

Topic: A Bloodbath in Aleppo

The northern Syrian city of Aleppo was caught in a brutal four-year deadlock. It was a key battleground in the war between **forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad** and **rebels who want to overthrow him**. In November, Syrian government forces launched a renewed assault, and rapidly retook almost the entire opposition-held east. By mid-December they had pushed the rebels into just a few neighborhoods. Tens of thousands of civilians fled those districts, but the UN says hundreds have gone missing since crossing into government-controlled areas - and that rebels prevented some civilians from leaving. On 15 December, the warring sides reached an agreement to end the fighting. The rebels had been rapidly pushed back into a small enclave, where, along with thousands of civilians, they came under intense bombing. The deal was negotiated between **one of the rebels' key backers, Turkey, on one side, and Syria's ally Russia, on the other**. Under the terms of the Aleppo deal, rebels and civilians were allowed to be evacuated to rebel-held **Idlib province**, while civilians in the rebel-besieged mainly **Shia villages of Foua and Kefraya in Idlib** would be allowed to leave in return - at the insistence of Iran, sponsor of pro-government Shia militias fighting in Aleppo.

History of Aleppo:

Aleppo was once Syria's largest city, with a population of about **2.3 million**. It was also the country's **industrial and financial centre**. The old city is a **UNESCO World Heritage site**, and was famous for its 13th Century citadel, 12th Century Great Mosque and huge covered markets, or souks. When the **uprising against President Assad erupted in 2011**, Aleppo did not see the large protests or the deadly violence that shook other towns and cities. But it suddenly became a battleground **in July 2012**. Rebel fighters launched an offensive to kick out government forces and gain control over northern Syria. But the rebel assault was not decisive. **Aleppo ended up divided roughly in half - the opposition in control of the east and the government in the west**. Over the next four years, the battle for Aleppo became a microcosm of the wider conflict in Syria. It highlighted the **weakness of both sides**, as well as the failure of the international community to protect civilians and broker a peace agreement.

Who has been fighting?

On the **government side**, state forces are being supported by **Russian air strikes** and Shia militias, including fighters from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Pakistan. The predominantly **Sunni opposition** is made of several rebel groups, many of whom have received financial aid from key opponents of President Assad, including the **US, Saudi Arabia and Turkey**.

A Brutal Victory of Government troops:

The battle for Aleppo has been a **humanitarian disaster**. **Syrian government troops have captured almost 85 per cent** of the eastern part of the city which fell into rebel hands in 2012 in one of the early setbacks to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in the civil war. Given the pace of the battlefield advances, it's only a matter of weeks, if not days, before the Syrian army recaptures all of Aleppo, the country's largest city and commercial capital before the conflict broke out.

Topic
Introduction

The regime will now have direct control over all the major cities and population centres in Syria, while for the army, which was on the brink of collapse a year ago before the Russian intervention, the victory is certainly a morale booster. But Mr. Assad has had to pay a heavy price for Aleppo. This military triumph is the result of a brutal strategy the regime and the Russians put in place earlier this year. Damascus knew that if Aleppo were to be recaptured, it would shift the balance of the civil war decisively. Eastern Aleppo was the priciest catch of the rebels where they built a parallel government. **Their plan was to expand the “revolution” to other regime-held territories** and they had the backing of regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Syrian government, however, launched a relentless bombing campaign in July, imposing a siege on the rebel-held parts of the city. After months of bombing by Russian and Syrian jets broke the rebel supply lines, the army, backed by Hezbollah and Iran-trained militias, moved in to make quick gains.

After the government resumed its air campaign on 15 November, troops pushed into several northern Aleppo districts and forced rebels and jihadists to retreat southwards. Tens of thousands of civilians fled their homes. By 13 December, **more than 90% of the city had fallen to the government**. The UN warned up to **100,000 people were trapped in "ever-shrinking" areas of eastern Aleppo**, adding that rebels were stopping people from leaving. Food and fuel in the rebel-held areas were running out, and basic infrastructure and health care facilities had been obliterated - at one point in November, all hospitals in eastern Aleppo were virtually out of action as a result of air strikes. The UN says hundreds of civilians have died, but the government and Russia have denied targeting them. Rebel rocket and mortar fire has also killed dozens of people in the government-controlled west.

Aftermath:

Russia’s ambassador to Turkey was shot dead by an assassin who told him: “**We die in Aleppo, you die here.**” The gunman – an off-duty policeman – opened fire at an art gallery in Ankara as **Andrei Karlov** was making a speech, then stood triumphantly over his body shouting “**revenge for Syria and Aleppo**”.

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/aleppos-fall-is-obamas-failure/2016/12/15/5af72640-c30f-11e6-9a51-cd56ea1c2bb7_story.html?utm_term=.273f57967ba8

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/19/briefing/asia-briefing.html?_r=0