



[U.N Investigation into Attacks on Civilian Sites in Syria](#)

The United Nations concluded its investigation into attacks on humanitarian sites in Syria by releasing a “mealy-mouthed” report that alludes to war crimes committed by Russia, but fails to name the country directly. The report blamed the Syrian government and its allies for the majority of attacks on humanitarian sites such as schools and hospitals, but didn’t name Russia specifically, despite Russia’s military support for the Syrian government. The United Nations’ board of inquiry that investigated the attacks focused on six specific bombings out of hundreds that had occurred. A summary of the board’s findings didn’t directly blame Russia, despite conclusive evidence pointing to a Russian plane carrying out the bombing of a school in one of the six attacks being focused on. The board of inquiry began its work in August after being appointed by U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres. Human rights and advocacy organizations had previously criticized the board for the limited scope of its investigation.

All of the sites investigated by the board of inquiry were in opposition-held territory in northwestern Syria. The sites were a school, a refugee camp, a children’s services center, two hospitals, and a medical clinic. In its report, the board found that the Syrian government or its allies were directly responsible for attacking all of the sites except for one, the refugee camp, which was likely attacked by opposition forces.

Russia has long prevented the United Nations from taking concrete action in Syria. As a member of the United Nations Security Council, Russia has blocked or vetoed 14 resolutions pertaining to Syria since 2011. Most recently, it blocked a resolution that would have facilitated aid reaching Syrian civilians from Iraq and Turkey. Russia also lobbied Antonio Guterres to withhold the publication of the board of inquiry’s report.

Various advocacy organizations have criticized the report, saying that it didn’t do enough to bring accountability to the perpetrators of crimes. Richard Gowan, U.N. Director at the International Crisis Group, said that the report’s findings were intentionally watered down because the United Nations needed Russia’s support for larger humanitarian efforts in Syria, and offending Moscow was counterproductive to the organization’s long-term goal to bring peace to Syria. Another group, Physicians for Human Rights, said that the Syrian government and its Russian ally had committed over 530 attacks on humanitarian sites since 2011, and criticized the United Nations for only investigating six of the attacks.

Without any severe repercussions, experts have warned that the Syrian and Russian governments will be emboldened in planning future attacks on humanitarian sites. While being intended as a fact-finding investigation, the United Nations’ board of inquiry failed to deter future attacks on sites such as schools and hospitals.