

# Houla massacre carried out by Free Syrian Army, according to Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

By Chris Marsden  
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The May 25 Houla massacre was perpetrated by opposition forces aligned with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), according to Germany's leading daily newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

The report refutes the official account by the United States and other major powers and presented uncritically by the media. The massacre was attributed to pro-government forces and used to step up the propaganda offensive for military intervention against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Without providing any serious evidence, the US and its allies claimed that either the Syrian Army or pro-government Shabiha militias carried out the mass killing of over 100 people.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on June 7 published a report from Damascus by Rainer Hermann, who based his article on investigations by oppositionists who visited the area and took eye-witness testimony. They largely confirm the account of the events in Houla given by the Assad government.

"Their findings contradict allegations of the rebels, who had blamed the Shabiha militias which are close to the regime", Hermann wrote, adding, "As oppositionists rejecting the use of force have been killed or at least threatened lately, the oppositionists did not want to see their names mentioned."

The massacre took place after Friday prayers and began with an attack by Sunni "rebels" on three Syrian army checkpoints around Houla. "The checkpoints are designed to protect the Alawite villages around the mostly Sunni Houla", the German daily reported.

Reinforcements were sent by the Syrian Army and fighting went on for 90 minutes, during which "dozens of soldiers and rebels were killed."

It was during these exchanges that the three villages of Houla were blocked off from the outside world. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote: "According to eyewitnesses, the massacre took place during this time.

Among the dead were almost exclusively families of the Alawite and Shia minorities of Houla, the population of which is made up of 90 percent Sunnis. Several dozen members of a family that had converted in recent years from the Sunni faith to Shia Islam were slaughtered. Also among the dead were members of the Alawite family Shomaliya and the family of a Sunni member of parliament who was regarded as a collaborator."

The report continued: "Immediately after the massacre, the offenders are said to have filmed their victims, calling them Sunni victims, and distributed the videos via the Internet."

This account is a devastating refutation of the propaganda campaign waged by Washington, London and Paris, with the aid of the Syrian National Council, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and a pliant Western media.

On the day of the attacks, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, without evidence, condemned the Syrian government's "unacceptable levels of violence and abuses", including the use of heavy weapons on civilian populations.

The regime noted that the massacre was timed to coincide with the visit of UN envoy Kofi Annan to Damascus. It charged that the mass killings were carried out to undermine the ceasefire Annan had negotiated. Soon after, the FSA, which is now accused of carrying out the massacre, said it would no longer respect the Annan peace plan. New demands for military intervention came thick and fast.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* article is given additional weight by a report in *Spiegel Online* from March 29 pointing to the widespread practice of summary execution carried out by the FSA. *Spiegel* interviewed a member of an opposition "burial brigade" who had "executed four men by slitting their throats."

His victims included a Shiite soldier in the Syrian army, who had "been beaten into a confession."

The burial brigade kill and "leave torture to others; that's

what the so-called interrogation brigade is for”, *Spiegel* wrote.

That report noted that whereas an admitted 150 Syrian army prisoners have been executed, “the executioners of Homs have been busier with traitors within their own ranks.”

“If we catch a Sunni spying, or if a citizen betrays the revolution, we make it quick”, one oppositionist explained. “According to Abu Rami, Hussein’s burial brigade has put between 200 and 250 traitors to death since the beginning of the uprising.”

Also of immediate relevance are reports on the web site of the Monastery of St. James the Mutilated in Qara, Syria. On April 1, Mother Agnès-Mariam de la Croix wrote of an incident in the Khalidiya neighborhood in Homs in which the FSA gathered Christian and Alawite hostages in a building and blew it up. They then blamed the Syrian army.

“The Al Amoura family in Al Durdak village, in the Homs area, was exterminated by Wahhabi terrorists. Forty-one people from this family had their throats slit in one day”, she also reported.

Agnès-Mariam stated that of Homs’ one million inhabitants, two thirds of the population had fled, including over 90 percent of Christians, due to the activities of “snipers and acts of criminal aggression” against “the Alawite and Christian minorities, Shiites, and many ‘moderate’ Muslims who did not choose to participate in dissident activity.”

She wrote that in numerous sectarian attacks “... people were mutilated, their throats slit, disembowelled, cut up, thrown in street corners or trash cans. They did not stop at shooting children at point-blank range to create distress and despair, as was the case with the young Sari, the nephew of our stonecutter. Such horrific acts were then exploited in the media to put responsibility on government forces.”

Even without such corroborative accounts, the silence of the world’s media on the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* report is extraordinary. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is a respected, indeed conservative, publication, with a circulation in the hundreds of thousands and a daily readership in 148 countries. Yet no major newspaper took up its report, because they are all complicit in the dissemination of naked propaganda. There is literally nothing in the reports of the mainstream Western media that can be taken as good coin.

The most important question posed by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* report, however, is what role was played in the massacre by the United States itself. Clearly, given its own extensive contacts with the Free Syrian Army, and the political, financial and military backing for the FSA by Washington’s regional allies—Saudi Arabia, Qatar and

Turkey—the Obama administration will have been well aware that the massacre was the work of anti-regime insurgents and not the Syrian army, even as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others called for additional action to be taken to depose Assad.

It is entirely possible that Houla was a massacre made in the USA.

US policy in Syria has from the start been based on the whipping up of a Sunni-based sectarian insurgency, with the aim of destabilising and deposing Assad’s Alawite regime. This, in turn, is linked to US preparations for a military attack on Iran, which would be further isolated in the Middle East with the demise of Assad, its major ally in the region.

With the experience of Bosnia and Kosovo to draw upon, this was done not merely in the certain knowledge that bloody internecine fighting would result, but with the intention of provoking civil conflict in order to provide a pretext for military intervention in humanitarian guise.

On Monday, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland expressed her “concern” about reports that the regime “may be organising another massacre” in Latakia province. “People will be held accountable”, she warned.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton escalated the crisis Tuesday, accusing Russia of sending attack helicopters to the Assad regime and charging Moscow with lying about its arms shipments.

The head of UN peace keeping operations, meanwhile, became the first United Nations official to describe the Syrian conflict as a civil war, and British Foreign Secretary William Hague, referring to the massacres at Houla and al-Qubair, denounced the Syrian government for committing “grotesque crimes.”

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