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PRESS RELEASE

Criminal Charges Unsealed Against Two Former High-Ranking Syrian Government Intelligence Officials for War Crimes against Americans and Other Civilians

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For Immediate Release
Office of Public Affairs

A copy of the indictment can be found [here](#).

An indictment was unsealed today in the Northern District of Illinois charging two high-ranking Syrian officials under former President Bashar al-Assad with war crimes. The indictment charges the former Syrian intelligence officials with engaging in a conspiracy to commit cruel and inhuman treatment of civilian detainees, including U.S. citizens, during the course of the Syrian civil war.

Former Syrian Air Force Intelligence officers Jamil Hassan, 72, and Abdul Salam Mahmoud, 65, were each charged in connection with a conspiracy to commit war crimes through the infliction of cruel and inhuman treatment on detainees under their control, including U.S. citizens, in detention facilities at the Mezzeh Military Airport (Mezzeh Prison), near Damascus, Syria. Warrants for the defendants' arrest have been issued, and they remain at large.

"The perpetrators of the Assad regime's atrocities against American citizens and other civilians during the Syrian civil war must answer for their heinous crimes," said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. "As alleged, these Assad regime intelligence officials whipped, kicked, electrocuted, and burned their victims; hung them by their wrists for prolonged periods of time; threatened them with rape and death; and falsely told them that their family members had been killed. The Justice Department has a long memory, and we will never stop working to find and bring to justice those who tortured Americans."

"The Assad regime may have fallen, but our commitment to accountability continues unabated," said Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. "For the second time in a year, the Department of Justice has brought charges against those who committed war crimes against U.S. citizens, deploying a previously unused federal law to hold accountable individuals who engaged in cruel and inhuman atrocities during armed conflict."

"Hassan and Mahmoud allegedly oversaw the systematic use of cruel and inhumane treatment on perceived enemies of the Syrian regime, including American citizens," said FBI Director Christopher Wray. "The FBI is fully committed to working with our law enforcement partners around the world to ensure these alleged war criminals are held accountable for their actions and justice is brought to the victims of these atrocities."

"The defendants are alleged to have committed atrocities against political dissidents, including U.S. citizens, opposing a brutal and now-deposed dictatorial regime," said Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri, head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "War crimes such as the torture described in this indictment strike at the basic human rights that we all share. This historic indictment — the second brought under the U.S. War Crimes statute — demonstrates the Justice Department's commitment to pursue accountability for those who commit war crimes and other atrocities wherever they may occur."

"The serious human rights abuses set forth in this indictment must not go unpunished," said Acting U.S. Attorney Morris Pasqual for the Northern District of Illinois. "The United States Attorney's Office in Chicago remains steadfastly committed to bringing justice to the victims of these heinous crimes, no matter where the perpetrators are or how long it takes."

"Human rights abuses are among the most egregious crimes that the FBI investigates, and this historic indictment memorializes our commitment to accountability and justice," said Special Agent in Charge Douglas S. DePodesta of the FBI Chicago Field Office. "This multi-year investigation is the culmination of the tireless work by FBI personnel, both in the United States and overseas, and the courage of countless victims and witnesses affected by the Assad Regime in Syria."

According to the indictment, Hassan was the Director of Syrian Air Force Intelligence and oversaw a network of detention facilities, including the Mezzeh Prison in Damascus, where civilians perceived to be opponents of the Syrian regime were detained and subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment. Mahmoud was a Brigadier General in the Syrian Air Force Intelligence and directed operations at the Mezzeh Prison.

The indictment alleges that, between January 2012 and July 2019, Hassan and Mahmoud conspired to identify, intimidate, threaten, punish, and kill people detained at Mezzeh Prison suspected of aiding or supporting opponents of the regime, such as those who protested, provided medical aid to opponents of the regime, or publicly criticized the regime. According to the indictment, detainees in the defendants' custody, including U.S. citizens, were mercilessly beaten, electrocuted, and had their toenails removed. Detainees were also allegedly hung from the ceiling by their wrists and were burned with acid. The defendants allegedly conspired to create an atmosphere of terror at Mezzeh, forcing detainees to listen to the screams of tortured prisoners and share cells with the dead bodies of other detainees, while guards threatened to kill and sexually assault their family members. The detainees were also allegedly deprived of adequate food, water, and medical care.

The defendants are charged with one count of conspiracy to commit the war crime of cruel and inhuman treatment. If convicted, the defendants each face a maximum sentence of life in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

The FBI Chicago Field Office investigated the war crimes allegations in partnership with the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section (HRSP), U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois, and Justice Department's Office of International Affairs. The Justice Department thanks the United Nations International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism for Syria, as well as French authorities, for their assistance.

HRSP Trial Attorneys Elizabeth Nielsen and Frank Rangoussis and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Steven Doller, Barry Jonas, and Ann Marie Ursini for the Northern District of Illinois are prosecuting the case. HRSP historian Phil Hoffman provided substantial assistance in the investigation and prosecution.

Members of the public who have information about human rights violators in the United States or the location of the defendants named in this indictment are urged to contact the FBI at 1-800-CALL-FBI (800-225-5324) or through the [FBI online tip form](#). All are staffed around the clock, and tips may be provided anonymously.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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