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For Sama

The film begins during what appears to be an artillery strike on a civilian population in Syria. We see injured being quickly examined in a small hospital or clinic using flashlights. It is then revealed that the hospital itself is the structure being bombed. The adults attempt to keep the children calm with small games such as peek-a-boo. This is Aleppo a city under siege by it’s own government. We see children covered in blood, crying on the floor likely lacerated and impaled by shrapnel or debris. Turning back to clock to before the beginning of the siege we see peaceful protesters storming the streets, and defaming depictions of Bassar al-Assad the infamous dictator of Syria. The main characters are a doctor named Hamza ,functioning as a medic on the front lines of the protests against the oppressive regime, and Waad al-Kateab, the young woman documenting the horrors of the siege of Aleppo and later betrothed to Hamza. Going further there are depictions of people being buried in mass graves as hospitals are constantly at capacity. Depictions of strike zones show toppled apartment buildings, entombing some of the populace under several meters of rubble while their neighbors desperately attempt to dig them out. Despite all the sorrow and suffering Hamza and his friends try to remain upbeat and lighthearted despite the unrelenting shelling. A wedding is held between Hamza and Waad in a small apartment, fortunately there is no shelling during this event. Such a great display of human will in the face of adversity; humans still try to eek out a normal life despite the fact that any day an artillery shell or airstrike bomb could land on and destroy their house with their children inside of it. Eventually islamic extremists attempted to overtake their rebellion. Waad remarks that the things the extremists did was nothing in comparison to the brutality of the regime. Eventually, the regime forces begin to enclose around the resistance boxing them into a small pocket. This development spells the end of days for the resistance. Soon after al-Assad’s forces begin deploying chlorine gas, an imense violation of the Geneva Convetion. Soon the survivors are given an ultimatum by the Russians. They must surrender and in return they are allowed to live, however they will only live in exile.

Bashar al-Assad’s brutal assault against his own populace is one of the many tragedies afflicting our world. The willingness to not only bomb one’s one people but to bomb hospitals as a means to break the will of the survivors is appalling at best. However, the impressive amount of will shown by the resistance in the face of adversity should be lauded. They continue to attempt to find some normalcy in their lives as best they can. From preparing family meals, to holding a wedding, and even having children in their dystopic existence. While it’s debatable the morality of bringing a child into a world such as that, I would argue that the onus is on Bashar and his brutal regime for creating such awful conditions that he forces the people of Aleppo to live under. The siege escalates with Russian support. Airstrikes which are far more deadly than standard siege equipment become common. Then finally the supporters being forced out of their city, out of their homes. Somehow they make it through the checkpoint without losing Hamza. Luckily they made it out with their lives which is much more than many others can say. The most sad thing is how little in the way of repercussions the Assad regime faces. While there is interest to drag Bashar al-Assad in front of The International Criminal Court, Syria does not lie with in the ICC jurisdiction. While their may be a re feral from the security council, Russia has vetoed and continues to threaten to veto all attempts to try Bashar al-Assad in criminal court.

These events in Syria fly blatantly in the face of the Geneva Convention, which restricts the use of military force against civilian populations, as well as the use of chemical weapons. Syria did indeed sign the Geneva Convention so the fact that their will likely be no repercussions for violating this agreement is extremely disheartening and in my opinion makes the Geneva Convention look more like a suggestion than a binding agreement.