SNHR
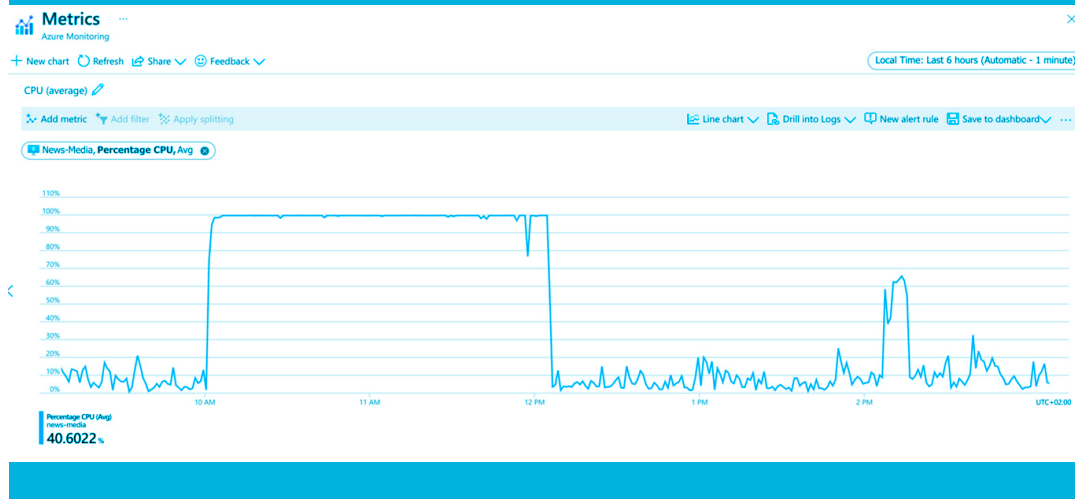SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Statement

Ruthless Cyberattacks Target SNHR Website

The Attack Happened a Few Days After SNHR Revealed its Data Being Utilized in the Case Against the Syrian Regime at the ICJ
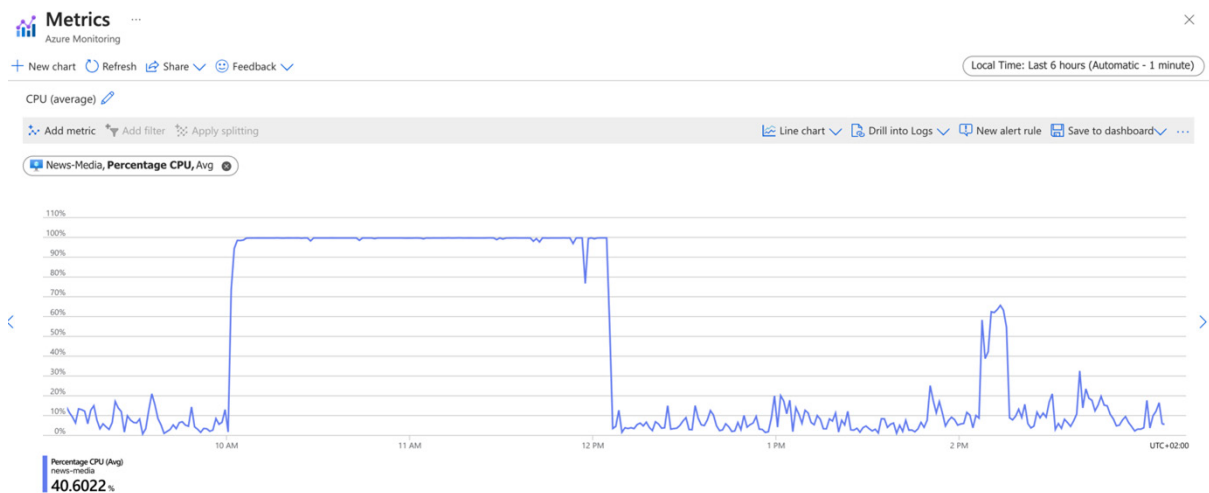

Tuesday 17 October 2023

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyzes in Syria.

On the morning of October 16, 2023, the website of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) was the target of a series of ruthless and sustained cyberattacks. These attacks, which took the form of a DDoS that aimed to completely shut down the SNHR site, lasted for over three hours.

DDoS, or Distributed Denial of Service, attacks focus on exhausting a website's online resources, such as its cyber infrastructure, with the aim of taking it offline. DDoS attacks are carried out by sending a massive number of requests to the provider in order to exhaust its request-processing capabilities, thereby rendering it not properly functional for a certain period of time.

Thanks to our IT team's prompt reaction and expertise, however, SNHR was able to fend off this attack and swiftly restore our website's functionality.

It is noteworthy that these attacks come one week after the first public hearing in the case brought by Canada and the Netherlands regarding the application of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment against the Syrian regime at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). On October 11, SNHR released a statement revealing that it is a principal source for the case with 14 citations.

Since its foundation in June 2011, SNHR has worked tirelessly on documenting violations against the Syrian people and the Syrian state. Through years of meticulous work and documentation, we have been able to build an expansive database documenting multiple patterns of violations, which we use in releasing news stories and reports that identify and expose perpetrators as a first necessary step for holding them accountable, and in order to preserve the collective memory of events from being altered or distorted. This is part of our core mission to defend and advocate for victims and their rights, and to ensure that violations do not recur.

Furthermore, SNHR shares its data with many UN and international bodies, as well as partner organizations and local and international think tanks and media outlets. This is undoubtedly extremely troubling to the perpetrators of violations in Syria, who have tried for years to tarnish SNHR's reputation and hurled baseless, slanderous accusations with the help of dozens of propagandists on social media. The Syrian regime has even created an organization with the same name – The Syrian Network for Human Rights - in a thinly-veiled attempt at creating confusion. We have also been accused of treason and been attacked by some extremists who became involved in the popular uprising.

Many of the perpetrators of violations have released statements of condemnation, accusing SNHR of treason in response to reports we have released that document and condemn their violations. None of those perpetrators have been able to refute the facts documented in our reports in any convincing, organized or proper way, however. For instance, the Kurdish People's Protection Units have released many statements denying the violations we documented, and in turn directed a long list of false accusations against us. ISIS has also subjected us to many threats, with SNHR being one of the first organizations to release an extensive report in in early-2014 exposing the group and its practices. Following the launch of the Russian intervention in Syria in September 2015, SNHR released a number of reports documenting the war crimes committed by Russian forces; this was followed by cyberattacks on our website, as well as attempts to hack our Twitter account, not to mention malicious verbal attacks launched against us by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2015 through pro-Russia media outlets.

This attack on SNHR was certainly not the first. Over the years, SNHR's website and social media channels have been the target of numerous cyberattacks that we have been able to successfully fend off, thanks to our robust servers and the wealth of experience that our IT team has gained. The most relentless and sustained of those attacks happened two years ago in October 2021, which prompted us to released [two statements](#) [to clarify this matter](#), in which we noted that those attacks were probably of a Russian origin.

Working on the Syrian issue will always be a dangerous and challenging endeavor, with cyberattacks being one of the most notable challenges. Yet, such attacks are clearly an indicator of the significant impact SNHR has been able to create, so much so that the perpetrators of violations have been consistently keen and eager to use their capabilities to attempt to shut us down. **In this statement, we are sending a clear and direct message: our website is functioning properly. We will never abandon our mission of documenting and condemning human rights violations and exposing their perpetrators, whoever they may be, as a first step towards holding them accountable and defending victims' rights, so that Syria will one day transition from dictatorship to the rule of democracy, and human rights.**

SNHR

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