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To the Judges:

Descended into chaos, Syria was both a signal story of 2012 and a difficult and monumentally dangerous one to cover. Bringing news of this full-blown civil war to the world required repeated trips into the war zone, without government permission or protection; it demanded sensitive negotiations with shadowy groups of fighters. And always, there were the dangers of shelling, bombardment and errant bullets, the risk of abduction or capture.

Time after time throughout 2012, five Associated Press photographers endured these perils to show us that when war hits, everything we take for granted is shattered. The homes we live in, the streets we walk down, our routines, our families and friends and our sense of normalcy are all transformed by violence.

These images take us deep into the suffering of civilians in a war that has left more than 60,000 dead, displaced more than a million people internally and sent hundreds of thousands more fleeing over Syria's borders, mainly into Turkey. The images connect us personally to Syrians' experience as the war suddenly struck their lives, tearing them quite literally apart throughout 2012. They also show us fierce resistance by the Free Syrian Army in the face of repeated advances by government forces, often shelling civilian areas as they try to quell anti-regime protests that started peacefully in 2011.

The lead image drives it home directly. A father overcome with grief cradles the lifeless body of his young son on his knees, oblivious to all but his loss.

Without showing a single person, the photo of a destroyed Aleppo apartment haunts us with a family's story. We know nothing about those who lived there. But a charred living room wall, rubble on a sofa's upholstery, a chandelier shrouded in dust and darkness -- and that cold light from the hole punched into their home -- tell us all about the loss they carry with them wherever they have fled.

In what could be a companion photo, another home is turned into a sniper's nest.

The frame puts the viewer in the middle of stories flowing from every direction -- the mirror's homey intimacy, the intensity in the eyes of the gunmen crouched among family furniture and the rifle barrel pointing to the unseen violence outside.

One dramatic scene centers on the bravado of a rebel who has just fired a rocket. But from the dust swirling around him emerges the rest of the story: layer upon layer of ruin on a city street corner.

Another searing image captures a civilian, lying helpless in the street after being shot by a sniper as traffic in the background stops and turns away.

When we see the people caught in the middle, the focus is on how their lives have been overturned. Families flee the fighting carrying a few basic possessions as smoke rises into the air. A woman screams while being stretchered into a makeshift hospital. The debris of triage floats in a puddle of blood and a wounded woman's eyes communicate shock and seeming disbelief that this can be happening.

A flashlight beam focuses the eye on the body of a man killed in shelling -- a symbol of the war's human cost. But what overwhelms the picture is the darkness of the countryside beyond, a landscape foreboding a war seemingly without end.

For the refugees, forced to flee their country the journey is long and ends in bare refugees camps where they live in tents. A mother carrying her child curls her lip in determination as she steps from a rowboat onto a muddy riverbank, crossing into an uncertain future in Turkey.

For these images that allowed viewers the world over to experience what it is like to live in a war raging inside one's own home -- images that combine immediacy, compassion and artistry -- I am proud to nominate AP photographers Rodrigo Abd, Manu Brabo, Narciso Contreras, Khalil Hamra and Muhammed Muheisen for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Photography.

Sincerely

Santiago Lyon
Director of Photography
Associated Press