

# Why Geneva2 Failed

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## Introduction

Beginning in March 2011, there was a civil war in Syria that diplomats have been unable to stop. The so-called Geneva2 negotiations during Jan/Feb 2014 between Assad's lawful government of Syria and the Syrian National Coalition ended in failure on 15 Feb 2014. These negotiations show no sign of resuming in the foreseeable future (as of 1 July 2014). Furthermore, the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, resigned in frustration on 13 May 2014.

There are two general reasons why the Geneva2 negotiations failed:

1. The United Nations used the Geneva1 Communiqué as the basis for the Geneva2 negotiations. The agenda in Geneva1 requires a "transitional governing body", which is code for a new government that does *not* contain Assad or his cronies. Because Assad refused to resign, the negotiations failed.
2. The Syrian National Coalition was selected to negotiate against Assad's government, because the Coalition was the only acceptable political opposition. However, I believe there are serious problems with the Coalition that makes them unworthy to lead Syria.

The first part of this webpage collects my reasons for the failure of the Geneva2 negotiations from my [essays](#) on Syria, and gives some additional explanation. Revisiting this topic in late May 2014 gave me the opportunity to add to what was in my previous, monthly essays.

The [second part](#) of this webpage discusses the problems in finding a suitable political opposition to negotiate with the lawful government of Assad.

Because I have been critical of the United Nations, London11, and the Syrian National Coalition, in the [conclusion](#) I sketch my opinion of how the Syrian civil war should end.

## Sources

Links to documents, including the Geneva1 Communiqué, are collected on my main webpage about [Syria](#), and scattered in my essays on Syria. For that reason, I do not include links to historical documents in this webpage. I do mention dates in this webpage, so that the reader may refer to my contemporary essay that contains citations to sources. For any quotation that is new in this webpage (i.e., not in my previous essays), I do provide a link to the source.

## Organization

Each of my contemporary essays is basically organized chronologically. This webpage is organized by topics. Because the various topics are interwoven, the reader needs to be aware of other topics before he/she can understand any one topic. For that reason, this is *not* a good webpage for readers who are unfamiliar with the Syrian civil war and the Geneva2 negotiations.

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## No Representatives From Syria Present at Geneva1

The one-day meeting of the *ad hoc* "The Action Group for Syria" in Geneva on 30 June 2012 — so-called Geneva1 — was attended by the foreign ministers of:

1. China,
2. France,
3. Iraq (Chair of the Summit of the League of Arab States),
4. Kuwait (Chair of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States),
5. Qatar,
6. Russia,
7. Turkey,
8. United Kingdom,
9. United States of America

and the following people:

10. Ban Ki-moon (Secretary-General of the United Nations),
11. Nabil Elaraby (Secretary-General of the League of Arab States),
12. Catherine Ashton (European Union High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy).

The meeting was chaired by Kofi Annan, the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria.

(See the list in Geneva1 Communiqué at §1; [Reuters](#).)

**Note that no one from Syria attended.** The Syrian government was absent. No one represented the rebels in Syria. Plainly, this was a meeting of foreign meddlers who sought to impose a solution on the people of Syria. Having foreign meddlers impose a government on Syria reminds me of colonialism and imperialism from the 1800s, up to about the 1960s. It is a fundamental part of "due process of law" that any party who is affected by a decision has the right to appear — and to speak — before the tribunal makes the decision.

In 1916, England and France carved up the former Ottoman Empire in the so-called Sykes-Picot Agreement. Amongst other things, that Agreement specified the current borders for Syria and Iraq. Neither the English nor the French asked for any input from the Arabs who lived in the affected land. (Incidentally, in June 2014 the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) sought to create a Sunni Muslim caliphate, in place of the colonial Sykes-Picot Agreement. See, e.g., editorials in [AINA](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Arab News](#).)

Not only were the Syrian people unrepresented at Geneva1, but also the room was full of enemies of Assad. Of the dozen participants in Geneva1, only two (i.e., China and Russia) supported Assad. Of the nine nations present at Geneva1, five of them — France, Qatar, Turkey, UK, USA — were later members of the Core Group of the Friends of the Syrian People, an intensely anti-Assad group of nations.

At a minimum, Assad's government, the rebels in Syria, plus Iran and Saudi Arabia, should all have been invited to Geneva1.

While no one from Syria attended Geneva1, the Syrian National Coalition subsequently endorsed Geneva1, with the interpretation favored by the "Friends of the Syrian People" that the transitional governing body does *not* include Assad. The Coalition endorsed the transitional governing body without Assad, because that gave them the victory that they were unable to achieve in the civil war in Syria.

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## Transitional Governing Body (TGB)

The Geneva1 Communiqué of 30 June 2012 — at §6, under "II. Clear Steps in the Transition" on page 3 — calls for "the establishment of a transitional governing body" (TGB) in Syria. The TGB allows the transition from Assad's government to a new constitution, followed by "free and fair multi-party elections" in which the people choose a new government.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, §16 (27 Sep 2013) endorsed the Geneva1 Communiqué, explicitly including the "the establishment of a transitional governing body".

## Situation Changed:

## Now No Need for TGB

At the Geneva1 meeting, on 30 June 2012, it was conventional wisdom that President Assad of Syria would soon either resign or be defeated militarily. Therefore, in June 2012 it was believed that Syria would soon need a new government.

The Geneva2 negotiations actually began on 24 January 2014, approximately 19 months after Geneva1. At the time of the negotiations, Assad's military was winning on the ground in Syria, and Assad had no reason to resign. Beginning in March 2014, journalists and commentators widely recognized that Assad was winning, as documented in my essays.

Assad is winning the civil war. Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government. And, on 3 June 2014, Assad was elected to another seven-year term (in elections that were widely criticized as rigged to re-elect Assad). These facts show that Syria already has a stable government, so there is no need for a TGB. Syria does *not* need a TGB in 2014, or in the foreseeable future.

What the Syrian people *really need* are negotiations about: ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, reconciliation, and other issues that affect the *people* living in Syria. Instead, the United Nations agenda pushed a discussion of an unnecessary TGB, that only affects the *leaders* (i.e., Assad's government and the Syrian National Coalition).

So why do the United Nations and the Syrian National Coalition continue to insist on the TGB? The insurgents have failed to depose Assad in more than three years of civil war. The TGB is a way of deposing Assad in negotiations. In other words, the TGB is a way to achieve in negotiations what the insurgents failed to achieve in more than three years of civil war.

### Domination of Insurgency by Jihadists & Al-Qaeda

Another situation that has changed since the June 2012 Geneva1 meeting is the presence of jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria. In 2011, the insurgents were mostly deserters from the Syrian army, plus Syrian civilians armed with a rifle. Beginning in Nov 2011, and increasingly during 2012 and 2013, jihadists and Al-Qaeda joined the insurgents. By December 2013 these jihadists and Al-Qaeda dominated the insurgency. The current domination of the insurgency by professional terrorists (i.e., jihadists and Al-Qaeda) makes it very important to maintain a stable government in Syria, so there is neither weakness nor inexperience for the terrorists to exploit. Maintaining a stable government means rejecting the TGB.

A small collection of links to history of jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria, arranged in chronological order:

- [NT Times](#), 23 Dec 2011 ([first?] suicide bomber in Syria, Al-Qaeda suspected).
- [Al-Monitor](#) (Nusra Front created in Jan 2012).
- [The Guardian](#), 12 Feb 2012 (Zawahiri, international leader of Al-Qaeda, calls for jihad

- in Syria).
- [NY Times](#), 8 Dec 2012 (Nusra Front).
  - [U.S. State Dept.](#), 11 Dec 2012 (USA blacklists Nusra Front as terrorist group: "Since November 2011, al-Nusrah Front has claimed nearly 600 attacks....").
  - [NY Times](#), 9 Jan 2013 ("The Nusra Front, Syria's largest and most powerful jihadist rebel group,....")
  - [blog](#), 23 May 2013 (ISIL appears in Syria).
  - [NY Times](#), 26 Sep 2013 (11 insurgent groups join Nusra Front).
  - [Washington Post](#), 22 Nov 2013 (7 jihadist groups create Islamic Front).
  - [NY Times](#), 3 Feb 2014 (Al-Qaeda disowns ISIL).
  - [Jerusalem Post](#), 11 Feb 2014 ("15% of all suicide bombings in the world in 2013 [occurred] in Syria", mostly by Nusra Front and ISIL).
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## **Does the TGB Imply That Assad Resign? Russian and U.S. Views**

The Geneva1 Communiqué actually says the TGB "could include members of the present government and the opposition and other groups and shall be formed on the basis of mutual consent." (See the text of that document.)

The dispute over whether Geneva1 requires Assad to resign began on the day of the Geneva1 meeting. *The New York Times* reports:

The new plan [which replaced Mr. Annan's earlier six-point peace plan] demanded that all parties prepare for a democratic transition that could include opposition figures as well as current government officials chosen by "mutual [consent]." It is unclear what the new agreement can offer any of the parties to persuade them to stop fighting, and it included no suggested enforcement measures.

The Action Group, which includes the five permanent Security Council members and four Middle Eastern countries, had considered barring from the proposed unity government those "whose participation would jeopardize stability and reconciliation," understood to be a reference to President Assad. That language was dropped from the final agreement after Russia, Mr. Assad's strongest ally, objected.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the omission would make no difference in practice. "Assad will still have to go," she said. "He will never pass the mutual-consent test given the blood on his hands."

....

"What we have done here is to strip away the fiction that he and those with blood on their hands can stay in power," [Clinton] added.

Russia, however, did not seem to see it that way. Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov said there was no requirement that Mr. Assad step down.

"There is no attempt to impose any kind of a transition process," [Lavrov] said at a news conference here. "There are no prior conditions to the transfer process and no attempt to exclude any group from the process."

Nick Cumming-Bruce & Rod Nordland, "Talks Come Up With Plan for Syria, but Not for Assad's Exit," [NY Times](#), 30 June 2012.

*The Washington Post* reported on 30 June 2012 that Geneva1 "failed to specify whether President Bashar al-Assad must be excluded" from a transitional government. The *Post* also said: "Lavrov noted that the group's final communique includes no demand for Assad to step down." [Washington Post](#). Similarly, Reuters reported on 30 June 2012 that "World powers ... remained at odds over what part President Bashar al-Assad might play in the process [i.e., transitional government in Syria]." [Reuters](#).

In Hillary Clinton's press conference at the Geneva1 meeting, Matt Lee of Associated Press correctly noted that it was "a recipe for continued stalemate." Clinton disagreed, but history shows that Lee was correct.

QUESTION [by Matt Lee of Associated Press]: Madam Secretary .... for all intents and purposes, it looks like the Russians have won here. There is no exclusionary language in the document that has been agreed to, whereas the draft contained language that would exclude people deemed to be bad for the transition. This speaks only of mutual consent, which would seem to give both sides — the Assad government and the opposition — veto power, which seems to be a recipe for continued stalemate.

Can you address why you think this calls for — in your own words, what you said, lays the way — paves the way for a post-Assad future, when in fact, it doesn't require him to leave and ... leaves the question open entirely? Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I disagree with your premise, obviously, because as I've made clear all week, we supported the Joint Special Envoy's original text, but we agreed to some changes that we did not believe affected the substance, because frankly, we read the results to be the same. Assad will still have to go. He will never pass the mutual consent test, given the blood on his hands. I think you already heard Kofi Annan basically say the very same thing. The text also makes clear that the power to govern is vested fully in the transitional governing body, which strips him and his regime of all authority if he and they refuse to step down and leave.

Now, every day that has gone by without unity on the Security Council and among the states gathered here has been a day that has given comfort to Assad and his cronies and supporters. What we have done here is to strip away the fiction that he and those with blood on their hands can stay in power. The plan calls for the Assad regime to give way to a new transitional governing body that will have full governance powers.

Now, in deciding to accept the minor textual changes, we and our partners made absolutely clear to Russia and China that it is now incumbent upon them to show Assad

the writing on the wall. I do not believe that anyone in the Assad regime ever thought we could come out with a unified statement today expressing not only the concerns but a path forward that would include Russia and China. And he needs to hear loudly and clearly that his days are numbered.

Russia and China have also pledged to start helping Kofi Annan find a way forward and work to use their leverage in order to establish the transitional governing body. We, of course, will do our part as well, because this transitional governing body will only succeed if it is composed of men and women who are beyond reproach.

The plan we have endorsed gives the Syrian people a real roadmap out of the violence and the increasing sectarian destruction of parts of their country. And I think it is absolutely important to note that more than 700 people lost their lives across Syria this week. That's more than 100 a day, about the number we have in this room, and Damascus itself is now ringed with violence. And we believe that the plan will gain the support of many other countries and expect to see that occur at the Friends of the Syrian People meeting in Paris on Friday [6 July 2012].

I guess I would repeat and associate myself with Kofi's remarks. He has been working very hard to create the conditions for mediation. There was not unity in the international community as represented by the permanent members of the Security Council about what road he was supposed to be traveling as he tried to mediate and negotiate among and between the regime and the opposition. Now there is. I think that is an important step forward and a boost for his efforts to try to bring an end to the violence and bring about a transition that will protect and benefit the Syrian people. "Press Availability Following the Meeting of the Action Group on Syria," [State Dept.](#), 30 June 2014.

In her second paragraph, Clinton says "What we have done here is to strip away the fiction that he and those with blood on their hands can stay in power." That was at the end of June 2012. Now, at the end of June 2014 — 24 months later — Assad is not only still in power, but also he is winning the civil war.

In her third paragraph, Clinton says Assad's "days are numbered". Nope. Assad will be the president of Syria for the foreseeable future. On 3 June 2014, Assad won re-election for another seven-year term, and there are no plans for more peace negotiations.

In her fifth paragraph, Clinton boasts of giving "the Syrian people a real roadmap out of the violence and the increasing sectarian destruction of parts of their country." But history shows it was a roadmap to disaster: violence has increased to 250 dead/day, negotiations failed on 15 Feb 2014, and further negotiations on the TGB (and Assad's departure) are futile.

In my [first essay](#) on Syria, at 24 Sep 2013, I cite three quotations from Hillary Clinton (then U.S. Secretary of State) and four quotations from Obama, each stating that Assad *should* resign, because Assad has "lost all legitimacy" as president of Syria. The quotations from Clinton go back as far as 2 June 2011.

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## Friends of the Syrian People & London11

The interpretation of the TGB used by the "Friends of the Syrian People" — an anti-Assad group of nations — is absolutely opposed to Assad leading Syria:

- "... [the participants] strongly underlined that Bashar al-Assad must relinquish power." Chairman's Conclusions, Friends of the Syrian People, at meeting in Paris, 6 July 2012.
- §2: "Participants reiterated that Bashar Al Assad has lost legitimacy to govern Syria." §10: "Participants ... reiterated that Bashar Al-Assad has lost legitimacy and should stand aside to allow the launching of a sustainable political transition process in conformity with the Geneva communiqué." Chairman's Conclusions, Friends of the Syrian People, at meeting in Marrakech, 12 December 2012.
- "We reiterate our firm position, emanating from the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, that Bashar al-Assad and his close associates cannot be part of this solution [i.e., the TGB]." Chairman's Statement, Friends of the Syrian People, at meeting in New York City, 26 Sep 2013.

Beginning in April 2013, there were meetings of foreign ministers of eleven nations, known as "The Core Group of the Friends of the Syrian People", later known as the "London11" after the foreign ministers of eleven nations at a meeting in London in Oct 2013. The London11 governments were intensely opposed to Assad leading Syria:

- "[The ministers] also restated their firm position that Bashar Al Assad and his close associates have no place in the future of Syria and that they must cede power to a transitional executive body...." Statement of the London 11 at meeting in Istanbul on 20 April 2013.
- "... Assad, his regime, and his close associates with blood on their hands cannot play any role in the future of Syria." Statement of the London 11 at meeting in Amman on 22 May 2013.
- "The Ministers affirmed their prior commitments in the previous meetings in favor of negotiations, which would lead to the establishment of a transitional governing body to which full executive powers would be transferred, including military and security institutions, that excludes the central figures and associates whose hands are stained with blood. In this context, Bashar al-Assad has no role in the transitional governing body or thereafter." Communiqué of the London 11 at meeting in Doha on 22 June 2013.
- "We agree that when the TGB is established, Assad and his close associates with blood on their hands will have no role in Syria." Communiqué of the London 11 at meeting in London on 22 October 2013, §2.
- "once the TGB is established, ... Assad and his close associates with blood on their

hands will have no role in Syria."

Statement of London11 at meeting in Paris on 12 Jan 2014, §7.

From this series of quotations, there can be no doubt that the London11 absolutely opposed the continuation of Assad's presidency. Unfortunately, this intransigence — shared by the Syrian National Coalition — led to the collapse of the Geneva2 negotiations on 15 Feb 2014. The Coalition, backed by the London11, demanded Assad resign. Assad, who was winning the civil war, refused to resign. This is an irreconcilable difference that led to the failure of negotiations.

After Geneva2 failed, the foreign ministers of the London11 nations simply blamed Assad's failure to resign for the collapse of the negotiations. But from Assad's point of view, he had no reason to resign: he was firmly in control of the lawful government of Syria and Assad was winning the civil war. The foreign ministers of the London11 nations, as documented in my essays, engaged in propaganda that vilified Assad, but ignored the problems with the Syrian National Coalition. The foreign ministers of the London11 nations also showed substantial arrogance in demanding that Assad resign, as if these foreign meddlers were entitled to determine the government of Syria.

Meanwhile, the London11 — specifically including the U.S. Government — continues to bleat about the desirability of a "political solution" (i.e., negotiated solution), *after* they supported the demand of the Syrian National Coalition for the resignation of Assad, thereby killing negotiations.

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## Collapse of Geneva2 Was Foreseeable

I am *not* a diplomat, but I could see the train wreck coming. It was *easy* to predict: Assad repeatedly declared he would *not* resign, and the dominant theme of the Syrian National Coalition was that Assad must resign. That is obviously an irreconcilable difference. In the end, Assad prevailed because he was winning the civil war, and because he firmly controlled the legitimate Syrian government.

Back on 14 Oct 2013, I wrote:

Even if *all* of the parties somehow attend the Geneva2 conference, agreement on the future government seems impossible: Assad wants to remain in power, and the rebels demand that Assad resign.

Standler, "Chemical Weapons in Syria: Oct-Dec 2013", [second essay](#), 14 Oct 2013.

Back on 25 Nov 2013, I wrote:

The peace process might be simplified if the United Nations — and the London11, especially USA, UK, and France — abandoned the transitional government specified in Geneva1, and concentrated on: [list of six items omitted here].

*Ibid.*, at section titled: "my comment: Abandon Transitional Government?".

On 27 Nov 2013, I wrote:

This demand of the London11 and the Coalition that Assad have no place in the future

of Syria should be fatal to establishing a transitional government at Geneva2, because neither Assad nor the Coalition will yield on the issue of Assad's future. But, as I suggested above, failing to establish a transitional government may be a good thing. Failing to establish a transitional government would leave Assad in place to fight jihadists and Al-Qaeda.

*Ibid.* at section titled: "Coalition agrees to attend Geneva2, but ...."

On 12 Jan 2014, I wrote a discussion of the meeting of the London11 group of foreign ministers in Paris:

As I discussed in my second essay on Syria, the requirement for "a transitional governing body (TGB)" in Syria was decided at Geneva1, a conference where no one from Syria — neither rebels nor Assad's government — participated. As a result, the transitional government is something pushed by foreign meddlers on Syria, in an undemocratic move. Moreover, the demand for a transitional government in which "Assad and his close associates with blood on their hands will have no role in Syria" (§7 of [Paris] Communiqué [of London11]) frustrates discussions at Geneva2, because Assad clearly will not relinquish power at this time.

....

The foreign meddlers at the Paris conference see the number one problem as the removal of Assad and the substitution of a transitional government in Syria. Instead, I see the number one problem as a ceasefire that ends the civil war.

Standler, "Geneva2 & Syria: January 2014", [third essay](#) at section titled: "12 Jan 2014 Paris Communiqué".

On 17 Jan 2014, I wrote:

On 16 Jan, U.S. secretary of state, John Kerry, said both the Assad government and the Syrian National Coalition would be able to veto names suggested as the leader of the transitional government in Syria. Kerry says there will be "mutual consent" to the leader of the transitional government of Syria. [citations omitted]

In my opinion, such a veto is ridiculous. Assad is not going to resign anytime soon. The Syrian National Coalition will *not* accept Assad as leader of Syria. The concept of a transitional government is an illusion that will *not* happen at Geneva2. As I said above, Geneva2 should be focused on establishing a ceasefire, *not* a transitional government. The leader of Syria should be selected by the people of Syria, voting in free and fair elections.

*Ibid.* at section titled: "17 Jan 2014 Kerry says veto at Geneva2".

I suggest that the London11 group of nations — and the Syrian National Coalition — were so obsessed with deposing Assad that they did not recognize that their demand that Assad resign would cause the Geneva2 negotiations to fail. Not only was much diplomatic effort and expense wasted on Geneva2, but also the frustration caused the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resign on 13 May 2014.

On 7 June 2014, an interview with Brahimi was published in *Der Spiegel*. Part of this interview is quoted in my [eighth essay](#). In that essay, I wrote:

Surely Brahimi saw the impossibility of resolving the issue of whether Assad remains in control of the Syrian government. So *why* did Brahimi allow the topic to scuttle the negotiations? I see two reasons. First, U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118 *endorsed* the Geneva1 Communiqué that requires the TGB, and Brahimi was required to follow that Resolution. During discussions of the TGB, the topic of the inclusion or exclusion of Assad would naturally arise. Second, if Brahimi had refused to discuss the TGB or allowed Assad to remain in power, then the Coalition would have refused to attend — or walked out of — the Geneva2 negotiations. As documented in my [third essay](#) on Syria, the Coalition almost refused to attend Geneva2, because Assad had not resigned in advance of Geneva2.

Ronald B. Standler, "Syria: June 2014," [eighth essay](#), at section titled: "Brahimi Interview".

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## Why Geneva2 Failed

After the Geneva2 negotiations collapsed on 15 Feb 2014, I wrote an explanation of *why* the negotiations failed. My explanation included:

In World War I and II, when the armistice was signed, the German military immediately stopped fighting. That was because the German military was professional and disciplined. That means the German soldiers obeyed their officers, and the lower-ranking officers obeyed the higher-ranking officers.

The situation in Syria is strikingly different.

1. There are literally hundreds of rebel and jihadist groups in Syria. Their soldiers are unprofessional and have had little or no formal training. Many of these groups appear more similar to a criminal gang in the USA than to a professional army of a major nation. In contrast to the unified command structure of a professional army, the rebels and jihadists are mostly disorganized and fragmented.
2. Most of these rebel or jihadist groups are purely military, and are *not* part of some governmental or political organization. (One exception is the Free Syrian Army, which is loosely affiliated with the Syrian National Coalition, but the FSA has been growing weaker since Sep 2013.) This means there is no one who can negotiate for each of these rebel or jihadist groups, except for their local commander.

We saw this disorganization play out when the parties in Geneva agreed on a ceasefire in Homs on 26 Jan. But then no ceasefire happened for 11 days, while United Nations officials continued to negotiate with local commanders of rebel or jihadist groups in Homs. When a ceasefire in Homs was finally agreed at the local level to begin on 7 Feb, the ceasefire was repeatedly violated with mortar and rifle fire, especially during 8-9 Feb. This example shows that a ceasefire and humanitarian aid will need to be negotiated separately for each city and town in Syria, owing to the hundreds of rebel and jihadist groups and the absence of a central opposition government organization that is obeyed by all of the rebels and all of the jihadists. This example also shows that

any ceasefires will be violated by unprofessional, undisciplined barbarians amongst the armed groups in Syria.

The USA, Western Europe, Russia, and the United Nations seem to pretend that the Syrian National Coalition speaks for *all* of the rebel and jihadist groups in Syria. This fiction makes the Coalition the proper party to negotiate with Assad's lawful government. But, as we saw in Homs, agreement in Geneva did *not* translate to results in Homs.

....

The inevitable conclusion of this analysis is that negotiations with the Syrian National Coalition are futile, because:

1. The Coalition controls neither the rebels nor the jihadists who are fighting in Syria, as explained above.
2. The consistent demand of the Coalition that Assad and his henchmen resign, which is an irreconcilable difference with Assad's government.
3. *Neither* Assad's government, the rebels, the jihadists, *nor* Al-Qaeda desires an end to the civil war. Despite strong evidence of a military stalemate in Syria, each of the parties in Syria clings to the notion that they can win a military victory, and thus they should not compromise in negotiations. (However, note that Assad is currently in a strongly dominant position in most of Syria, and Assad has besieged many of the cities that he does not control.)
4. The leaders in Syria — the rebels, the jihadists, *and* Assad's government — appear concerned only with control, power, and authority, which are expressed by demanding pre-conditions, guarantees, and other formalities. These leaders completely lack any sense of urgency concerning suffering people. We are seeing a total failure of leadership on all sides, while innocent people suffer.

The reason that the Coalition attended negotiations in Geneva was that the USA and Western Europe pressured the Coalition to attend, as documented in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria. After arriving at Geneva, the Coalition and Assad's delegation each pretended (as propaganda) they were seeking peace, while portraying the other party as either war criminals or terrorists.

Ronald B. Standler, "Syria: February 2014," [fourth essay](#), 17 Feb 2014.

In mid-May 2014, I wrote:

I put the blame for the failure of Geneva2 negotiations on:

1. the governments of the USA and Western Europe for their obsession with deposing Assad, including their continuing insistence on the "transitional governing body" in Syria.
2. the desire of the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda for continuing the civil war.
3. the failure of the Syrian National Coalition to represent either the moderate rebels fighting in Syria or the Syrian people. The Coalition has never operated a

government. The Coalition has never been elected by either the rebels or people of Syria. The Coalition is *not* the appropriate representative of the opposition to Assad. Unfortunately, there is no other opposition political group (except for the Islamic Front, Nusra Front, and ISIL — all of whom are Islamic extremists, who are unacceptable to the USA and Western Europe).

Until *all three* of these problems have been resolved, more negotiations are futile. None of these problems will be easy to solve, and I predict that the Syrian civil war will continue for the foreseeable future, probably for years.

*If* the United Nations had the will to choke off the flow of munitions (from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, etc.) to the insurgents, then that *might* motivate some of the insurgents to negotiate a surrender.

....

Stating the problems a slightly different way, the four big problems are:

- A. the London11 governments and the Syrian National Coalition for their obsession with deposing Assad, including their continuing insistence on the "transitional governing body" in Syria;
- B. the intransigence and stubbornness of *all* the parties in Syria, many of whom refuse to talk to other parties;
- C. the continuing flow of munitions to insurgents in Syria from foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, UAE); and
- D. the refusal of rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda to negotiate an end to the civil war.

....

Obama's foreign policy on Syria is essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012 or 2013, the U.S. foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality. The intransigence of the Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Kerry, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian government. But the reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, and the insurgents are unable to force Assad to resign. During the Geneva2 negotiations in Jan-Feb 2014, and again in April 2014, the clamor for the "transitional governing body" in Syria was just a slogan for replacing Assad. In this way, the Coalition — and its supporters — hoped to achieve in Geneva2 negotiations what the rebels were unable to accomplish militarily. The Geneva2 negotiations have collapsed for multiple reasons, one of which is the refusal of Assad to resign.

Ronald B. Standler, "Syria: May 2014," [seventh essay](#), 13 May 2014.

On 7 June 2014, an interview with Brahimi was published in *Der Spiegel*. In that interview, Brahimi gave what is the definitive reasons for the failure of the Geneva2 negotiation.

I summarized Brahimi's reasons:

Brahimi plainly says both (1) the Coalition and Assad believe they can win a military

victory and (2) neither the Coalition nor Assad *wanted* to attend negotiations. When *both* parties do not want negotiations, that is a recipe for failed negotiations. Moreover, the Coalition's intransigent demand that Assad resign, and Assad's insistence on remaining in power, is impossible for compromise.

Ronald B. Standler, "Syria: June 2014," [eighth essay](#), at section titled: "Brahimi Interview".

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## Problem in Finding Alternative Government for Syria

In my second essay on Syria, I discussed the problem of finding an experienced leader for Syria to replace Assad:

Hafez al-Assad was President of Syria from March 1971 until his death in June 2000. Hafez's son, Bashar, became President in 2000 and was reelected in 2007. As of Oct 2013, the Assad family has controlled Syria for 42 years. Because the legislature is weak in Syria, this means the Assad family is essentially alone in having experience in leading the Syrian government.

This is difficult for people in the USA to understand. In the USA, we have 50 governors, 100 U.S. Senators, and 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, many of whom could be a credible candidate for the presidency of the USA. The USA also has a shorter term of office — four years for president and a maximum of two terms, compared to seven years in Syria with no maximum — which ensures the USA will have more turnover of politicians than Syria.

....

Note that the lack of experienced political leaders is *not unique* to Syria. This lack is a characteristic of many Muslim nations, which are now going through anarchy after deposing their long-serving (between 24 and 42 years) leader:

- Iraq, where Saddam Hussein ruled from July 1979 until April 2003.
- Tunisia, where president Ben Ali ruled from Nov 1987 until Jan 2011.
- Egypt, where Mubarak ruled from Oct 1981 until Feb 2011.
- Libya, where Gaddafi ruled from Sep 1969 until Aug 2011.

The lesson is that no one should be leader of a nation for more than approximately ten years. Furthermore, to avoid tyrants, there should be three equal branches of government (executive, legislative, judiciary), each with the power to overrule the other two branches in some circumstances.

Ronald B. Standler, "Chemical Weapons in Syria: Oct-Dec 2013," [second essay](#), Oct 2013.

Consider the other alternative governments for Syria:

1. The Free Syrian Army was created on 29 July 2011 by deserters from Assad's military.

The Coalition was created in Nov 2012. Note that the Free Syrian Army was created more than one year *before* the Syrian National Coalition, and the Army continues to be independent of the Coalition. The Free Syrian Army has never had a political organization for operating cities and provinces, it is only a military organization composed of moderate rebels who are opposed to Assad. The Free Syrian Army is frequently described as "fragmented" and "disorganized", and part of that disorganization is having no plan for a new government *if* they defeat Assad's military.

2. The jihadists organized under the "Islamic Front" on 22 Nov 2013. The Islamic Front does have a political organization, but — because they are Islamic extremists — they are unacceptable to the London11 group of nations.
3. The Nusra Front, the Al-Qaeda group in Syria, has a political organization, (i.e., Sharia councils). The Nusra Front is also unacceptable to the London11 group of nations.
4. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an Al-Qaeda inspired group, also has a political organization. Because ISIL is the most extreme terrorist group in Syria, they are also unacceptable to the London11 group of nations. ISIL is so terrible, other insurgents have been fighting against ISIL, beginning on 3 Jan 2014.

Summarizing, the Coalition was the best available political opposition group. That is why the United Nations chose the Syrian National Coalition to negotiate against Assad's lawful government in the Geneva2 negotiations during Jan/Feb 2014. Below, I explain why I have concluded that the Coalition is unworthy to lead Syria.

Notice that the jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL have been ignored in negotiations sponsored by the United Nations. No one seems to have a plan for how to make the jihadists and Al-Qaeda disappear from Syria.

### **Syrian National Coalition is Unworthy to Lead Syria**

By selecting the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) as the opposition in negotiations, the United Nations seeks to impose on the people of Syria a transitional government containing the SNC. However, there are several reasons why the SNC is unworthy to lead the Syrian government:

- the SNC is indecisive — took eight months (May 2013 to Jan 2014) to accept an invitation to Geneva2, as documented in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria.
- the SNC has an absolute, rigid demand that Assad resign — and this demand is now unrealistic. Assad is winning the civil war, Assad is firmly in control of the lawful government of Syria, and Assad wants to continue being president of Syria, so there is no good reason for Assad to resign.
- the SNC has no influence with insurgents in Syria (e.g., the failure of rebels and jihadists in Homs to respect the 26 Jan 2014 agreement in Geneva. The insurgents in Homs made their own agreement on 7 Feb.).

- the SNC is a group of Syrian expatriates, each of whom have lived in Istanbul for years. The SNC has no experience in operating a government of a nation. Syria had a pre-war population of about 22 million people, it is *not* a small nation. Syria now faces massive reconstruction caused by damage to buildings, water and electricity utilities, and roads. Further, Syria is infested with jihadists and Al-Qaeda terrorists, who need to be defeated. Syria needs *experienced* leaders of a government, which means a continuation of the Assad government.
- the SNC has been very critical of the excesses and atrocities by Assad's military. Presumably, if the SNC gains control of Syria, the SNC would disband or severely restrict Assad's military. But that would cripple the ability of the SNC to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda.
- the SNC has *not* been elected by anyone in Syria.

*If* the SNC continues to be the political opposition that negotiates with Assad's government, then those negotiations will be futile, because of the SNC's demand that Assad resign. And if — somehow — the SNC gains control of the Syrian government, then the incompetence and indecision of the SNC will be worse than Assad. If the SNC heads the Syrian government, it is predictable that the jihadists and Al-Qaeda will defeat the SNC.

The United Nations, by choosing the SNC as the political opposition to Assad, effectively imposes the SNC on the people of Syria, *if* a TGB is created.

But if the United Nations looked to the internal opposition in Syria — perhaps minority parties in the Syrian legislature — for the political opposition to Assad, then Assad would probably arrest those opponents as traitors.

### **Assad is Least Worst Leader for Syria**

On 22 Oct 2013, Con Coughlin, writing in *The Telegraph* in London, courageously expressed his opinion that "it would be better to have a stable Syria with Assad in charge than have the country descend into a lawless, ungovernable state such as Libya where Islamist terror cells flourish with impunity." [The Telegraph](#), 22 Oct 2013. Since then, other commentators have expressed similar opinions, as documented in my essays on Syria. (For example, see citations to Gen. Hayden and two others in my [second essay](#), at 14 Dec 2013.)

On 21 Dec 2013, former U.S. Ambassador to Syria (and five other nations), Ryan Crocker, wrote an opinion piece in *The New York Times* in which he says:

It is time to consider a future for Syria without Assad's ouster, because it is overwhelmingly likely that is what the future will be.

President Obama's bold declaration in 2011 that Assad must go violated a fundamental principle of foreign affairs: if you articulate a policy, you had better be sure you have the means to carry it out. In Syria, we clearly did not.

....

.... The impact of a radical Sunni ascendancy in Damascus on Chechnya and Dagestan is one of Moscow's worst security nightmares.

Better armed, organized, supported and motivated, Assad isn't going. Most likely, he will get the country back, inch by bloody inch. Perhaps Al Qaeda will hold a few enclaves in the north. But he will hold Damascus. And do we really want the alternative — a major country at the heart of the Arab world in the hands of Al Qaeda?

So we need to come to terms with a future that includes Assad — and consider that as bad as he is, there is something worse. A good place to start is Geneva next month and some quiet engagement with Syrian officials.

Ryan C. Crocker, "Assad Is the Least Worst Option," [NY Times](#), 21 Dec 2013.

**Assad is the best leader for Syria, for the following reasons:**

- president since the year 2000, most experienced leader of Syria.
- strong, decisive leadership, and ruthless against terrorists — best available choice to defeat jihadists and Al-Qaeda.
- continuing the current government with Assad avoids inconsistency, hesitation, vacillation, and decreasing loyalty of the Syrian military — or worse: chaos or anarchy — that would create an opportunity for the jihadists and Al-Qaeda to exploit. Further, beginning a new government (i.e., the TGB) in the middle of a civil war is a particularly bad idea.
- continuation of secular government that is tolerant of religious minorities.
- no acceptable alternative candidate for president (i.e., Syrian National Coalition is unworthy, and jihadists/Al-Qaeda are worse).

There is no doubt that Assad has engaged in nasty behavior (e.g., besieging cities and starving the inhabitants into submission, attacking civilians), but the insurgents — including moderate rebels — have engaged in the same behavior. Because of Assad's alleged war crimes, it is more accurate to use Ryan Crocker's phrase that Assad is the "least worst" option, instead of saying that Assad is "best".

Given the essentially one political party in Syria (i.e., the Baath party, of which Assad is a member) and the absence of a genuine opposition, it is *not* significant that Assad was re-elected with 88% of the vote on 3 June 2014. But journalists — especially the Associated Press — reported in June 2014 on the genuine enthusiasm of voters for Assad. I find that enthusiasm significant. It appears that the majority of people in Syria sincerely *want* Assad to continue ruling Syria. That is another reason why Assad should continue ruling Syria.

Below, I quote some of my essay in 2013, in which I argued that Assad was preferable to the alternative of the insurgent(s) ruling Syria. Or you can skip to the [conclusion](#).

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Back on 14 October 2013, I wrote:

Kerry again said Assad "has lost the legitimacy to be able to be a cohesive force that

could bring people together." As documented in my previous essay, U.S. Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry have been saying this since June 2011. The fact is that Assad has outlasted Hillary Clinton, and Assad is continuing to do a good job of leading his military in a battle against rebels. I believe that Assad's government is much preferable to a government led by jihadists and terrorists. I worry that if a strong leader like Assad is removed, the "good" rebels will be unable to either defeat or control the jihadists.

Ronald B. Standler, "Chemical Weapons in Syria: Oct-Dec 2013," [second essay](#), 14 Oct 2013.

On 17 Oct 2013, I wrote:

Al-Qaeda has been in Syria for at least 22 months (since Jan 2012), but, astoundingly, Syria's neighbors are only now beginning to realize the presence of Al-Qaeda is a game changer. I agree with Russia that support for Assad is the best strategy against Islamic terrorists and jihadists. However — and this is the scary part — neither the Russians (in Afghanistan during 1980s) nor the USA (in Iraq and Afghanistan) were able to defeat Islamic terrorists. It is unclear how Assad will defeat Islamic terrorism, but he may be able to keep terrorists engaged inside Syria.

*Ibid.*, 17 Oct 2013, near beginning of the essay, in section on chemical weapons and atrocities.

On 23 Oct 2013, I wrote:

Above, I quote Con Coughlin's opinion that it is preferable that Assad continue to lead Syria, compared to the alternative that jihadists/terrorists control most of Syria. I believe that the best solution is to continue Assad's government, end the civil war between the moderate rebels and the Assad government, merge the moderate rebels (including deserters from the Syrian military) into the Syrian military, have a unified fight against the jihadists, and hold the regularly scheduled elections in Syria in June 2014. This solution would contain the jihadists inside Syria. Like it or not, Assad is the strongest and most experienced leader in Syria. And Syria really needs a strong leader now. However, this solution is a fantasy that is *not* going to happen. Neither the moderate rebels nor Assad can tolerate each other, even though they have common interests in preserving Syria and defeating jihadists. Furthermore, this solution is *not* likely to occur, because of more than two years of hatred and distrust between the rebels and the Syrian military.

Nevertheless, *before* the London 11 decides that Assad has no future in Syria, the London 11 needs to find a better leader than Assad. Before abandoning what one has, make sure one has something better!

*Ibid.*, 23 Oct 2013, just before the section titled "Replacing Bashar Assad?".

On 11 Nov 2013, I wrote:

On 10 Nov [2013], after six months of indecision, the Syrian National Coalition is still *unable* to decide whether or not to attend Geneva2. With that kind of glacial indecision, does anyone believe that the Syrian National Coalition is capable of leading a nation? ... I believe the time has come to consider the Syrian National Coalition as an impediment to peace in Syria, and unworthy of leading a future Syrian government.

On 11 Nov, the Syrian National Coalition says they will attend Geneva2 *only* if Assad has no role in either transitional government or in future government. That demands that Assad relinquish power. In effect, this gives the rebels a political victory over Assad, instead of the military victory that they have been seeking since March 2011.

But Assad is the legitimate ruler of Syria, elected to a term that expires in mid-2014. Assad is not only defending a stable, secular government in Syria, but also Assad is clearly a stronger leader than the indecisive Syrian National Coalition. As I argued above, Assad is everyone's best hope of avoiding both (1) anarchy from fragmented/disorganized rebels and (2) an Islamic state established by the jihadists. Assad is an indispensable party to any negotiations about Syria, but Assad has good reasons to avoid negotiations that *require* his resignation.

So when the Syrian National Coalition says they will attend Geneva2 *only* if Assad resigns, the rebels are *not* helping the peace process. It is undesirable if Assad attends Geneva2, but the rebels are absent. It is equally undesirable if the rebels attend Geneva2, but Assad is absent. *All* relevant parties are needed at Geneva2, without preconditions. When the Syrian National Coalition establishes a list of preconditions for their attendance at Geneva2, the Coalition has not really agreed to attend.

Consequently, I continue to believe the time has come to consider the Syrian National Coalition as an impediment to peace in Syria, and unworthy of leading a future Syrian government.

*Ibid.*, 11 Nov 2013, in section titled: "10-11 Nov 2013: Syrian National Coalition".

On 22 November 2013, I wrote:

With the merger of the jihadists [creation of the Islamic Front], and the formidable presence of two Al-Qaeda groups in Syria, along with the incompetence of the Coalition, Assad is looking better and better. Unfortunately, the Sunni leaders of Arab nations, as well as diplomats in Western Europe and the USA, have been condemning Assad for more than two years. It would be very difficult for Western Europe and the USA to now endorse Assad.

*Ibid.*, 22 Nov 2013, at end of section titled: "Merger creates 'The Islamic Front'".

On 27 November 2013, I wrote:

Earlier in this essay, I extolled Assad's ability to exert strong leadership, while the Coalition is disorganized, fragmented, and unable to make simple decisions. As I said above, Assad is our best hope of defeating the jihadists and Al-Qaeda. And Assad represents a continuation of a secular government that is tolerant of religious minorities.

*Ibid.*, 27 Nov 2013, in section titled: "26 Nov 2013:Free Syrian Army says 'NO!'"

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## Conclusion

Here's how I suggest the civil war in Syria should be concluded:

1. recognize Assad is what former U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker in Dec 2013 called "the least worst" leader for Syria, and recognize that Assad has already won the civil war in most of the populated regions of Syria — yes, this means the London11 (including Obama) will need to abandon their obsession with deposing Assad
2. moderate rebels (e.g., Free Syrian Army) surrender and be re-integrated into Assad's military
3. ignore the Syrian National Coalition
4. international support for Assad's battle against the Islamic extremists in Syria (i.e., the jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL)
5. sanctions against nations that supported jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL. The sanctions might include paying restitution for the reconstruction of Syria. (Just as we make polluters pay to clean up their toxic waste, we should make nations who furnished munitions pay for the damage caused by those munitions.)
6. in each town organize negotiations between local insurgents and Assad's government on ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, etc.

It would be more efficient to have one big negotiation between Assad's government and the opposition, but there is no single "the opposition" in Syria. Instead, there are hundreds of rebel and jihadist groups. That means there will need to be separate negotiations in each town, something that has been happening in Syria, beginning in February 2014.

In my opinion, the rigid insistence of the United Nations — probably motivated by the London11 group of nations — on the TGB specified in Geneva1 makes irrelevant any negotiations sponsored by the United Nations. *If* the United Nations wants to be relevant to the negotiations to end the Syrian civil war, then the U.N. should abandon the concept of the TGB, and concentrate on negotiating ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, etc.

It needs to be recognized that a totally new government (i.e., TGB) is a bad idea in the midst of a vicious civil war with jihadists and Al-Qaeda. Any inconsistency, hesitation, vacillation, or decreasing loyalty of the Syrian military — or worse: chaos or anarchy — would create an opportunity for the jihadists and Al-Qaeda to exploit. It would be desirable to retain the present government in Syria, and make small changes to that government to improve that government — instead of discarding the present government and beginning with a new TGB.

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This document is at [www.rbs0.com/Geneva2F.pdf](http://www.rbs0.com/Geneva2F.pdf)  
begun 27 May 2014, modified 28 June 2014

My main webpage about [Syria](#).

