

Syria: June 2014

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous seven essays on Syria. That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war and removal of chemical weapons from Syria.

Because news media in the USA often ignore details of what is happening in Syria, at least once a day I checked the *Al-Jazeera* Syria blog and the Middle East section of the *Daily Star* newspaper in Lebanon. I also made daily searches of the websites of Reuters in England and the Associated Press to find news about Syria.

When I was a full-time student in universities during 1967-77, I learned not to write documents full of facts, without also explaining the significance of those facts and drawing conclusions from those facts. So, I include my opinions in this essay, to show the reader omissions, inconsistencies, propaganda, and other defects in the conventional wisdom or in journalists' reports. In science and engineering, we keep our opinions separate from facts, and in that spirit I label most of my opinions and my comments.

In writing these essays, I have been using "Syrian National Coalition" (or just "Coalition") to designate a group of Syrian exiles with headquarters in Istanbul that have the official name "National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces", which they sometimes shorten to "The National Syrian Coalition". The U.S. State Department is calling this organization the SOC, for "Syrian Opposition Coalition". I want to be clear that, despite the different names for it, this Coalition is *one* organization.

Copyright law allows an author to make brief quotations for purposes of scholarship, news reporting, or comment, but *not* to copy an entire article. (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper. However, there is no copyright on works of the U.S. Government (17 U.S.C. §105), so an author is free to copy as much of a Government's work as the author wishes.

I am [aware](#) of "link rot" — the failure of links owing to a webmaster who either (1) moved old webpages to a new location, or (2) deleted old webpages. Such actions by webmasters frustrate users of the Internet, who depend on stable links. In writing this essay, I often cite multiple news sources, in the hope that at least one of those links will still function in the future. Link rot is a problem created by webmasters, and the solution to this problem lies with those webmasters.

I use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) for events in Europe and Syria. Eastern Standard Time in Boston is -5 hours from GMT, Beginning 9 March, the USA was on Daylight Savings Time, Eastern Daylight Time in Boston is -4 hours from GMT. Beginning 30 March, England was on British Summer Time (BST), which is +1 hour from GMT.

Terse Summary of Syria Fighters

It is helpful to understanding the Syrian civil war to divide the opposition fighters into three groups of people:

1. The so-called "rebels" are moderates, many of whom are part of the Free Syrian Army.
2. The "jihadists" want to impose an Islamic government on Syria.
3. And at least two Al-Qaeda affiliated groups fighting in Syria: (a) the Nusra Front and (b) the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) — also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). On 3 Feb 2014, Al-Qaeda repudiated ISIL, but ISIL remains Al-Qaeda inspired.

The USA and Western Europe would prefer that the rebels win, although military aid to the

rebels has been withheld because of fears that donated weapons and munitions would eventually be acquired by either the jihadists or Al-Qaeda. The rebels are frequently described by two words: "fragmented" and "disorganized". Beginning in September 2013, the rebels are also frequently characterized as "disillusioned". Since October 2013, many smaller rebel groups have been leaving the Free Syrian Army and joining the jihadists.

While I use the words rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda to indicate three different opposition groups, journalists routinely use the word "rebels" to refer to the entire opposition. Thus, there is different word usage between my text and quotations from journalists.

Government

The Arab nations, Western Europe, and the USA recognize the Syrian National Coalition, an exile group in Turkey, as the *only* legitimate government of Syria. However, there are hundreds of rebel or jihadist groups operating in Syria, and the Coalition represents only some of the rebel groups and none of the jihadists. As explained in detail in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria, the Coalition is unable to make decisions, and — in my opinion — has no credibility as a future government of Syria. However, there is no other alternative government for Syria. Since October 2013, several commentators have noted that Assad is preferable to having Al-Qaeda control Syria. The topic of a future government for Syria is discussed in my separate [essay](#).

History During June 2014: Destruction of Chemical Weapons

4 June 2014

There has been mostly silence from OPCW and the United Nations since the last delivery of chemical weapons on 24 April. Approximately 100 metric tons of chemical weapons, about 8% of the total, remain in Syria. On 4 June, Sigrid Kaag, the head of the OPCW/UN mission in Syria, briefed the U.N. Security Council. The Associated Press reported:

The head of the mission charged with destroying Syria's chemical weapons called Wednesday [4 June] on President Bashar Assad's government and the international community to ensure that the last 16 containers of dangerous chemicals are immediately removed from the country.

Sigrid Kaag told reporters after briefing the U.N. Security Council that a number of key nations have confirmed that Syria has "legitimate" security concerns about transporting the final 7.2 percent of its declared chemical stockpile to the port of Latakia. She said the joint U.N.-Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons mission which she heads has separate information that security conditions in the contested area not far from Damascus "have been very volatile."

But she said getting the last containers on to Danish and Norwegian ships "is very, very critical" and she called for help from key nations. She said she will return to

Damascus in a few days to press for immediate removal of the chemicals from "harm's way."

Kaag reiterated that Syria will not meet the June 30 deadline to completely destroy its chemical weapons. But she said in an interview with The Associated Press that the joint mission is hoping to wrap up and hand over its remaining work to the OPCW "within a finite period of time — count it on one hand in months."

....

Kaag pointed to "the tremendous cost" for the countries that have supplied the vessels to carry the containers and the ships escorting them, as well as the United States which is providing a ship, now in an Italian port, specially equipped with two machines that will render the chemicals inert. That process takes approximately 60 days.

Edith M. Lederer "Envoy: Last Dangerous Chemicals Must Leave Syria," [Associated Press](#), 18:36 EDT, 4 June 2014.

My comments: I note that diplomats *should* stop using words like "demand" and "must". When a diplomat "demands" some act, and the act does not occur, then the diplomat appears as a toothless dog, who barks, but is not to be taken seriously.

I also note that Kaag misused the word "finite" in her expression "a finite period of time". To a mathematician, that means OPCW will complete its work in *less* than an infinite amount of time. That is a tautology because *any* amount of time in human history is finite. Her related remark that the number of months could be "counted ... on one hand" is a childish expression that means less than five months. If I need to count, I don't use fingers on my hand, and neither do my colleagues in science and engineering.

I am surprised that no one has proposed having some foreign nation's military conduct airstrikes on the insurgents who are blocking removal of the remaining chemical weapons from Syria. That would send a real message to the insurgents not to defy the United Nations, and help Assad deliver his weapons without additional delay.

Reuters reports on concerns that Assad may not have declared *all* of his chemical weapons: Inspectors overseeing the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal have asked President Bashar al-Assad's government to clarify disparities in its original declaration on its cache of toxic gas, diplomats said on Wednesday [4 June]. [¶] The envoys were citing remarks by Sigrid Kaag, head of the joint mission to Syria of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, who was briefing the 15-member U.N. Security Council. [¶] "The (U.N.-OPCW) team has been in Damascus seeking clarification on discrepancies in the original declaration," a diplomat present at the closed-door meeting told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Speaking to reporters after the council meeting, Kaag spoke of ongoing efforts to overcome the declaration's "deficiencies that have been identified, in collaboration with the authorities." She did not elaborate.

The Western diplomat who attended the meeting said some of the discrepancies went beyond routine errors, noting that there were omissions from Syria's declaration.

....

But Western officials want the mission to continue to investigate numerous ambiguities in Syria's chemical weapons declaration, which have become increasingly glaring during the course of the mission's work. [9] The officials have cited U.S., French and British intelligence that Assad's government had failed to disclose all of its poison gas stocks in its original declaration, leaving it with the capability to produce and deploy chemical arms.

Louis Charbonneau, "Inspectors press Syria on chemical arms 'discrepancies': envoys," [Reuters](#), 14:50 EDT, 4 June 2014.

OPCW/UN posted the following statement on their website:

Given that the 30 June 2014 deadline for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme will not be met, the focus now is on the immediate removal of the remaining materials, the head of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission said today [4 June].

"The deadline will not be met," Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag told reporters, referring to the destruction of the full arsenal of the country's chemical weapons in line with the decisions taken by the UN Security Council and the OPCW Executive Council.

The removal of the most critical material for destruction began in early January, in line with an agreement brokered by Russia and the United States, by which Syria renounced its chemical weapons material and joined 1992 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons.

The removal of the chemical agents out of the country involves transporting them to port of Latakia, where they will be shipped on commercial vessels provided by some Member States. They will then be loaded onto a United States ship and destroyed at sea using hydrolysis.

Ms. Kaag, speaking to reporters after a closed-door session with the Security Council, stressed that what is important is that all material is out of harm's way and destruction can begin as soon as possible aboard the US ship, especially since "considerable" time and investments have been made to get the job done.

At the same time, she underlined that "significant" progress has been attained over an "impossible" period of nine months in dismantling most of Syria's declared chemical weapons programme.

The focus now is on the urgency of the removal of the remaining 7.2 per cent of the declared chemical weapons material, which is still held at one site, and is made difficult owing to the volatile security conditions.

"We have an indication from the authorities that as soon as security conditions permit, removal from the site will happen; additional indications are that this is expected to be soon," said Ms. Kaag.

"The security considerations have been assessed as reasonable," she noted. "However, that doesn't mean that additional delays can be incurred. There's not only the issue of the deadline of 30 June, there's equally so the tremendous cost on the maritime partners. The operation should have long been completed in this regard."

The joint mission has also spoken to Member States with influence over the parties to the conflict in Syria to assist in this regard.

"We call on all Member States to exercise their influence to ensure the immediate removal of the remaining chemicals ... the urgency, the time, the pressure to remove the remaining 7.2 per cent is very, very critical."

The Special Coordinator also discussed with the Security Council the residual activities of the joint mission, as well as how the joint mission will continue its work and possible successor arrangements when the OPCW Executive Council and the Security Council determine that its mandate has been completed.

"As Syria deadline nears, OPCW-UN mission focuses on swift removal of remaining chemicals," [OPCW/UN](#), 4 June 2014. The original press release at [U.N. News](#) contains six additional paragraphs at the end.

6 June 2014

On Friday, 6 June, OPCW announced:

The Norwegian vessel Taiko, which is participating in the multinational maritime operation to remove chemicals from Syria, departed today for Finland and the United States to deliver its cargo of chemicals for destruction in those countries.

This is in accordance with the schedule of the Taiko, which was notified to the OPCW at an earlier stage. The Danish ship Ark Futura will take over the remaining 8 percent of chemicals for transportation to their destination.

"I commend Norway and Denmark for their vital support for the maritime operation," said the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü. "We remain focused on removing the last consignment of chemicals from Syrian territory and urge the Syrian authorities to complete the removal as soon as possible."

"Norwegian Cargo Ship Departs with Chemicals," [OPCW](#), 6 June 2014.

My comment: The plain English translation is that the Norwegians were tired of waiting for the final delivery, now 40 days past the 27 April deadline proposed by Assad's government.

17 June 2014

On 17 June, a progress report was made to the OPCW Executive Council:

The Director-General [of OPCW] noted that ongoing delays in transporting the remaining 8% of chemicals mean that Syria will miss the target date of 30 June for the complete destruction of its chemical weapons programme. He called on Syrian authorities to redouble their efforts to complete the transportation of the remaining chemicals without further delay.

Referring to progress in technical talks on the destruction of 12 chemical weapons production facilities (CWPF), the Director-General noted that Syria has agreed to the methodology for destroying hangars that were used as CWPFs. However, further work is needed regarding the underground structures.

[OPCW](#), 17 June 2014.

During 7-16 June 2014, there was complete silence from OPCW and OPCW/UN about chemical weapons in Syria. The last delivery of chemicals from Syria was on 24 April and about 100 metric tons of chemicals remain in Syria.

My comments: I remember back in 1980, after Iranians had kidnapped 52 Americans from the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, television news programs in the USA displayed *every day* the number of days the Americans had been held hostage in Iran. The continuing display of the number of days was monotonous, but very effective in destroying the presidency of Jimmy Carter, who happened to be president at that time.

I wonder if something similar could be done voluntarily by newspapers and television news programs around the world prominently publishing *every day* a count of how many days since the previous delivery of chemical weapons by Assad's government. One would hope that Assad would care about his crumbling international reputation in the relentless, monotonous repetition of the fact that he was in violation of his obligation under a United Nations Security Council Resolution.

The current silence by OPCW and diplomats is a gift to Assad, since nearly everyone has forgotten about Assad's failure to deliver *all* of his chemical weapons.

23 June 2014

Final Delivery of Chemical Weapons

On Monday, 23 June 2014, the Director General of OPCW announced that the final shipment of chemical weapons had been loaded on a Danish ship in the Syrian port of Latakia:

Just under 9 months ago in October, I addressed you members of the press — in this same place, here in The Hague — to announce the deployment of the first OPCW inspectors to Syria to begin an historic and unprecedented mission. The mission was to destroy the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

A major landmark in this mission has been reached today. The last of the remaining

chemicals identified for removal from Syria were loaded this afternoon aboard the Danish ship Ark Futura. The ship made its last call at the port of Latakia in what has been a long and patient campaign in support of this international endeavour.

Removing the stockpile of precursor and other chemicals has been a fundamental condition in the programme to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme.

The next stage in this mission is the completion of the maritime operations to deliver the chemicals for destruction at the assigned facility on board the U.S. vessel Cape Ray and at commercial facilities in Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme has been a major undertaking marked by an extraordinary international cooperation.

Never before has an entire arsenal of a category of weapons of mass destruction been removed from a country experiencing a state of internal armed conflict. And this has been accomplished within very demanding and tight timeframes.

....

While a major chapter in our endeavours closes today, OPCW's work in Syria will continue. We hope to conclude soon the clarification of certain aspects of the Syrian declaration and commence the destruction of certain structures that were used as chemical weapons production facilities. Syria's cooperation with the work of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission will also remain important. The OPCW will continue to engage with Syria to ensure that it is able to fulfil all its obligations under the CWC and the relevant decisions of the Executive Council and UN Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

Ahmet Üzümcü, "Announcement to media on last consignment of chemicals leaving Syria," [OPCW](#), 23 June 2014.

The Associated Press made clear that delivery of the final consignment of declared chemical weapons did *not* mean there were now zero chemical weapons in Syria. The 23 June delivery only completes the delivery of the chemical weapons that were declared last year by Syria.

[Uzumcu, the director general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons] acknowledged that Syria could still be hiding some of its arsenal. [¶] "I can't say ... that Syria doesn't have any chemical weapons anymore," Uzumcu said, while acknowledging that that was true of any country that his organization works with. He said Syria's declared arsenal was close to estimates made by external security analysts and experts before its disarmament process began. [¶] He described the Syrian government's cooperation as "satisfactory."

Toby Sterling & Menelaos Hadjicostis, "Syria Hands Over Last Of Declared Chemical Weapons," [Associated Press](#), 17:34 GMT, 23 June 2014.

25 June 2014

The M.V. Cape Ray departed from Rota, Spain on the morning of 25 June for the port of Gioia Tauro, Italy, where the Syrian chemical weapons will be transferred from the Danish ship Ark Futura. [Pentagon](#).

The Cape Ray has waited in Spain since 13 Feb, while the Syrians *slowly* delivered their chemical weapons.

Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in Kfar Zeita on 11 April 2014

The opposition says that Assad's government used chemical weapons at sunset on 11 April at the village of Kfar Zeita in Syria. Assad's government says that the Nusra Front used chemical weapons. Both the opposition and Assad's government agree that two people died and "more than 100" were affected by the chemical weapon. Both sides claim that chlorine gas is the chemical weapon.

On 29 April, OPCW announced it would "soon" send a fact-finding team to Syria to investigate this alleged use chlorine gas in Syria. The team arrived in Syria sometime before 8 May. The OPCW fact-finding team is maintaining a low profile — with zero press releases and no interviews with journalists. On 27 May, the OPCW team was attacked in Syria while attempting to investigate chemical weapons use in Kafr Zeita.

My comments: The first use of chemical weapons at Kafr Zeita was on 11 April. There was a bureaucratic delay of 18 days before OPCW decided to investigate. The crime scene has now been amply contaminated, and there have been abundant opportunities for fabrication or tampering with evidence. That is why competent detectives immediately secure a crime scene and then promptly begin collecting evidence. The delay by OPCW compromises their investigation.

For details of the early history of chemical weapons use at Kafr Zeita, see my [sixth essay](#) on Syria.

On 4 June, the Associated Press reported on a briefing by Sigrid Kaag to the U.N. Security Council:

Kaag also said an OPCW fact-finding mission into alleged chlorine attacks in Syria, which was ambushed and briefly held by gunmen in rebel-held territory on May 27, left Syria last Friday [30 May].

The mission's experts reported Wednesday [28 May] "that they will continue their work from The Hague and collect as much information and evidence as possible," she said. It was not clear whether the mission ever actually got to the site of an alleged chlorine attack.

Edith M. Lederer "Envoy: Last Dangerous Chemicals Must Leave Syria," [Associated Press](#), 18:36 EDT, 4 June 2014.

On 5 June, Reuters reported:

France said on Thursday [5 June] samples it had collected suggesting Syrian government forces had used chlorine gas in the country's civil war may not prove to be conclusive and would need to be cross-checked with other information to determine its use.

....

In a daily briefing to reporters, French foreign ministry spokesman Romain Nadal said Paris, which has been examining about 14 samples for several weeks, would continue to do so in coordination with other nations. [9] "Given that ... chlorine which is widely used for civilian purposes is very volatile, the results of the analysis may not necessarily prove to be conclusive, (and) will need to be complemented with other information," Nadal said.

"France says Syria chlorine gas samples may be inconclusive," [Reuters](#), 12:49 GMT, 5 June 2014.

My comments: This is an embarrassment for the French government who has been screeching about war crimes committed by Assad, but now admit that their evidence is flimsy.

"Volatile" is the wrong word. Volatile properly refers to the ability of a liquid to evaporate at room temperature. Chlorine is already a gas at room temperature and atmospheric pressure, so chlorine gas can *not* evaporate. I don't know what Nadal was trying to say. Perhaps he meant corrosive — chlorine reacts with many substances to form chlorates or chlorides. Nadal may have used the correct word in French, and Reuters may have mistranslated.

17 June Progress Report

On 17 June, OPCW issued a progress report:

The Director-General [of OPCW] noted that despite the grave incident which prevented the fact-finding mission (FFM) from conducting an important field visit, the team was able to prepare a preliminary report. The information that was available to the FFM lends credence to the view that toxic chemicals — most likely pulmonary irritating agents, such as chlorine — have been used in Syria. The FFM will continue its important work in gathering facts and bringing them to light.

[OPCW](#), 17 June 2014.

Why Peace Negotiations Futile: Disorganization of the Syrian National Coalition & Politics of the Peace Process

My [first](#), [second](#), [third](#), [fourth](#), [fifth](#), [sixth](#), and [seventh](#) essays on Syria explain why I believe peace negotiations are futile with the current conditions in Syria. The following information continues this history of frustrated negotiations.

Diversions

Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the Ukraine, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. (See my [fifth](#) essay on Syria.) Why is the Ukraine crisis relevant to the civil war in Syria? Time that Obama/Kerry spend on the crisis in the Ukraine is time not spent on the crisis in Syria. The threats during the Ukraine crisis mean that further cooperation between Russia and the USA on the civil war in Syria is temporarily *unlikely*. By 30 May, the crisis in the Ukraine was winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border.

The Ukraine is not the only problem, there are at least five other major problems in the world that divert attention and resources from Syria:

- a continuing civil war in the Central African Republic
- more violence in South Sudan, as ceasefires are violated
- On 14 April, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists in Nigeria, kidnapped more than 230 girls from a boarding school. Given the incompetence of the Nigerian government, foreign nations are involved in finding and rescuing the girls. Meanwhile, an Islamic bomb in Jos, Nigeria killed at least 118 people on 20 May. Approximately ninety people were kidnapped by Islamic terrorists on 21 June in Nigeria.
- On 18 May, a former Libyan general led an assault against the Libyan Parliament building, causing another crisis in Libya. Various parts of the government and military supported the general's anti-Islamist campaign.
- On 10 June, ISIL — an Al-Qaeda inspired group that operates in both Iraq and Syria — captured Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq. On 11 June, ISIL captured Tikrit. (See [below](#).) The crisis in Iraq pushed Syria out of the news in Western newsmedia.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 Failed

On 22 Feb 2014, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139, which required parties in Syria to allow humanitarian aid and to stop targeting civilians. Although this Resolution was effective immediately, *all* of the parties in Syria ignored it. The U.N. Secretary General issued Reports on 24 March and 23 April 2014 that recognized that Resolution 2139 had failed. (See my [fifth](#) and [sixth](#) essays on Syria.)

On 22 May, U.N. Secretary General Ban issued his third monthly report that again recognized that Resolution 2139 had failed. Because of continuing unavailability of documents from the U.N. website, beginning sometime before 16 May, I could not download the Report from the U.N. website during June.

On 10 June, I was frustrated by the continuing unavailability of documents from the U.N. website, so I downloaded a copy of Ban's report from SecurityCouncilReport.org, a nonprofit organization with a competent webmaster. I'm glad there are nonprofit organizations with reliable websites, unlike the incompetent bureaucrats at the United Nations.

Ban's third monthly report on the failure of Resolution 2139 says in part:

3. Violence continued unabated across the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period [22 April to 19 May 2014], Indiscriminate aerial strikes and shelling by government forces resulted in deaths, injuries and large-scale displacement of civilians, while armed opposition groups also continued indiscriminate shelling and the use of car bombs in populated civilian areas.

....

6. The city of Aleppo experienced significant cuts in its water supply from 5 to 13 May. The city's main pumping station was deliberately shut down by opposition groups surrounding the city, leaving at least 2.5 million people in the city without access to water for drinking or sanitation. The water supply was restored to Aleppo city on 13 May, following negotiations between the Sharia Committee and the Division of Public Services (affiliated with opposition groups) in eastern Aleppo.

....

21. Approximately 241,000 people remain besieged — 196,000 in areas besieged by government forces in Madamiyet Elsham, eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk, and 45,000 in areas besieged by opposition forces in Nubul and Zahra. During the reporting period, the siege of the old city of Homs ended.

....

31. In March, the United Nations sought the consent of the Syrian Government to use additional border crossings identified as vital for reaching over 1 million people in what have proved to be impossible-to-reach areas. To date, the Government has refused to agree to the use of these crossing points, restating its long-standing policy of refusing to use international crossing points not under its control, irrespective of the humanitarian imperative. The key border crossings required to scale up humanitarian operations are Bab al-Salameh and Bab al-Hawa on the border with Turkey, controlled by the Islamic Front; Al Yaroubiyah crossing point with Iraq, controlled by the Democratic Union Party; and Tal Shihab crossing point with Jordan, controlled by the Free Syrian Army.

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45. There has been no reduction in the appalling patterns of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses, as documented in my previous reports. Disrespect for human life and dignity remains a defining feature of the Syrian conflict and is at the root of the continued killing, the enforced disappearances, the torture and

other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the instances of arbitrary arrest and detention, the kidnappings, and the sexual and gender-based violence.

46. I am shocked by the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas, where children in particular continue to be at the forefront of the casualties. Barrel bombs, mortars and car bombs have killed and maimed thousands over the past weeks. I remind parties to the conflict that the deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime.

....

47. Once again, I appeal to Governments in the region and beyond to stop the flow of arms and fighters to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is having a hugely destabilizing impact on the region and beyond. Governments with influence need to do everything they can to stop those from outside the Syrian Arab Republic entering the country, regardless of whether they are invited or not, and taking up arms, as well as to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring financial resources, weapons and other supplies.

....

49. In my previous report to the Security Council (S/2014/295), I described as shameful the fact that people were being deliberately forced to live under the inhumane and illegal conditions of siege warfare. Thirty days later, for approximately 241,000 people, this situation remains unchanged. For over 3.5 million others, access to humanitarian assistance continues to be unpredictable and woefully inadequate. Despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), the situation on the ground has become worse, not better.

....

51. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic is failing in its responsibility to look after its own people. It is failing in that responsibility through its refusal to give consent to humanitarian organizations to use all means at their disposal, including the use of border crossings operated by opposition groups, to deliver urgently needed lifesaving humanitarian assistance which, by its nature, lies outside the political and military dimensions of the conflict. Arbitrarily withholding consent for the opening of all relevant border crossings is a violation of international humanitarian law, and an act of non-compliance with resolution 2139 (2014). Meeting the demand of the Security Council that all relevant border crossings be immediately opened for the passage of lifesaving assistance is not an abdication of sovereignty. On the contrary, it is an affirmation of the sovereign responsibility of the Government to ensure that its citizens do not suffer in such a tragic and unnecessary way.

52. The United Nations has submitted a list of border crossings which must be opened according to the obligations imposed by resolution 2139 (2014). It is ready to put in place arrangements at key border and line crossings to facilitate, improve and monitor access. These arrangements could include a mechanism to ensure that, even with those border crossings that are currently outside the Government's effective control, cross-border operations are conducted in a transparent way. The United Nations will do all it

can to facilitate and enable the provision of assistance by humanitarian organizations across borders in accordance with resolution 2139 (2014).

53. The Security Council, in resolution 2139 (2014), demands that relevant border crossings be opened. It demands that sieges be immediately lifted. It demands that schools and hospitals be respected and protected from attack. It demands that medical personnel and supplies be immediately allowed to reach all those in need. I deeply regret to inform the Council that the parties to the conflict are not heeding these demands. Despite the clearly expressed will of the Council and the best efforts of humanitarian actors, resolution 2139 (2014) has yet to make a meaningful difference to the lives of the millions of people in need in the Syrian Arab Republic. Therefore, I call on the Council urgently to consider what steps it will now take to secure compliance with its demands.

Ban Ki-moon, "Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014)," S/2014/365, 22 May 2014.

My comments: The London11 nations continue to denounce the nasty tactics of Assad's military, while ignoring atrocities by insurgents. Ban makes clear that the insurgents are engaging in similar tactics:

- "opposition groups also continued indiscriminate shelling and the use of car bombs in populated civilian areas", ¶3
- Nusra Front shut down supply of drinking water in Aleppo, ¶6, also ¶46
- "45,000 [people] in areas besieged by opposition forces", ¶21, also ¶29

Fixing the humanitarian situation in Syria is *not* as simple as removing Assad. Some of the insurgents are as bad as Assad. Because of atrocities committed by ISIL, the moderate rebels, jihadists, and Nusra Front have been fighting against ISIL since 3 Jan 2014.

Nonetheless, Assad's military commits the majority of the violations of international law, because Assad has more resources (e.g., the only air force in Syria) and controls more borders.

The following material is useful to understand ¶31 and ¶51-¶53 in Ban's Report that is quoted above.

international law

Back on 28 April 2014, an ad hoc group of 35 lawyers floated a [proposal](#) to deliver humanitarian aid to Syria through border crossings controlled by insurgents. (A copy of the proposal was posted at the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR](#).) The proposal is a practical solution to the "arbitrary and unjustified" delays by Assad's government at official border crossings and checkpoints. [The Guardian](#), 28 April.

At a United Nations Security Council meeting, Valerie Amos, the U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said "I don't feel that we should use precious time getting into an esoteric debate with respect to these issues of

international humanitarian law. I think what we should be doing is focusing on how we best get the aid in." [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#), both on 30 April 2014. It is easy to understand her frustration with more than one year of delays by the Assad government and insurgents, but the United Nations *must* set an example and respect the law.

At the meeting of the London11 group of anti-Assad nations on 15 May 2014, they called for "step up efforts to deliver humanitarian aid across borders and across lines irrespective of the consent of the regime." (See my [seventh essay](#) on Syria, which has links to the original source.)

It is *not* known whether Ban was influenced by either the group of lawyers or the London11.

more failure

On 16 June, the United Nations Security Council had still *not* solved the problem of delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria. [Reuters](#).

On 20 June, Syria warned the United Nations Security Council that delivery of humanitarian aid across the border into Syria without the permission of the Syrian government would be an "attack". Reuters reports that Syria said it could retaliate against unapproved aid convoys. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

20 June 2014 Fourth Monthly Report

On 20 June, U.N. Secretary General Ban issued his fourth monthly report that again recognized that Resolution 2139 had failed. Because of continuing unavailability of documents from the U.N. website, beginning sometime before 16 May, I could not download the Report from the U.N. website during June.

On 27 June, I was frustrated by the continuing unavailability of documents from the U.N. website, so I downloaded a copy of Ban's fourth report from [ReliefWeb](#), a nonprofit organization with a competent webmaster. I'm glad there are nonprofit organizations with reliable websites, unlike the incompetent bureaucrats at the United Nations.

Ban's fourth report was ignored by journalists, as the crisis in Iraq dominated the news.

Ban's fourth monthly report on the failure of Resolution 2139 says in part:

5. On 22 May, three mortars landed on a tent hosting a pro-government election rally in the Al Matar neighbourhood of Dar'a city, resulting in 43 people killed and many injured.

....

16. On 21 May, Jabhat al-Nusra reportedly executed three ISIS combatants captured that day in clashes around Al Tewamiya in Deir ez-Zor governorate.

17. Internet-based footage and photographs appear to depict Mohammad Mohammad, a 26-year-old man, being beheaded on 23 May by ISIS combatants in the town of Al Shuyouk in Hasakeh governorate. Activists who knew the victim report that he was not a combatant. According to information received by OHCHR, he was among a number of people, including women, captured on 23 May at an ISIS checkpoint outside the village of Jubb al-Faraj, Al Hasakeh. No information has been received by OHCHR on the fate of the others captured.

18. On 30 May, while on the road to Ein al-Arab, Aleppo, over 200 civilians, the majority of them high school students, were allegedly abducted by ISIS combatants. The students were reportedly on their way home from the city of Al Bab, Aleppo, where they had sat school examinations. The same day, ISIS released approximately 125 female students. As at 9 June, more than 100 male students reportedly continued to be held by ISIS.

....

21. The humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has further deteriorated. Latest estimates indicate that the number of people in need has now reached 10.8 million, an increase of 17 per cent (or 1.5 million), approximately 6.4 million of whom are internally displaced. The current estimate of 3.5 million people residing in areas that are difficult or impossible for humanitarian actors to reach has also risen, likely to be up to 4.7 million people. For the purpose of this report, all monitoring figures are based on 3.5 million. This includes at least 241,000 people who live in areas that are besieged by either Government or opposition forces.

....

25. Approximately 241,000 people remain besieged; 196,000 in areas that are besieged by Government forces in Madamiyet Elsham, eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk, and 45,000 in areas besieged by opposition forces in Nubul and Zahra.

26. During the reporting period [20 May to 17 June 2014], United Nations assistance only reached two besieged communities: Yarmouk and Douma [in eastern Ghouta]. Food was delivered to 2,467 people, or 1 per cent, and non-food items to 17,204 people, or 7 per cent of people in these besieged areas. UNICEF also distributed nutritional assistance to 3,600 beneficiaries in Douma in the form of fortified spread and cartons of High Energy Biscuits.

....

32. There has been no development since the United Nations sought the consent of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in March 2014 to use additional border crossings in order to facilitate greater access to those in need in hard-to-reach areas.

....

45. Every month I report to the Council the thousands of people killed, displaced and traumatized by aerial bombardments, mortar attacks, kidnappings and executions, many in densely populated areas. Even children traveling for school exams, perhaps the most poignant display of hope in the midst of this relentless war, are not exempt from the violent and indiscriminate actions of the parties. Arbitrary arrests, torture in detention and attacks on hospitals and health-care workers continue and are part of the everyday fabric of life of many Syrians. But they should not be. As I have said to this Council before, there are rules that govern the conduct of war, and these rules are being flagrantly violated every day.

46. I am particularly concerned that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, a signatory to the Charter of the United Nations, continues to indiscriminately drop hundreds of barrel bombs on defenceless men, women and children in populated neighbourhoods. I am equally concerned at the relentless and indiscriminate use of mortar and shelling of residential neighbourhoods by armed opposition groups. These actions are flagrant violations of international law. The deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime.

....

49. As stipulated by the Council in resolution 2139 (2014), humanitarian actors must be allowed to reach those in need by all routes available, both line and border crossings. As stated in my most recent report (S/2014/365), the United Nations is ready to put in place speedy, pragmatic and practical arrangements at critical border crossings to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in accordance with assessed and established needs and the obligations under resolution 2139 (2014). Such arrangements would allow United Nations convoys to cross the border into the Syrian Arab Republic, in their own vehicles, without the need for specific permits or visas, to deliver urgently needed relief to people in need.

50. While the parties to this conflict are responsible for upholding their obligations under international law, the members of the Security Council and other Member States with influence can and must do more to demand that the violence end, that sieges are lifted and that vital humanitarian assistance reaches all areas of the country.

51. In my report of 22 May (S/2014/365), I informed the Council that the demands of resolution 2139 (2014) were not being heeded, and that the resolution had yet to make a meaningful difference in the lives of millions of people.

52. I therefore call upon the Council, in the strongest terms, to honour the humanitarian imperative of saving lives and meeting urgent humanitarian needs, wherever they occur.

Ban Ki-moon, "Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014)," S/2014/427, 20 June 2014.

Ban's fourth report lacks the fervor of his previous three reports. For example, ¶47 of his third report condemned the flow of weapons into Syria, but that topic is missing from his

fourth report. As another example, ¶31 and ¶51-¶53 of his third report discusses the option of delivering aid through border crossings controlled by rebels, but in his fourth report that topic is only tersely mentioned in ¶49. Perhaps Ban is tiring of the U.N. Security Council inability to deliver humanitarian aid to people in Syria, which makes Ban's reports futile.

Assad Re-Elected in Syria Problems With the Election

At the beginning, let me state that this election has three significant problems:

1. Assad has two opponents, each of whom is unknown in Syria. One has been a communist member of parliament from Aleppo for two years. The other is a businessman from Damascus who was formerly briefly in parliament. These appear to be sham candidates, as neither has substantial experience in the Syrian national government. Furthermore, members of the Syrian National Coalition, or other exiled Syrians, were *not* eligible to stand as candidates in the election.
2. People loyal to Assad will count the ballots without any supervision by representatives of *genuine* opposition candidate(s). There are obvious opportunities for fraud or fictional results.
3. Without any sampling by opinion polls, the result of the election — an overwhelming majority for Assad — was known from the beginning of preparations for the election. The obvious result indicates the lack of a genuine opposition candidacy.

Politicians in Western Europe and the USA criticize Assad for holding an election in the middle of a civil war. There is also criticism of Assad because Syrians living in areas controlled by insurgents were not allowed to vote. But history teaches us that the USA held an election in the year 1864 in the midst of a civil war, and there is no criticism of the re-election of Lincoln as president, although people in the Confederate states were not allowed to vote. The U.S. Government is inconsistent in praising Lincoln, but condemning Assad for not allowing people in rebel territory to vote. Assad is *required* by Syrian law to hold an election at the expiration of his term as president in 2014. It is *not* feasible for Assad's government to conduct polling in areas controlled by insurgents. Therefore, it is bogus to criticize the Syrian election for either of these two reasons.

Despite the two sham candidates, the election could still be useful. For example, if Assad received 20% of the total votes, it would be clear that Assad was defeated. However, instead of voting for a sham candidate, the opposition to Assad seems to have boycotted the election. Boycotting the election was a stupid decision, because it made the opposition invisible and voiceless, and increased the majority voting for Assad.

Syrians in refugee camps were generally not allowed to vote (unless they traveled to a Syrian embassy to vote on 28 May, or traveled to Syria to vote on 3 June). While this superficially appears unfair, there is no way that Assad's government could conduct elections in refugee camps located in foreign nations that oppose Assad.

Fundamentally, the problem with the presidential election in Syria is that Syrian politics is essentially composed of only one party, the Baath, of which Assad is the leader. There are approximately six non-Baath parties in the Syrian legislature. Of the 250 seats in the legislature, the Baath party has 134 seats (54%), nonpartisans have 77 seats (31%), and six parties have a total of 39 seats (16%). Some of the nonpartisans and six parties are aligned with the Baath party, giving the Baath party a huge majority in the legislature. [Wikipedia](#) (visited 3 June 2014). That is why there is no genuine opposition in the Syrian presidential election. In a one-party government, one expects a presidential election to be a yes/no referendum on one candidate, with a yes vote highly likely. In the 2007 election, Assad received 97.6% of the vote. [CIA FactBook](#).

Syrian citizens living outside Syria were allowed to vote at Syrian embassies on 28 May, and on 28-29 May at the embassy in Lebanon. People inside Syria voted on 3 June.

28-29 May 2014 Voting at Embassies

In a shameful interference with democracy in Syria, several European nations (e.g., France, Germany, and Belgium) refused to let Syrian citizens vote at the Syrian embassies. [BBC](#), 28 May; [euronews](#), 30 May. The U.S. Government closed the Syrian embassy in the USA in March 2014, for reasons unrelated to the election.

On 28 May, Reuters reports that tens of thousands of Syrians voted in Lebanon: Refugees waved flags and held pictures of Bashar al-Assad as they crushed into Damascus's embassy in Lebanon on Wednesday [28 May] to join Syrians worldwide voting early in an election that looks certain to give him a third seven-year term as president.

....

Tens of thousands of people were bottle-necked into the entrance [to the Embassy in Beirut], some getting squashed by the hordes behind them. The Lebanese army had brought armoured vehicles and firemen sprayed the crowd with water to help cool them in the midday heat.

Inside the embassy, men and women voted. None said they had voted for the two candidates other than Assad — Hassan Abdallah al-Nouri and lawmaker Maher Abdel-Hafiz Hajjar.

....

Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad told the channel that he "was surprised by the undemocratic decisions taken by countries which say they are democratic — like the French, Belgian and Bulgarian governments — but which are not in line with

international law". [¶] He said the countries had banned Syrians from going to embassies, which he said is in violation of the Vienna Protocol on Diplomatic Relations.

The European Union has said holding an election "in the midst of conflict, only in regime-controlled areas and with millions of Syrians displaced from their homes would be a parody of democracy, have no credibility whatsoever, and undermine efforts to reach a political solution".

Oliver Holmes, "Tens of thousands of Syrians abroad vote in early poll," [Reuters](#), 14:27 GMT, 28 May 2014.

On 28 May, the Associated Press reported:

Tens of thousands of supporters of Syrian President Bashar Assad voted Wednesday at embassies abroad, clogging entrances to the Lebanese capital for hours and clashing with soldiers overwhelmed by their sheer numbers a week before national elections widely expected to give him a third seven-year term.

But reflecting the schism within Syrian society, many of the estimated 2.5 million refugees scattered across neighboring countries were either excluded or abstained from the balloting, which they deem a mockery because it is being held in the middle of a civil war.

The June 3 election is all but guaranteed to give the 49-year-old Syrian leader, whose family has ruled Syria for more than four decades, a new mandate to continue with his crushing of the armed rebellion.

Backed by his Iranian allies and the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group, Assad has in recent months gained the upper hand in the fighting, seizing key territory near the capital Damascus and the country's center.

....

Bassem Zamman, a 45-year-old Syrian sculptor who arrived in Sweden as a refugee 45 days ago, said he voted for Assad "not because I like Assad, but because I like Syria." [¶] "I like stability, I like (the safety) that we missed because of those savages," Zamman said, adding that he initially supported the rebels but changed his view because he felt they weren't really seeking freedom. He said rebel mortar fire had wounded his children and destroyed his house.

In Sweden, which has received some 30,000 Syrian asylum seekers since 2011, Syrians from opposing sides of the conflict gathered outside the embassy in Stockholm to express their views and cast their ballots. [¶] Police stood between the two groups as emotions ran high, with pro-Assad Syrians outnumbering those opposing him.

Bassem Mroue & Zeina Karam, "Assad's Supporters Abroad Vote In Syrian Election," [Associated Press](#), 19:20 GMT, 28 May 2014.

On 29 May, *Al-Jazeera* reports that tens of thousands of Syrians voted at the Syrian embassy

in Beirut, and the majority supported Assad:

Fifty-four-year-old Marwan Nayef, a Sunni sheikh from Aleppo, was struggling to reach the embassy to vote for Assad. Nayef fled the violence in his city almost one year ago. "Voting is worth all the pain. We want Syria to return to what it used to be before the chaos began and Assad is the only one who could do that," he told Al Jazeera. Nayef said his support for Assad was a clear example that Syrians were not sectarian.

Basma Atassi, "Huge turnout for Syrian vote in Lebanon," [Al-Jazeera](#), 07:05 GMT, 29 May 2014.

On 29 May, the Associated Press reported:

Most voters appeared to be supporters of Assad, who is widely expected to get a third seven-year term in the vote that has been criticized by the West and Syria's opposition because it is taking place amid a civil war.

....

"I hope Syria goes back to the way it was and that we will live in security and stability together, the way we used to," said the voter, who hails from the central city of Homs. He only gave his first name, Riad, for fear of harassment.

....

Throughout the three-year conflict, Assad has maintained significant support among large sections of the population, particularly among his fellow Alawites, Christians and other religious minorities. That support has been reinforced as Islamic militants have gained more strength among the rebels fighting to topple him.

Assad is a member of the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, while the overwhelming majority of rebels are Sunni Muslims.

Barbara Surk, "Syrians In Lebanon Vote For President For 2nd Day" [Associated Press](#), 10:35 GMT, 29 May 2014.

My comments: Journalists are reporting genuine enthusiasm for Assad amongst voters. This is in contrast to three years of propaganda from the U.S. Government about how Assad has "lost legitimacy" and more propaganda about how the Syrian people *want* Assad to resign. Because the election exposes anti-Assad propaganda about how the Syria people have allegedly rejected Assad, the anti-Assad nations (including the USA) may oppose the election.

3 June 2014 Voting in Syria

On 3 June, polls in Syria opened at 07:00 local time (04:00 GMT) and were originally scheduled to close at 19:00 (16:00 GMT). However, because of "a remarkably heavy turnout", the polls remained open until midnight (21:00 GMT). [SANA](#).

In an article written on 23 May, but published in *Al-Bawaba* on 4 June, there was some analysis of the strong support for Assad:

The regime is perfectly capable of rigging the results, but it won't need to, as a sizable majority of the population is looking forward to seeing the strong man elected. Members from many communities and groups, such as Christians, Druze, Shiites, the rich merchants, public clerks, are all terrified of the prospect of Assad losing the war. They believe it would mean the coming of all kinds of acts of vengeance. Assad has also managed to convince both a huge number of Syrians and the international community that he is — as he incessantly pledged to be at the outset of the rebellion — fighting terrorism.

In spite of numerous efforts from within and from the outside, the rebel side has been hijacked by a growing number of jihadist groups — some from neighbouring countries (and even Europe). Nobody really knows anymore whether these splinter groups are waging a war against Assad or against each other, something that has led to a deep wariness in the West; the last thing countries such as the US and France want is to fund future terrorist attacks targeting their own interests. Assad is to a certain extent, the devil they know — and they know him very well — and right now he could be seen as a better option than the other side's devils who allegedly have no qualms when killing unarmed civilians (for instance, last May 23rd a [mortar strike](#) hit a pro-Assad rally in Southern Syria killing 20).

....

Last but not least, Assad will win because there is no real [alternative](#). Or is there? A fragmented opposition incapable of even showing up in the news every now and then? A Free Syrian Army whose only aim seems to be fighting the Islamists? Or perhaps Syrians ought to pick these Islamists — funded by countries who could not really be defined as democracies (aka Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE) — who have threatened to make Syria, and its diverse multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian social fabric, disappear to create a new Sunni Islamic state in the heart of the Arab world?

"How Syria's civil war has made Assad the only viable presidential candidate," *Al-Bawaba*, 08:00 GMT, 4 June 2014. (two links in original) Originally published in *The Middle East Daily*, 23 May 2014. Also at [Your Middle East](#), 27 May 2014.

On 3 June, Zeina Karam, the Beirut bureau chief for the Associated Press, wrote about the significance of the election:

.... The government has presented the election as the solution to the conflict: If the people re-elect Assad, the fight should end; if he loses, he will gracefully step aside. In reality, the vote puts to rest any illusions that the man who has led Syria since 2000 has any intention of relinquishing power or compromising to reach a political solution. Rather, he appears emboldened by military victories in recent months that have strengthened his grip on power.

....

About 2.5 million Syrian refugees are scattered across neighboring countries. Most of

them have been either excluded or are boycotting the balloting. Syrian authorities have said that only those who have entered neighboring countries legally could vote, effectively ruling out tens of thousands of refugees — mostly Assad opponents — who fled through unofficial border posts. Lebanon, a country that hosts more than 1 million refugees, has said that Syrian refugees registered with the U.N. will lose their refugee status if they return home to vote.

Despite government assertions the election could resolve the conflict, there's no indication it will halt the violence or mend a bitterly divided nation. Assad's re-election in itself is not expected to change much, particularly on the battlefield. If there is high voter turnout in government-controlled territory, Assad will be able to claim renewed legitimacy based on continued support from a significant section of the population. The vote will likely be seen as illegitimate abroad, but Assad has scoffed at the opinions of Western leaders anyway, relying instead on the continued, unwavering support of powerful allies Iran and Russia. He is likely to regard the vote as a green light for his military campaign to crush the insurgency while working on local truces and reconciliation to pacify rebel-held areas.

Zeina Karam, "5 Things To Know About Syria's Presidential Vote," [Associated Press](#), 06:43 GMT, 3 June 2014.

On 3 June, an hour before the polls had closed, Reuters reports:

Assad is running against two relatively unknown challengers who were approved by a parliament packed with his supporters, the first time in half a century that Syrians have been offered a choice of candidates. [¶] But neither of Assad's rivals, former minister Hassan al-Nouri or parliamentarian Maher Hajjar, enjoys much support.

....

But for many Syrians exhausted by war, particularly the minority Alawite, Christian and Druze communities, the Alawite president offers a bulwark against radical Sunni Muslim insurgents and the promise — however remote — of some form of stability.

At the Masnaa border crossing between Lebanon and Syria, thousands of people stood in the sun in a tightly packed queue to vote at a polling station set up for Syrians inside Lebanon. [¶] All those who spoke to Reuters said they planned to vote for Assad, giving him a third seven-year term.

Marwan Makdesi, "Syrians vote in wartime election set to extend Assad's rule," [Reuters](#), 19:48 GMT, 3 June 2014.

On 3 June, after the polls had closed, the Associated Press reported on the election:

A victory for Assad is likely to bolster his base of support at home and provide further evidence that he has no intention of relinquishing power, making a protracted conflict the likely outcome in fighting that has already lasted three years.

Fears that the rebels would rain down mortar shells on government-controlled territory did not materialize, but fighting persisted.

State-run media reported that voting closed on midnight Tuesday [3 June], and election officials began the process of checking the number of votes against lists of registered voters to ensure numbers matched. In one central Damascus voting booth, 2,196 people cast their ballots — all but two were for Assad, counted an AP reporter who watched representatives of each presidential candidate tally votes.

....

At a polling station in the upscale Dama Rose hotel in central Damascus, a blue cup filled with pins was set out for those who wanted to vote in blood. Some pricked their fingers repeatedly to draw enough blood to mark the circle under Assad's name on the ballot — an act of allegiance and patriotism that has been used in previous elections under both Assads.

Most voted in ink, though, and some made their choice for Assad in full sight of other voters and TV cameras instead of using a curtained booth for privacy.

Diaa Hadid & Albert Aji, "As Civil War Rages, Syrians Vote For President," [Associated Press](#), 22:06 GMT, 3 June 2014.

Liz Sly of the *The Washington Post* wrote:

Syrians voted on in a tightly controlled election Tuesday that reinforced President Bashar al-Assad's tenacious hold on power, underscoring the failure of U.S. policies aimed at inducing him to step down.

Three years after Assad's brutal suppression of nationwide protests plunged Syria into a vicious civil war, the election seems certain to deliver him a third seven-year term in office, defying President Obama's 2011 call for him to "step aside."

Liz Sly & Ahmed Ramadan, "Syrian election sends powerful signal of Assad's control," [Washington Post](#), 19:15 EDT, 3 June 2014.

Note that Zeina Karam, quoted above, says Assad has no "intention of relinquishing power" and no intent on "compromising to reach a political solution." Karam's view is compatible with Sly saying Assad has a "tenacious hold on power".

On 4 June, about a half-hour after the results were announced, the Associated Press reported on the support of the Syrian people for Assad:

For all the serious flaws in Syria's election, it underscored the considerable support that President Bashar Assad still enjoys from the population, including many in the majority Sunni Muslim community.

Syria's conflict is often portrayed through one of its many prisms — that of a sectarian struggle, in which overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim rebels seek to topple Assad, who belongs to the minority Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam. The country's rich tapestry of Christian and Muslim minorities, meanwhile, help keep Assad in power, fearing their fate if he were to fall.

Without Sunni support, however, Assad's rule would have collapsed long ago amid a

civil war that activists say has killed more than 160,000, displaced at least a third of Syria's prewar population of 23 million, and destroyed wide swaths of the country.

That support was on display as Syrians voted overwhelmingly Tuesday [3 June] to give Assad another seven-year term. He won 88.7 percent of the vote, the speaker of parliament announced Wednesday [4 June] night, although the outcome was never in question.

....

... even the president's staunchest enemies concede that the man who has led Syria since 2000 [i.e., Assad] retains substantial backing.

....

Assad's supporters offered insights into why they still back him. These include fatigue over the conflict, mistrust among many toward a disorganized opposition, and the growing power of Islamic extremists in the rebel ranks.

....

A female civil servant who identified herself only as Maha echoed Saleh's concerns about what life would look like in Syria should the opposition take power.

Maha, her hair coiffed and cheeks heavily rouged, said she worried about women's freedoms if Assad fell.

"Assad gave women their rights and her freedom," Maha said. "They (the opposition) have taken this country backward."

....

"It's been three years. It's enough," said Moataz, a 40-year-old technician who worked in an upscale Damascus hotel. [¶] Asked if he believed any other candidate or the opposition could lead the country, he replied that only Assad had acted decisively. The technician said none of his relatives had died in the conflict, but that he grieved nonetheless.

Diaa Hadid, "Syria's Election Shows Depth Of Support For Assad," [Associated Press](#), 19:27 GMT, 4 June 2014.

My comment is that the Associated Press article makes an important point about women's rights in Syria. Assad and his wife dress like Christians in London. Assad does *not* wear Arabic tribal garb. Assad's wife does *not* wear a head scarf. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, women are not allowed to drive an automobile, and the Saudi rulers still wear tribal garb. Further, I agree with Moataz [quoted in the above article] that the three year civil war was long enough — if the insurgents could not win in three years, they should *not* be allowed to fight longer. Also I agree with Moataz that of all of the possible leaders, "only Assad had

acted decisively". In other words, Assad is the best leader for Syria.

After the election results were announced, Reuters reported:

For many Syrians voting on Tuesday [3 June], politics took second place to the yearning for stability and security after three devastating years of conflict which grew out of the mass protests in 2011 against Assad's rule.

For the country's minority Alawite, Christian and Druze communities, the Alawite president offers a bulwark against increasingly radical Sunni Muslim insurgents and the promise — however remote — of a return to stability.

The official figures also suggest that many of the majority Sunni Muslims turned out to vote for Assad, whether out of weariness with the conflict or fear of retribution if they did not vote.

Previous presidential votes had been referendums to approve the appointment of Bashar and his father, Hafez al-Assad, who ruled for 30 years until his death in 2000. Hafez never won less than 99 percent, while his son scored 97 percent in 2007.

Dominic Evans, "Assad declared landslide victor in wartime Syrian election," [Reuters](#), 22:34 GMT, 4 June 2014.

Final version: [Reuters](#), 13:26 GMT, 5 June 2014.

On 4 June, *The New York Times* reported:

Syrian officials announced that Mr. Assad had been re-elected with 88.7 percent of the vote and reported turnout of 73.4 percent of eligible voters. Those numbers could be questioned on many levels, but that did not matter much, as the election was primarily a display of Mr. Assad's continued control of important Syrian cities, the loyalty of his core supporters and the failures of his opposition and its backers.

For United States officials, it was a less triumphant day. But the Americans were confronted with a sense that their policy on Syria and in the region was adrift.

Anne Barnard, "Victory in Syrian Election Is Show of Assad's Control," [NY Times](#), 4 June 2014.

On 6 July, Liz Sly, the Beirut bureau chief for *The Washington Post* reported:

The leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement [Hasan Nasrallah] called on the United States on Friday [6 June] to admit that President Bashar al-Assad has won the war in Syria and to accept Syrian government terms for a political settlement to the crisis.

.....

Instead, [Nasrallah] said, the election confirmed that the government has the support of millions of Syrians. Assad was declared the winner with 88.7 percent of the 11 million votes cast, and although the circumstances of the election were less than transparent, the outcome left little doubt that he remains firmly in charge of the country and commands a significant degree of loyalty.

Nasrallah said the voting illustrated the failure of the Geneva peace process, which is promoted by United States as the best mechanism for ending the war and envisages a solution based on the eventual departure of Assad.

Liz Sly, "Hezbollah leader Nasrallah tells U.S. to talk to Assad if it wants to settle crisis in Syria," [Washington Post](#), 6 June 2014.

Nasrallah is a terrorist who in the past has attacked Israel. However, in this instance, I agree with Nasrallah that the U.S. Government needs to accept the reality that Assad is in charge of the Syrian government. Since Oct 2013 I have been saying that Assad is the best available leader for Syria and the election does not change my opinion. I also agree with Sly that Assad "remains firmly in charge of the country and commands a significant degree of loyalty".

My comments on the election: Just as during 28-29 May, voters in Syria are showing genuine enthusiasm for re-electing Assad. It is now clear that a majority of Syrians genuinely support Assad. Some of the support *may* be because people fear the jihadists and Al-Qaeda more than they dislike Assad.

I hope the U.S. Government will recognize the reality of the Syrian people's support for Assad, and stop the *propaganda* that the Syrian people want Assad to resign.

Russia, Iran, Venezuela, and — wait for it — North Korea sent observers to Syria in an attempt to give credibility to the election. In my opinion, none of these observer-nations have any experience with "free and fair elections". Elections in North Korea are especially egregious. Therefore, it would be a waste of my time to search for and read the news articles about these observers, then quote the better articles here.

There were many news stories about Syria on 3-4 June, not only because of the election, but also because of Ambassador Ford's [criticism](#) of Obama's policy in Syria, and Kaag's briefing on chemical weapons in Syria. But journalists have a short attention span, and so, on 6 June there were only four occurrences of the word "Syria" in the U.S. State Departments Daily Press [Briefing](#).

Results of Election

There was a presidential election in Egypt on 26-28 May 2014. The official results are that the former defense minister won 96.9% of the vote, while one opposition candidate received 3.1% of the vote. [Ahram](#). I mention the Egyptian result, because such overwhelming electoral victories are unknown in the USA. In the USA since 1940, the largest percentage win in a presidential election was 61% by Johnson in 1964, against Goldwater. Perhaps that means that voters in the USA are so confused, they simply make random choices, giving about 50% to each of two major candidates. *<laughing>* More likely, the two major candidates in the USA are like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. *<grin>*

The official result of the 2014 election in Syria is that Assad won with 88.7% of the vote. [SANA](#); [Associated Press](#), 18:56 GMT, 4 June. It is *not* surprising that Assad won — everyone knew that result months in advance of the election. What surprises me is that Assad

had less than 95% of the votes. Assad's low percentage — by standards in nations ruled by a dictator, with essentially one political party — may indicate that the counting of the votes was honest.

The Syrian government reported that 11.6 million people voted in the 28 May and 3 June 2014 elections, a turnout of 73.4%. [SANA](#); [Reuters](#), 19:56 GMT, 4 June.

Let's do a quick calculation to see if the turnout is plausible. There were about 23 million people in pre-war Syria. About 3 million are now refugees in neighboring nations, leaving 20 million inside Syria. Suppose 5 million are living in regions controlled by insurgents, mostly in the north and east Syria. That leaves 15 million people living in areas controlled by Assad. Assume that 2/3 of the people are adults who can vote, and 1/3 are children. That gives 10 million adults in areas controlled by Assad. The government claims a turnout of approximately 70%, which means 3 million adults boycotted the election. That gives a total of 7 million votes, about 5 million fewer than the reported number of votes. My conclusion is that the reported number of votes seems high, but my estimate is crude, in that I do not know how many people are living in areas controlled by insurgents, and I do not know the number of children.

Reaction of Insurgents to Election

So how did the insurgents respond to the election in Syria? The insurgents intimidated citizens from voting by threatening to attack polling places. [Associated Press](#), 30 May; [Daily Star](#), 2 June; [Al-Bawaba](#), 2 June.

Insurgents increased their terrorists attacks in the days before the election on 3 June. On 22 May, rebels fired a mortar shell into an Assad campaign rally in Daraa, killing 39 civilians. (See citations in my [seventh essay](#) on Syria, at the end of the section on proposed war crimes prosecution.) On 31 May and 1 June, insurgents fired rockets into Aleppo, killing fifty people. [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#). On 1 June, a car bomb in Homs killed at least ten people. [Reuters](#). ISIL claimed responsibility for that car bomb in Homs, with a final count of 18 people dead. [Daily Star](#).

The attacks before the election show that the insurgents are terrorists, who attempt to intimidate citizens from making their own choices about whether to vote.

On 3 June, the Free Syrian Army claimed responsibility for destroying a Sama television truck with a landmine in Hama. The television crew was killed. [Al-Jazeera](#).

Also on 3 June, "Several mortar rounds reportedly hit in the capital [Damascus], including one that fell near the Opera House on a major plaza." [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) reports:
... the Islamic Front and allied groups pledged not to target polling stations and urged other rebels to do the same.

Damascus residents said mortar shells struck residential areas in the capital on Tuesday [3 June], most likely fired from rebel suburbs. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

[Reuters](#).

A total of four people were killed and 29 wounded in three attacks by terrorists in Damascus and surrounding area on 3 June. [SANA](#).

Early on 5 June, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported "more than 100 mortar bombs fell [on Damascus] as people turned out to vote in the country's presidential election [on 3 June]." The mortar shells were "believed fired by rebel groups". [Daily Star](#).

U.S. Government Reaction to Re-Election of Assad

For the past three years, the U.S. foreign policy in Syria has been based on the demand that Assad resign. In reality, Assad is more firmly in control of Syria now than in 2012. That means the U.S. foreign policy in Syria is a delusional obsession, based on the demand that Assad resign. How did the U.S. Government react to the election in Syria?

On 12 Jan 2014, the London11 group of nations, including the USA, declared:

In addition, the perspective of a presidential election organized by the regime, in which Bashar al-Assad would run, also fully contradicts the Geneva II process and its goal of a negotiated democratic transition. Such a parody of a ballot, aimed at maintaining in power a man whom the UN considers committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, would only fuel the conflict and increase the threat of a partition of the country. If it were to happen, we would consider it totally null and void.

Paris [Declaration](#) of the Core Group of The Friends of the Syrian People, ¶6, 12 Jan 2014.

My comments: "Fully contradicts" the Geneva2 process is an exaggeration. As I explain in my [essay](#), the Geneva2 process is an attempt by foreign meddlers to impose the Syrian National Coalition on the people of Syria, without any election. More than four months *before* the election, the London11 has condemned the election as "a parody of a ballot", without waiting for the facts, and without knowing who would oppose Assad in the election. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has *accused* Assad (and also accused insurgents) of various crimes, but there have been no arrests and no trial. Assad would argue that his military campaign against the insurgents seeks to end the conflict and prevent partition of Syria. This declaration by the London11 group of nations is mostly propaganda.

On 3 April 2014, the London11 issued a statement that

Recent actions by the Assad regime to pave the way for presidential elections in the coming months, including the promulgation of a new electoral law, have no credibility. Bashar al-Assad intends these elections to sustain his dictatorship. They would be conducted in the midst of a conflict, only in regime-controlled areas, and with millions of Syrians disenfranchised, displaced from their homes, or in refugee camps. An electoral process led by Assad, who the United Nations considers to have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, mocks the innocent lives lost in the conflict.

"Joint Statement by the London 11 Countries," [U.S. State Dept.](#), ¶3 of 4, 3 April 2014.

On 15 May 2014, the London11 *again* "denounced" the election in Syria:

We the countries of the 'London 11' Core Group of the Friends of Syria denounce the Assad regime's unilateral plan to hold illegitimate presidential elections on 3 June. This mocks the innocent lives lost in the conflict, utterly contradicts the Geneva communiqué and is a parody of democracy. Under rules set by the regime, such elections will be devoid of political participation of millions of Syrians. We call on the entire international community to reject these illegitimate elections, as the Arab League, United Nations, United States of America, Turkey and the European Union have already done.

Friends of Syria Core Group (London11), meeting in London, [Communiqué](#), ¶1, 15 May 2014.

My comments are that "mocks the innocent lives lost" and "parody of democracy" are propaganda. Calling the election "illegitimate" is conclusory, because it expresses a conclusion without good reason(s). Above, in my comment on the 12 Jan London11 declaration, I explained why the Geneva1 Communiqué is not a good idea to impose on the people of Syria.

On 1 June 2014, a Reuters story with the headline "U.S. insists Assad must go, but expects he will stay" says:

Since Syrians rose up more than three years ago against longtime President Bashar al-Assad, U.S. President Barack Obama has had a clear message: Assad must go. [¶] Now, even as the United States seeks to increase support to moderate rebels to fight his regime, U.S. officials privately concede Assad isn't going anywhere soon.

....

But despite that support, senior U.S. officials acknowledge in interviews the difficulty of removing Assad, [¶] "I don't think anybody is under the impression that you're going to see a dramatic change in the near term in terms of the situation on the ground in Syria," said a senior U.S. official, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the subject.

Lesley Wroughton & Missy Ryan, "U.S. insists Assad must go, but expects he will stay," [Reuters](#), 08:01 EDT, 1 June 2014.

My comment is that the U.S. foreign policy in Syria is erroneous when senior U.S. government officials can acknowledge the Truth only in anonymous statements to journalists.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department on 2 June, the Spokesperson said: MS. PSAKI: Well, we have been clear that this election is a farce. Voting opened May 28th, so just a couple of days ago for Syrian ex-pats, and the election will conclude tomorrow in Syria. The democratic elections generally offer an opportunity for people in a free society to be consulted and to play an important role in choosing their leaders. Such a process is inconceivable in Syria today, where the regime has crushed political dissent and nearly half the population is displaced by war, including millions scattered outside of the country in refugee camps and host communities.

Further, the Syrian parliament adopted this year a law restricting candidacy to

individuals who've lived in Syria for the past 10 years, thereby preventing exiled opposition figures from running. The London 11 also on May 15th denounced the Assad regime's unilateral plan to hold illegitimate presidential elections. So we've been clear that this election flows from a family legacy of brutal dictatorship, and also clear we won't recognize the outcome.

QUESTION: Iran and Russia and other Arab states are sending observers to observe the elections. How do you view this kind of observation?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we view observing an election that we think is a farce is probably a — not a good use of time.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 2 June 2014.

My comments: The election in Syria may be a farce — there are obvious weaknesses and defects in that election. But what is certain is that (1) Assad is — and will continue to be — the lawful ruler of Syria, and (2) Syria is now infested with vicious terrorists who are worse than Assad. The U.S. Government needs to recognize the reality of these two facts, and stop pursuing a nonsensical foreign policy of aiding a Coalition that is the weakest party in a multidimensional sectarian civil war in Syria. If foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Kuwait, USA, etc.) had not funding the insurgents, Assad might have quickly won the civil war before the jihadists and Al-Qaeda arrived to fight Assad. Thanks to the foreign meddlers who supported the insurgents, the civil war has lasted for more than three years and will continue for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, the foreign meddlers refuse to admit their mistakes, and simply blame Assad for all of the problems in Syria.

The USA and Western Europe, with their obsession about removing Assad, looks like 19th Century colonialism, in which imperialist nations decided what was best for impoverished nations in Africa and Asia. The Arab neighbors of Syria want to remove Assad, because the neighbors are mostly Sunni muslims and Assad is a Shiite muslim. Both kinds of foreign interference in Syria should be rejected.

Notice that the criticism of the election in Syria by U.S. Government officials is mostly propaganda: they hurl invectives, and utter pejorative phrases, but do *not* identify precisely what is wrong with the election. The real problem is that Syria has essentially a one-party government, in which all of the senior officials are loyal to the president. Therefore, it is difficult to find experienced politicians who would be a genuine opposition to the ruling president.

On 3 June, the Deputy Spokesperson for the U.S. State Department dumped propaganda on the election in Syria:

Today's presidential election in Syria is a disgrace. Bashar al-Assad has no more credibility today than he did yesterday. Elections should be an opportunity for the people of a free society to be consulted and to play an important role in choosing their leaders. Instead, such a process was inconceivable today in Syria, where the regime continued to reject the courageous calls for freedom and dignity that started more than three years ago. It intentionally denied millions of Syrians the right to vote and continued to massacre the very electorate it purports to represent and protect. Just

today, we also note reports the regime shelled the Yarmouk refugee camp and eastern Ghouta.

Detached from reality and devoid of political participation, the Assad regime-staged election today continues a 40-year family legacy of violent suppression that brutally crushes political dissent and fails to fulfill Syrians' aspirations for peace and prosperity. Marie Harf, Daily Press Briefing, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 3 June 2014.

My comments on 3 June: It is probably true that "Assad has no more credibility today than he did yesterday." But yesterday and tomorrow, Assad was — and continues to be — the lawful ruler of Syria, who was — and still is — firmly in control of the Syrian government. So Assad was the credible ruler of Syria last year, and Assad is the credible ruler of Syria for the foreseeable future. The U.S. Government refuses to recognize that reality. In my opinion, the election did *not* change the credibility of whether Assad is president of Syria.

Harf gives Obama/Kerry's point of view. But consider Assad's point of view: Assad rejects the insurgents who are trying to overthrow the lawful government of Syria in an armed rebellion. That is why Assad's "regime continued to reject the courageous calls for freedom and dignity" of the terrorists. The words "freedom and dignity" are propaganda slogans. Supporters of Assad can use slogans too: Assad is fighting for religious freedom, against the jihadists and Al-Qaeda.

Harf's claim that Assad "intentionally denied millions of Syrians the right to vote" is false. There is no practical way that Assad could operate elections in territory controlled by insurgents, just as President Lincoln in the USA did not operate polling places in the Confederate States. Similarly, Assad could not operate elections in refugee camps in foreign nations that oppose Assad. There is nothing "intentional" about these practical consequences.

What really "fails to fulfill Syrians' aspirations for peace and prosperity" is the insurgents who continue the civil war, despite the fact that Assad is winning in the heavily populated western part of Syria, and despite the fact that the rebels are too weak (and too disorganized) to have any realistic hope of military victory.

On 5 June, the topic of the election arose again at the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department.

QUESTION: Secretary Kerry in his press conference in Beirut yesterday [4 June], he said on Syria it's not up to us to decide when or how President Assad goes. It's up to people in other countries, and specifically it's up to the Syrians. Is this a new message he intended to send to Assad?

MS. HARF: No.

No, no, no. Not — no new messages here. What we said is it's up to the Syrians to decide their future, which is why elections like we saw this week are a complete sham and disgraceful because they haven't had the opportunity to do so when many people weren't able to vote, when people were being killed while they were attempting to vote.

So nothing's changed at all on this. We've obviously called on actors in the region like

Iran, like Hezbollah who have influence over the regime, to try to press them to make some progress here. That's also part of what he was referring to as well.

QUESTION: He didn't repeat that Assad must go.

MS. HARP: Assad must go. I'll repeat it right now. Nothing's changed. (Laughter.) Daily Press Briefing, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 5 June 2014.

Islamic Terrorism in Europe

On 11 and 15 March 2012 someone killed three off-duty French soldiers in or near Toulouse. On 19 March 2012 someone attacked a Jewish school in Toulouse killing four people, including a rabbi and three children. The suspect in these seven murders was identified as Mohamed Merah, 23 y old. On 22 March 2012, French police killed the suspect when he attacked the police who were attempting to arrest him at his apartment. The suspect had apparently been radicalized while in a French prison, then he traveled to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Merah apparently had also trained at a terrorist camp in the Middle East, possibly in Yemen or Egypt. Because he died before being arrested, his detailed history is unknown.

See, e.g.: [Washington Post](#), 22 March 2012; [BBC](#), 22 Mar; [BBC](#), 23 Aug 2012.

On 24 May 2014, someone fired a Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifle and a .38 caliber revolver inside the Jewish Museum in Brussels, initially killing three people and critically wounding one person. The critically wounded person died on 6 June. On 30 May, Mehdi Nemmouche was arrested at a bus terminal in Marseille, while carrying the same rifle and pistol. The 29 y old suspect had gone to Syria, where he joined Islamic terrorists (ISIL?) in their fight against Assad from 31 Dec 2012 until March 2014.

In March 2014, Nemmouche returned to France from Syria via a very circuitous route that included Istanbul, Malaysia, Singapore, either Thailand or Hong Kong, and then to Frankfurt in Germany. The circuitous route may have been an attempt to conceal his origin in Syria. German officials notified the French government of Nemmouche's arrival on 18 March, but the French appear to have done nothing with the intelligence.

References:

- "Jewish museum shooting suspect spent year in Syria — prosecutor," [Reuters](#), 14:53 GMT, 1 June 2014.
- "Frenchman 'admits to' Brussels shooting in video," [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 16:18 GMT, 1 June 2014. ("... some 780 people have left France to fight with jihadists in Syria.")
- Anne Penketh, "French suspect in Brussels Jewish museum attack spent year in Syria," [The Guardian](#), 17:04 GMT, 1 June 2014.

- "Brussels shooting suspect trained in Syria, Paris prosecutor says," [France24](#), 1 June 2014.
- Scott Sayare, "Suspect Held in Jewish Museum Killings," [NY Times](#), 1 June 2014.
- John-Thor Dahlburg & Elaine Ganley, "Suspect In Jewish Museum Killings Went To Syria," [Associated Press](#), 22:45 GMT, 1 June 2014.
- "'Blowback' from Syria strikes Belgium, rattles France," [France24](#), 22:22 GMT, 2 June 2014.
- "Fourth person dies after Brussels Jewish Museum shooting," [Reuters](#), 16:11 GMT, 6 June 2014.
- "French court approves extradition for suspect in Jewish Museum attack," [Reuters](#), 09:09 GMT, 26 June 2014.

Frank Gardner, BBC security correspondent, wrote the following analysis:

British government officials have long been warning of the growing risk of young men going off to Syria to join jihadist groups then returning to Britain to carry out attacks at home.

Already the number of Syria-related arrests in the UK this year is greater than for the whole of 2013. An estimated 500+ Britons have gone to Syria to fight, while the number for Europe as a whole may now exceed 3,000.

A small minority have been killed on the battlefield but analysts say that historically the proportion of returning jihadists who go on to commit acts of violence in the country of departure is around one in nine. They believe that Syria is so easy to reach from Europe that the ratio may even be higher.

Frank Gardner, in "Brussels Jewish Museum killings: Suspect 'admitted attack'," [BBC](#), 1 June 2014.

If 3000 jihadists return to Europe, and "one in nine" commit a violent incident, that would be 333 incidents. If we assume four innocent people die in each of 333 incidents, that would be a total of 1332 dead victims. One expects a *greater* total of dead victims, because at least a few of the returning jihadists will commit an incident of mass murder in which at least fifty innocent people are killed. Other jihadists may commit several incidents before they are killed or arrested. This crude estimate shows that returning jihadists are a serious current and future problem.

The newspaper *Haaretz* in Israel wrote:

Terrorism investigators in the West say that Western Muslims who join jihadi terror groups generally go through four stages: [1] Growing religiosity; [2] a personal or economic crisis that the young man attributes to discrimination against Muslims; [3] ideological radicalization under the influence of a local preacher; and, finally, [4] enlistment in a terror organization in either central Asia or the Middle East. That's

what happened in the past in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that's what is happening now in Syria, the current principal theater of jihadi operations.

This process runs like a scarlet thread among the terrorists who perpetrated huge attacks in Madrid and London during the previous decade. When these young men return to the West, they seek out new targets to attack: Crowded public places, sites affiliated with the United States and Israel, or Jewish centers. For them, solidarity with the Palestinian struggle is integrated into the larger war against the West.

Amos Harel, "Background of Brussels suspect confirms West's worst fears," [Haaretz](#), 2 June 2014.

My comments: Merah and Nemmouche converted to radical Islam while they lived in France, then they traveled abroad to fight with jihadis. Nevertheless, their travel abroad to fight with jihadists helps identify them as dangerous terrorists. The problem is that we can *not* arrest someone because of their religion or travel destinations. We need to wait for them to commit a crime *before* they can be arrested. While France *might want* to criminalize French citizens who fight in a terrorist organization in a foreign country (e.g., Syria or Afghanistan), I think there are serious jurisdictional issues for France to criminalize conduct that occurs outside of France. For example, Nemmouche is a French citizen who was arrested in France, but he will be extradited to Belgium for trial where his crime (i.e., murder) occurred.

If Western Europe were supporting Assad in the fight against terrorism, Assad could share information on Europeans fighting for insurgents in Syria, which could help improve the security of Western Europe.

Former U.S. Ambassador Ford Criticizes Obama

On 3 June, former U.S. Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, gave an interview to Christiane Amanpour, chief foreign correspondent of CNN. Ford delivered a scathing criticism of Obama's refusal to provide military aid to the moderate rebels. Ford specifically said he resigned because "I was no longer in a position where I felt I could defend the American policy." There is a news story at [CNN](#), 10:48 EDT, 3 June 2014, and a [transcript](#).

Ford also gave an interview to Margaret Warner, chief foreign affairs correspondent of the Public Broadcasting System's NewsHour. [PBS](#), 14:07 EDT, 3 June 2014. A transcript is posted at [PBS](#) and [scribd](#).

See also [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).

At the U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing on 3 June, the journalists asked tough questions:

QUESTION: Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford has said today in an interview that — a quote: "I was no longer in a position where I felt I could defend the American policy." That's why he resigned and he left the State Department. He added, "We have been unable to address either the root causes of the conflict in terms of the fighting on the ground and the balance on the ground, and we have a growing

extremism threat." Do you have any reaction to what he said?

MS. HARF: I saw those comments. As you know, Ambassador Ford served a very long, distinguished career here, is now a private citizen obviously entitled to his own views. I think, broadly speaking on some of what you addressed and then if I miss anything, let me know. Look, the President was clear in his speech last week. We've all been clear that we're frustrated by the situation in Syria. You heard the President at West Point say we're going to increase our support to the moderate opposition because we know more needs to be done.

No one working on this issue can look at the situation on the ground — I mean, just look at today. The photos — disgusting photos of President Assad voting, acting like this is a real election. Nobody working on it is happy with where things are. We're all frustrated, and I think you heard some of that in Ambassador Ford's comments. On the terrorism front, we've all — I've stood up here for months and months and months now and talked about the growing threat coming from terrorists in Syria that are — is a result of the security situation the Assad regime has allowed there. We've been very clear about that as well, and it's something we're working on every single day.

....

QUESTION: I mean, does it not disturb you that a long-time senior, serious former U.S. official, who was directly — who was the point person for this policy should state publicly that he no longer felt he was able to defend the U.S. policy? That doesn't bother you at all?

MS. HARF: As I said, he's a private citizen. He's entitled to his views. What we're focused on today is the officials who are still here who are working on Syria, who share the kind of frustration you've heard from the President, the Secretary, and others.

QUESTION: And it's not the first one. Fred Hof said the same thing in the past, too.

MS. HARF: Again, we appreciate former officials who want to weigh in on what's going on today. Obviously, they have a unique perspective on this, but what we're focused on here is what's happening today, what may be the same, what's changed since any of these folks left and what we need to do going forward.

....

QUESTION: [Ford said:] "I was no longer in a position where I felt I could defend the American policy." It looks like he was frustrated from the American policy, not from the whole situation in Syria, and that's why he quit.

MS. HARF: I'm happy to let him talk about his own — first of all, "quit" is a strong term. He had a very long, distinguished career here, and he retired. Again, he's a private citizen. I'm happy to let him his explain his own words. What I'm telling you right now is what we're focused on today for the folks that are still here working on

Syria, that are working on it going forward. That's what I'm focused on. I'm happy to let him parse his own words for you.

Daily Press Briefing, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 3 June 2014.

My comments on 3 June: Notice how Ms. Harf attempted to twist Ford's frustration with Obama into frustration with the situation in Syria. In the last question quoted above, a journalist pointed out the distinction, and an exasperated Harf told the journalist to go talk to Ford.

Regardless of whether you agree with Ford that we should have armed the rebels, or whether you believe we should have supported Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorists, the U.S. foreign policy in Syria has been a disaster.

Notice that Harf says it is "disgusting" that Assad and his wife were photographed putting their ballots in a box. Harf does *not* say she is disgusted by the facts that at least 160,000 people have died in the civil war, or that Syrian cities are in ruins, or that the Syrian National Coalition refuses to recognize that it has been defeated.

The following day, the topic of Ford's criticism of Obama arose again at the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department.

QUESTION: Okay. Yesterday I think it was former ambassador to Syria —

MS. HARF: I thought we were going to get through the whole briefing without the —

QUESTION: Okay. Robert Ford said that you guys could have stepped in early on and aided the moderate opposition. Are there any kind of regrets that you have not done that?

MS. HARF: We've been consistently aiding the moderate opposition in a variety of ways. We've continued to increase it. As the President said last week, we will continue to do so going forward. Look, I don't think anyone can — as I said yesterday a number of times — look at what's happening in Syria, what's happened there, and be satisfied. It's heartbreaking and frustrating. But that's why, again, we announced another tranche of aid today to the Syrian people. That puts us over \$2 billion [including humanitarian aid].

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 4 June 2014.

On 5 June, the U.S. Government was further embarrassed when journalists reported that Hillary Clinton, in her forthcoming book, said she had advocated "arming and training moderate Syrian rebels", but Obama overruled her. [CBS News](#) (see p.2); [Washington Post](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

On 17 June, Hillary again told journalists she tried to convince Obama to give munitions to moderate rebels in Syria. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

My comments on 4 June: The U.S. Government is incredibly arrogant when it refuses to admit that it made mistake(s) with its policy in Syria. If one agrees with some critics of the U.S. foreign policy (e.g., Ford), the mistake could be not sending more military aid to the

rebels in 2011 and 2012. In my opinion (since Oct 2013), we should have supported Assad in his fight against Islamic extremists. Even Ms. Harf, in her job as cheerleader for the U.S. foreign policy, admits that the situation in Syria "is heartbreaking and frustrating", despite much effort by the U.S. Government. But she is unwilling to admit that the U.S. foreign policy was flawed or erroneous. To anyone familiar with the news from Syria, it is obvious that the U.S. foreign policy in Syria has been a disaster for the people of Syria, although there are various opinions on what mistake(s) the U.S. Government made.

On 10 June, Ford had another opinion piece published in the [NY Times](#). Ford makes two points.

First, Ford says Assad "can't rid Syria of the terrorist groups now implanted in the ungoverned regions of eastern and central Syria." Ford says Assad's "prospects for vanquishing the opposition are negligible." When Ford says "opposition", I think he means the jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL.

Second, Ford believes "we must ramp up sharply the training and material aid provided to the moderates in the armed opposition." Ford specifically recommends: "To achieve this, the Free Syrian Army must have more military hardware, including mortars and rockets to pound airfields to impede regime air supply operations and, subject to reasonable safeguards, surface-to-air missiles."

In my opinion, Assad was wise to concentrate his limited military resources in the heavily populated western region of Syria, and let the jihadists and Al-Qaeda temporarily control the relatively unpopulated northern part of Syria. It remains to be seen whether Assad can defeat the Islamic terrorists. In 2011 and 2012, the U.S. Government was predicting that Assad would soon resign, a prediction that was not only wrong, but also Assad is now stronger than ever.

Suppose we follow Ford's (and Hillary Clinton's) recommendation and the moderate rebels win the civil war. What happens next? The moderate rebels have no politicians who can operate the Syrian government. The Syrian National Coalition might try to fill the political vacuum in Syria, but they are indecisive and inexperienced — as I argue in my previous essays and in my [essay](#) at the end of May 2014. Inevitably, Islamic extremists would exploit the chaos and disorganization and again fight for control of Syria. In contrast to this debacle, I urge that we support the stable government of Assad.

Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

Beginning on 10 March 2014, journalists have been reporting that Assad is winning the civil war in Syria. Some of these reports by journalists are cited in my previous essays.

On 2 June, *The International Business Times* reports that "In the Syrian civil war, [Assad] is also winning militarily."

On 3 June, *The Washington Post* reported:

Obama announced an unspecified increase in aid to moderate rebels in his foreign policy address last week. But [former U.S. Ambassador] Ford said he saw no evidence the extra support would make a difference to the rebels' ability to confront the better-armed government forces.

Indeed, Assad now appears stronger than he did two years ago. Backed by Russia, Iran and volunteer militias from Lebanon and Iraq, his forces have ejected rebels from significant chunks of territory in the heart of Syria over the past year.

Liz Sly & Ahmed Ramadan, "Syrian election sends powerful signal of Assad's control," [Washington Post](#), 19:15 EDT, 3 June 2014.

On 5 June, *Al-Jazeera* reported:

Fawas Gerges, a Middle East expert based in London, called the election win a "culmination of Assad's accumulated victories" since his opponents took up weapons against his regime in 2011. [¶] "The opposition does not seem to be able to genuinely change the balance of power on the ground," he told Al Jazeera. [¶] "The opposition's allies — the US and others — have not been as solid and committed as Assad's allies. Assad's allies — Iran, Russia, Hezbollah — have fought tooth and nail to keep Assad in place."

"Assad re-elected in wartime election," [Al-Jazeera](#), 01:58 GMT, 5 June 2014.

On 5 June, *The Times of Israel* reported an anonymous Israeli diplomatic official as saying Assad had won the civil war:

Syrian President Bashar Assad, with Iran's help, has attained most of the regime's territorial goals and effectively won the civil war against the Sunni rebel forces, an Israeli diplomatic official told *The Times of Israel* on Thursday [5 June].

"Assad has secured 70-80 percent of essential Syria," the official said, sketching a line from Aleppo in the north down through Hama, Homs, Damascus and the southern areas near Jordan and the city of Dara'a — a Syrian city where the war began and, currently, a channel through which Sunni extremists enter Syria from Jordan.

....

Only the Kurdish regions have slipped irretrievably beyond Assad's control, he added.

....

The diplomatic official said that the Sunni exodus from the country has "changed the demography in Assad's favor,"

Mitch Ginsburg, "Syria's Assad has won civil war, Israeli diplomatic official says," [Times of Israel](#), 5 June 2014.

During June 2014, ISIL conquered much of northern and western [Iraq](#), which produced a dramatic expansion of the civil war in Syria. Leslie Gelb proposed partitioning Iraq into semi-autonomous ethnic regions in an [op-ed](#) published in *The New York Times* in Nov 2003.

Gelb revised that proposal for both Syria and Iraq in the 21 June 2014 *The Daily Beast*:
There's only one strategy with a decent chance of winning: forge a military and political coalition with the power to stifle the jihadis in both Iraq and Syria. This means partnering with Iran, Russia, and President Assad of Syria. This would be a very tricky arrangement among unfriendly and non-trusting partners, but the overriding point is that they all have common interests. All regard the jihadis as the overwhelming threat, and all would be willing to take tough joint action. And with this fighting arrangement in place, the "partners" could start seriously fixing the underlying political snake pits in Damascus and Baghdad.

....

I'm certainly not saying that Assad is a good guy and that we should abandon pursuing his eventual departure, or that we can now trust Russia and Iran. Washington has and will have serious problems with all these countries. And most certainly, the U.S. will have to stay on its guard. But the fact is that there is common ground with Moscow and Tehran to combat the biggest threat to all of us at this moment. Russia frets all the time about the jihadis in the Mideast making joint cause with Muslim extremists in Russia; it's Moscow's No. 1 security issue. Iran worries greatly about the Sunni jihadis torturing and killing Shiites in Syria and Iraq. There's nothing more frightening in the world today than these religious fanatics.

....

In sum, President Obama must start addressing the jihadi threat not just in Iraq, but in Iraq and Syria. Second, he has to fashion strategic alliances with Iran, Russia and Assad to deal with the threat effectively and immediately. Third, that doesn't mean no military role for the U.S.; it means U.S. military aid in various forms in the context of that broader alliance. Fourth, with all this moving into place, Washington can then focus on the necessary political changes first in Baghdad and ultimately in Damascus. For the time being, Assad is needed to fight the bad guys. Over time he can be eased out as long as his Alawite people are protected in some kind of federal Syria. Hopefully, Iraqis will maneuver Maliki out of power much more quickly and try to restore political support and some degree of unity under a federal banner as well.

....

Above all, this is not the time to blunder into horrendous religious and civil wars with direct and extensive U.S. military force. Our only chance to stop the jihadis in their tracks and push them back is to band with mutually wary allies who can and will fight now to check the common and dangerous foe.

Leslie H. Gelb, "A Winning Strategy for Iraq and Syria," [Daily Beast](#), 21 June 2014.

Gelb clearly recognizes that we need to cooperate with Assad in fighting terrorism in Syria and Iraq, because terrorism is everyone's Nr. 1 enemy. Further, the borders for Syria and Iraq that were drawn by England and France in 1916 make no sense, the borders should consider religious and ethnic differences in the population. But redrawing borders will *not* stop terrorists who want to impose their religion on others.

Zeina Karam, the chief of the Associated Press bureau in Beirut, wrote an insightful article: The Syrian rebels that the U.S. now wants to support are in poor shape, on the retreat from the radical al-Qaida breakaway group that has swept over large parts of Iraq and Syria, with some rebels giving up the fight. It is not clear whether the new U.S. promise to arm them will make a difference. [¶] Some, more hard-line Syrian fighters are bending to the winds and joining the radicals.

The Obama administration is seeking \$500 million to train and arm what it calls "moderate" factions among the rebels, a far larger project than a quiet CIA-led effort in Jordan that has been training a few hundreds fighters a month. But U.S. officials say it will take a year to get the new program fully underway.

....

"The Syrian opposition is exhausted," said Adam al-Ataribi, a spokesman for the Mujahedeen Army, a small group fighting alongside other rebels against the extremists.

An opposition activist based in the northern town of Marea said the FSA has lost more people fighting against the Islamic State in the past year than it has against Assad's forces. "There is a steady attrition within rebel ranks," he said.

....

Activists say other fighters in the nationalist-minded opposition are just abandoning the fight altogether due to frustration and disillusionment. Judging how many is difficult, but several activists in Syria speaking to the AP saw it as a growing trend.

Zeina Karam, "Syrian Rebels Buckling In Face Of Jihadis," [Associated Press](#), 20:25 GMT, 27 June 2014.

If the moderate rebels are defeated, the choice is between (1) Assad and (2) jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL. Clearly, Assad is the lesser of these Evils.

On 27 June, Kerry seemed to hint that he wanted the moderate rebels in Syria to fight against ISIL — perhaps also fight in Iraq. [State Dept](#). That is a good way to further weaken the moderate rebels, and also help Assad defeat ISIL. The end result would be that Assad wins the civil war in Syria.

When the moderate rebels join the jihadists, the former rebels will probably take their weapons with them, so the U.S. taxpayers will be supporting radical Islamic jihadists.

U.S. Military Aid to Rebels

In an interview with CNN on 6 June, Susan Rice said the U.S. Government was "providing lethal and non-lethal support" to rebels. [CNN](#). *Al-Arabiya* reported the story under the headline "Susan Rice hints at 'lethal' aid to Syrian rebels". [Al-Arabiya](#). See also [Haaretz](#).

My comments: There is probably nothing new in this disclosure by Susan Rice. It has been known at least since Sep 2013 that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency is providing military supplies to rebels, mostly small arms and ammunition. (See, e.g., [NY Times](#), 25 Mar 2013; [Washington Post](#), 11 Sep 2013.) At a speech at West Point on 28 May 2014, Obama said he wanted to "ramp up support" to rebels. Note Obama did *not* say he wanted to *begin* military support for rebels, instead Obama wanted to *increase* the military support for rebels, in an indirect admission that military aid had already begun. (See my [seventh essay](#) on Syria, at the end of the section titled "U.S. Government embraces Syrian National Coalition".)

In my [sixth](#) essay on Syria, in the section titled "USA resuming arming rebels?", I argued that it was a bad idea to provide military aid to the rebels. More than 160,000 people have died and cities are in ruins. The civil war in Syria is now more than three years old, and that is long enough. There is now no reasonable hope of victory by the moderate rebels. Foreign meddlers should stop sending munitions to the insurgents.

On 9 June, [Reuters](#) reported that the chief-of-staff of the Supreme Military Council (SMC), Brigadier General Abdelilah al-Bashir, is upset because the U.S. Government is giving military aid directly to "individual battalions" of rebel forces on the ground in Syria, instead of providing the aid to the SMC. At least since Sep 2013, the rebels have been criticized as "disorganized". Providing aid directly to rebel fighters, instead of properly going through the chain-of-command, increases this disorganization. Further, it empowers the commanders who receive the aid, and weakens the SMC. Gen. al-Bashir says: "Providing support to individual battalions could turn the commanders of these battalions into warlords and they will be difficult to control in future. This could turn Syria into Afghanistan or Somalia." His use of the word "warlord" echoed Brahimi in an interview on 7 June, as described in the next section of this essay.

The same Reuters article says most of the U.S. aid to rebels is "non-lethal", "[b]ut some U.S. officials have told Reuters small arms and anti-tank missiles are also being given."

My comment is that the U.S. Government is providing military aid in a clandestine way that prevents U.S. taxpayers from knowing what their government is doing. The military aid itself allows the rebels to continue their futile civil war, with more deaths and more destruction. And now we learn that the way in which the aid is given weakens an already disorganized rebel army. The U.S. Government seems inept, if not actually immoral for prolonging a futile civil war.

At least since Dec 2013, the United Nation Secretary General, Ban, has called for an end to supplying munitions to insurgents in Syria. Everyone is ignoring Ban, despite the fact that his call is logical and rational. In Ban's 22 May [Report](#) quoted above, ¶47, Ban again repeats his call "to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring financial resources, weapons and other supplies." The U.S. Government should be ashamed to be openly defying Ban.

On 9 June, the following exchange occurred at the Daily Press Briefing of the U.S. State Department:

QUESTION: Reuters is reporting that a Syrian rebel commander is saying that the lethal arms from the United States going to the country are going to create a warlordism, turning Syria into Somalia. Could you comment on that?

MS. HARF: Look, as we've said, we're not going to outline all the kinds of assistance we're giving to the moderate opposition. Our goal here though with everything we give is to change the balance of power on the ground, to increasingly push the regime to come back to the negotiating table and get to a diplomatic solution. So I know there are a variety and a range of views about what we should or should not be doing in Syria, but that's our overall goal. And one of the reasons that we vet everyone we give assistance to and that we are very careful when we do it is so we don't either have assistance fall into the hands of terrorist organizations or create even more bloodshed than we've already seen.

QUESTION: Does that include lethal assistance?

MS. HARF: Again, I'm not going to go into all of the kinds of assistance we give.

QUESTION: Susan Rice and now this rebel commander are confirming that lethal assistance is going to the —

MS. HARF: I am happy to let the national security advisor's words stand for themselves. As I said, we don't detail all the kinds of assistance we give.

Daily Press Briefing, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 9 June 2014.

My comment is that increased military aid to rebels in a civil war will inevitably "create even more bloodshed than we've already seen". That is what military aid in a war does, by its very nature.

On 14 June, Agence France-Presse reported: "Nine top officers from the moderate Free Syrian Army resigned Saturday over shortages and mismanagement of military aid from donor countries to their uprising against President Bashar Assad." When donors give munitions to the rebels, they give them directly to the fighters, and *not* to the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syrian Army, which made the SMC irrelevant. One of the officers who resigned said: "While we thank donor countries for their assistance, it has been really insufficient, and simply too little to win the fight." [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon. Copy at [Al-Jazeera](#) (blog); [GlobalPost](#). As mentioned above, this will create warlords amongst the many commanders of rebel groups. The Free Syrian Army has been disillusioned since Sep 2013, when Obama refused to bomb Assad's military.

On 20 June, the United Nations Secretary General again called for an arms embargo in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#) (Reuters); [Associated Press](#). Ban did not identify the warmongering nations who are supporting the insurgents in Syria, but those nations include the USA, who has been covertly supplying small arms and ammunition to the moderate rebels for more than one year. Since early April 2014, the USA has supplied anti-tank missiles to the moderate rebels in Syria, as documented in my previous essays. Together with Ban's proposal that the U.N. Security Council enact an arms embargo on Syria, Ban also proposed a six-point plan for peace in Syria:

1. ceasefire,
2. "protect civilians",
3. "start a serious political process",
4. "ensure accountability",
5. "finish the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons",
6. "address the regional dimensions of the conflict, including the extremist threat."

(quoting items 2-6 from Reuters news story cited above). I can not find Ban's proposal at the U.N. website, probably because that website has been undergoing maintenance for the past month.

My comment: Back in 2012, when Koffi Annan was the first U.N. envoy for Syria, Annan proposed a six-point peace plan, now long forgotten. Now Ban has proposed a six-point peace plan. Why should the United Nations have a monopoly on six-point plans? Here is my parody of six-point plans for Syria:

1. ceasefire — including total annihilation of any insurgents when they violate the ceasefire
2. sponsors of insurgents in Syria pay restitution for
 - A. reconstruction of buildings, utilities, roads, etc. in Syria,
 - B. compensation for civilians injured/displaced in civil war,
 - C. reimbursement of Syria's neighbors (e.g., Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey) for costs of harboring refugees from Syria,
 - D. reimbursement of non-Arab nations for contributions to humanitarian aid during Syrian civil war.
 — and cap the price of crude oil sold by sponsors of insurgents at the market rate on 7 June 2014 until the restitution is fully paid, to prevent sponsors from passing the restitution to consumers of oil.
3. recognize Assad as least-worst ruler for Syria
4. ignore Syrian National Coalition
5. ignore Geneva1 Communiqué — including forbidding the mention of "transitional governing body" in discussions of the future of Syria
6. resignations of Ban, Obama, Kerry, ... for their incompetence in negotiating peace in Syria and for their pig-headed stubbornness in refusing to endorse Assad's fight against Islamic terrorism.

On 20 June, Obama gave an interview to CBS News, in which Obama said:

"I think this notion that somehow there was this ready-made moderate Syrian force that was able to defeat [Syrian President Bashar] Assad is simply not true, and, you know, we have spent a lot of time trying to work with a moderate opposition in Syria," the president said in the interview taped Friday [20 June].

....

"When you get farmers dentists and folks who have never fought before going up against a ruthless opposition in Assad," Mr. Obama continued, "the notion that they

were in a position to suddenly overturn not only Assad but also ruthless, highly trained jihadists if we just sent a few arms is a fantasy. And I think it's very important for the American people — but maybe more importantly, Washington and the press corps — to understand that."

Obama, "Obama: Notion that Syrian opposition could have overthrown Assad with U.S. arms a 'fantasy'," [CBS News](#), 20 June 2014.

Obama made a similar remark about dentists in an interview with National Public Radio on 29 May, which interview was quoted in my [seventh essay](#) on Syria. If an untrained "moderate opposition" (even with a "few arms" from the USA) is unable to overthrow Assad — and three years of history shows Obama is correct — then why is Obama continuing to fund the moderate opposition in their futile struggle? Obama does *not* answer the obvious question.

Although *not* what Obama and Kerry intended by "U.S. aid to rebels", on 22 June ISIL began using American-made Humvees in Aleppo province in Syria. As described [below](#), ISIL looted the Humvees from the Iraqi army in Mosul on 10 June. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#). I cringe when I think of U.S. tax dollars at work in support of Islamic terrorists like ISIL.

A detailed inventory of what munitions and supplies ISIL captured from the Iraqi army has not been made public, but the BBC reported:

[ISIL's] capabilities have been boosted to phenomenal level by what it won from its stunning capture of Mosul on 10 June in an assault spearheaded by perhaps as few as 500 fighters.

The list of military hardware captured after Iraq's troops fled Mosul and Kirkuk includes, sources say, some 4,000 medium machine-guns, 1,500 Humvees and other military vehicles, 50 state-of-the-art 155mm GPS-guided artillery pieces which can "aim like a sniper rifle" over a 40km range, 50 T-55 tanks and two helicopters.

Jim Muir, "Iraq crisis forces old battle lines to be redrawn," [BBC](#), 26 June 2014.

Despite the capture of U.S. military supplies by ISIL in Iraq, on 26 June the Obama administration formally requested that the U.S. Congress approve direct military aid and training for the moderate rebels in Syria. [White House](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 27 June, Agence France-Presse reported that the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) had disbanded the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), because of suspected corruption by the SMC. Also, the Coalition sacked the head of the FSA, Brig. Gen. Abdel-Ilah Bashir. Further, the Coalition asked the rebels on the ground to appoint their own leaders. [Al-Jazeera](#) blog; [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Gulf News](#)(AFP). See also [Los Angeles Times](#). Remember, the previous head of the FSA was sacked on 16 Feb 2014, when Bashir was appointed. Bashir lasted only four months before he was sacked. The admission by the Coalition that the SMC was corrupt shows that these rebels are unworthy of support by foreign governments. Why would the Coalition ask the rebels to appoint their own leaders? I suggest that avoids a crisis if the Coalition were to appoint leaders who the rebels then rejected. Nevertheless, the decision to let the rebels appoint their own leaders shows a lack of

leadership and lack of control by the Coalition.

However, the news about the disbanding of the SMC and the sacking of Bashir did *not* appear at the Coalition website by 21:00 GMT on 27 June. Also, when Coalition President Jarba met with Kerry on 27 June, Jarba said "... General Abdul Ilah al Bashir is ready to cooperate with the U.S. side." [State Dept.](#) So one wonders if the Agence France-Presse report is true. But [The Telegraph](#) in London also reports the story and cites an announcement on Facebook.

Late at night on 27 June, Agence France-Presse reports that Coalition President Jarba reversed the decisions to disband the SMC and sack Bashir. Ahmad Tohme made the decisions while Jarba was in Saudi Arabia for a meeting with Kerry. Tohme is supported by Qatar, while Jarba is supported by Saudi Arabia. [Daily Star](#); [GlobalPost](#)(AFP). This kind of petty bickering amongst the so-called opposition government of Syria casts doubt on their competence to lead a nation.

Tohme could face a "no confidence" vote at the next Coalition meeting during 4-6 July. [Asharq Al-Awsat](#), 29 June.

Brahimi Interview

On 7 June, the German weekly newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* published an interview with Brahimi, who resigned on 13 May as the U.N. negotiator for Syria.

Why Geneva2 failed:

The issue of President Assad was a huge hurdle. The Syrian regime only came to Geneva to please the Russians, thinking that they were winning militarily. I told them "I'm sure that your instructions were: 'Go to Geneva. But not only don't make any concessions, don't discuss anything seriously.'"

The majority among the opposition were against coming to Geneva. They preferred a military solution and they came completely unprepared. But at least they were willing to start talking with President Assad still there as long as it was clear that, somewhere along the line, he would go.

I told the Americans and the Russians several times while we were preparing for Geneva that they were bringing these two delegations kicking and screaming, against their will.

.... You have a situation where one side says there can be no solution unless Assad stays in power. While the other side says there can be no solution unless Assad goes. Do you know how to square a circle?

On war crimes:

SPIEGEL: Is Assad aware of the way the war is being conducted by his army?

Brahimi: One-hundred percent. He knows a hell of a lot. Maybe he doesn't know every single detail of what is happening, but I'm sure he is aware that people are being tortured, that people are being killed, that bombs are being thrown, that cities are being destroyed. He cannot ignore the fact that there are 2.5 million refugees.

.... War crimes are being committed every day, by both sides.

On chemical weapons:

They have been used, but there are conflicting views about who the culprits were. The UN was specifically requested by the Security Council to merely establish that chemical weapons were used. Not everyone agrees that it was the Syrian government who used these chemical weapons.

As I said, the UN investigating mission was strictly ordered *not* to try to determine who the guilty party was. Now, from the little I know, it does seem that in Khan al-Assal, in the north, the first time chemical weapons were used, there is a likelihood that it was used by the opposition. Regarding the use of chemical weapons on Aug. 21, 2013 in the suburbs of Damascus, it is a fact that for the West and perhaps most people in the region, the responsibility lies with the regime. Moscow and Tehran say they are equally certain that the government *did not* use chemical weapons anywhere. It is a great pity the UN was under strict instructions not to try to point the finger at anyone.

....

Future of Syria:

It will become another Somalia. It will not be divided, as many have predicted. It's going to be a failed state, with warlords all over the place.

Interview of Lakhdar Brahimi by Susanne Koelbl, "Interview with UN Peace Envoy Brahimi: 'Syria Will Become Another Somalia'," *Der Spiegel*, 7 June 2014.

See reports in news media: [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#); [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon; all on 8 June 2014. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Al-Jazeera](#)(blog); both on 9 June 2014. Strangely, this important interview seems to have been ignored in the USA. Neither the Associated Press, *The Washington Post*, nor *The New York Times* covered this interview. On 9 June, the [Los Angeles Times](#) was an exception to the blackout in the USA.

My comments: 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. For more detail, see my separate [essay](#).

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.

I am surprised to see that Brahimi says there is a "likelihood" that the insurgents used chemical weapons in Khan al-Assal, which the OPCW investigation said occurred on 19 March 2013. Brahimi seems to be open to the possibility that insurgents used chemical weapons elsewhere in Syria. I am surprised because the conventional wisdom is that Assad is responsible for *all* uses of chemical weapons in Syria. I believe this conventional wisdom is *not* plausible, because it would be irrational for Assad to use chemical weapons for little advantage on the battlefield and huge detriment in international reputation.

Brahimi on Iraq

On 15 June, Brahimi spoke to Agence France-Presse about the situation in [Iraq](#):

Brahimi said that the international community's inaction on the conflict in Syria had precipitated the crisis in Iraq.

"It is a well known rule: a conflict of this kind (in Syria) cannot stay confined within the borders of one country," Brahimi told AFP.

The international community "unfortunately neglected the Syrian problem and did not help to resolve it. This is the result," said Brahimi,

"Brahimi says world neglect of Syria behind Iraq unrest," [Daily Star](#), 15 June 2014.

Also at [GlobalPost](#).

Amnesty in Syria

On Monday, 9 June, just six days after the election, Assad announced a general amnesty that applies to the following crimes committed before 9 June 2014:

1. "commutes sentences with more lenient ones, including commuting the death sentence to life penal labor, life penal labor to 20 years of penal labor, and life in prison to 20 years in prison."
2. "commutes the entire duration of the sentence for convicts with incurable terminal illness, convicts who are 70 [years old] or above".
3. no punishment for kidnappers, if the kidnapper "frees the victim safely without taking ransom or delivers the victim to the authorities" before 10 July 2014.
4. no punishment for "foreigners who entered Syria with the purpose of joining a terrorist group or committing a terrorist act if they turn themselves in to the authorities" before 10 July 2014.

5. "Deserters are also granted full amnesty, both those who are inside Syria and abroad and who are not fugitives from justice."
6. "Fugitives wanted for other crimes can also benefit from the amnesty if they" surrender before 8 Sep 2014.

The above quotations are from a Syrian government news article at [SANA](#), 9 June.

The amnesty for kidnapers, Nr. 3 in the above list, seems intended to encourage the release of hostages inside Syria.

Journalists note that the extent of the amnesty, and to whom, is *not* clear. For example, Nr.1 in the above list suggests that it is actually a commutation of sentence for those already in prison. State television in Syria reported that the amnesty did *not* apply to "terrorists", but the scope of the word "terrorists" is unclear, since Nr.4 in the list grants amnesty to foreign "terrorists". Nr.5 in the list grants amnesty to deserters from the Syrian army, but what if the deserters joined the Free Syrian Army and became what the Syrian government calls "terrorists"?

Journalists report that previous amnesties announced in Syria were not always fully honored by the Syrian government.

References:

- [Reuters](#), 13:33 GMT, 9 June.
- [Associated Press](#), 15:04 GMT, 9 June.
- [GlobalPost](#)(AFP), 15:45 GMT, 9 June.
- [Al-Jazeera](#), 16:19 GMT, 9 June.
- [NY Times](#), approximately 17:00 GMT, 9 June.
- [Washington Post](#), 21:55 GMT, 9 June.
- [Daily Star](#), 10 June. ("dozens" of prisoners released)
- [SANA](#), 11 June. (Total of 403 prisoners released on 11 June from three prisons.)
- [SANA](#), 12 June. (Total of 155 prisoners released on 12 June.)
- [SANA](#), 13 June. (Total of 50 prisoners released in Homs on 13 June.)
- [SANA](#), 14 June. (Total of 137 prisoners released on 14 June.)
- [SANA](#), 15 June. (Total of 167 prisoners released in two provinces on 15 June.)
- [SANA](#), 16 June. (Total of 90 prisoners released in three provinces on 16 June.)
- [SANA](#), 17 June. (Cumulative total of 1351 prisoners released in five provinces.)

On 11 June, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights explained the scope of the amnesty: Thousands of detainees in security prisons and detention centers are expected to be released in the coming days after Bashar al-Assad issued an amnesty days earlier. It is estimated that more than 70,000 detainees and prisoners imprisoned during the past 3 years will be released. However, the fate of more than 18,000 persons who reportedly went missing after detainment by regular forces is still unknown.

Bashar al-Assad issued an amnesty for detainees convicted under crimes of "conspiring against the state, belonging to terrorist organizations, carrying out and agitating for

terrorist acts, withholding information about criminal acts" and a partial amnesty for those convicted under "smuggling, possessing and manufacturing weapons, ammunition and explosions", specifically those who have been referred to the Court of Terrorism.

According to the statement, the Amnesty also includes those accused by the authorities of "weakening the nation's spirit, publishing false news, lagging behind in military service and igniting people against the authorities". It is also possible, but has not been clarified yet, that the Amnesty includes those detained in security centres without being subject to trial or those who were subject to a field trial.

[SOHR](#), 11 June 2014.

On 11 June, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said: "However, we do not consider the Amnesty to indicate generosity on part of the Syrian authorities, but consider it as a basic step in returning to [the detainees] their most essential right." [SOHR](#).

I abandoned covering the amnesty on 18 June, when it was apparent that the amnesty would *not* include tens of thousands of prisoners. If the number of released prisoners increases substantially, then I will resume covering this amnesty in my essay(s).

ISIL Invades Iraq

In December 2011, the U.S. Government pulled its military out of Iraq. At that time, the conventional wisdom was that the Americans in Iraq were inflaming sectarian tensions between Shiite and Sunni Muslims in Iraq, and the situation would be calmer without the Americans. The conventional wisdom was wrong.

After the Americans departed from Iraq, the intensity of the Iraq sectarian civil war increased. In the year 2013, the United Nations counted 8868 dead/year in terrorist attacks in Iraq. The annual death toll in 2013 was the highest since 17956 people died in 2007. [BBC](#).

ISIL was created in Iraq in the year 2004 under the name "Al-Qaeda in Iraq", and expanded into Syria in April/May 2013 when it assumed its current name. The goal of ISIL is to create a Sunni muslim caliphate in both Syria and Iraq. ISIL regards Shiite Muslims as heretics who deserve to die.

On 4 Jan 2014, ISIL captured Fallujah. [Al-Jazeera](#). The incompetent Iraqi government promised to retake Fallujah, but in June Fallujah was still under ISIL control.

On 10 June 2014, Western Civilization was jolted by the news that ISIL — an Al-Qaeda inspired group that operates in both Iraq and Syria — had captured Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq. The Iraqi military and police simply fled, rather than engage ISIL in battle. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#).

When the Iraqi military and police fled, their weapons and ammunition were abandoned, and the weapons and ammunition were seized by ISIL. [NY Times](#). Note that the Iraqi military

significantly outnumber ISIL, the [BBC](#) says outnumber by a factor of 15 Iraqi army soldiers to 1 ISIL terrorist. On 11 June, *The Guardian* reported: "Iraqi officials told the Guardian that two divisions of Iraqi soldiers — roughly 30,000 men — simply turned and ran in the face of the assault by an insurgent force of just 800 fighters." [The Guardian](#). Because the U.S. Government did an incompetent job of "vetting" the Iraqi military and police, weapons and ammunition from the USA are now in the hands of ISIL. On 29 June, the [Los Angeles Times](#) published a story titled: "ISIS weapons windfall may alter balance in Iraq, Syria conflicts". (Copy at [Seattle Times](#).) On 29 June the amount of U.S. weapons and munitions stolen by ISIL has *not* been publicly revealed. In my opinion, this debacle in Iraq should teach the USA *not* to supply military aid to *any* of the rebels in Syria.

Some of the stolen weapons and ammunition were moved to ISIL in Syria. [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#).

ISIL also robbed several banks in Mosul. At one bank, the Mosul central bank, ISIL stole US\$ 425,000,000. Those robberies made ISIL "the world's richest terror group". [IBT](#), 11 June; [Washington Post](#), 12 June. This funding of ISIL by robberies is an extremely important development.

U.S. military veterans were especially aghast. [Washington Post](#); [USA Today](#); [Associated Press](#). The U.S. Government spent more than one trillion dollars — and wasted the lives of more than 4400 dead U.S. military personnel — to invade Iraq in 2003, depose Saddam Hussein, search for alleged weapons of mass destruction, and attempt to build a new stable government in Iraq. We did successfully invade Iraq and we successfully deposed Saddam Hussein (who was hanged in Dec 2006). But, we never found the weapons of mass destruction that were the reason for invading Iraq. The new government in Iraq displays more anarchy than stability. And now ISIL appears to be taking over Iraq. The courageous work and sacrifices of the U.S. military were squandered by politicians in Iraq and the USA.

On 11 June 2014, ISIL captured Tikrit. Apparently, ISIL is headed south toward the capital city of Baghdad. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Washington Post](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

A map published in *The Washington Post* shows ISIL seized 11 towns in Iraq during Jan 2014 to March 2014. The ISIL problem did *not* suddenly appear. The ISIL problem in Iraq began in the year 2004, and has been worsening since Jan 2014.

On Friday, 13 June, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a leading Shiite cleric in Iraq, called on all Iraqis to join militias to stop the ISIL advance on Baghdad. The militias are also to defend the two Shiite holy shrines in Samarra. [IBT](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [BBC](#). Journalists reported that thousands of Shiites responded to this call to arms. There is already too much sectarian tension in Iraq, and this call to arms increases that sectarian tension of Shiite Muslim vs. Sunni Muslim. The militias are also poorly trained and inexperienced in fighting terrorists, which makes one wonder if the militias will be able to defeat ISIL.

Early on 16 June, while Obama was in California on vacation, ISIL captured the city of Tal Afar in Iraq. [Associated Press](#); [GlobalPost](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#).

On 17 June, ISIL was attacking Baquba, a city only 60 km north of Baghdad. Agence France-

Presse reported:

Militants pushed a weeklong offensive that has overrun swathes of Iraq to within 60 kilometers of Baghdad Tuesday, as the U.N. warned the country's very existence was under threat.

....

The overnight attack on Baqouba, which was pushed back by security forces but left 44 prisoners dead at a police station, marked the closest that fighting has come to the capital as part of a lightning offensive in which jihadists have said they intend to march on Baghdad and the southern Shiite holy city of Karbala.

....

The swift advance of the militants has sparked international alarm, with U.N. envoy to Baghdad Nikolay Mladenov warning that Iraq's sovereignty was at stake. [¶] "Right now, it's life-threatening for Iraq but it poses a serious danger to the region," Mladenov told AFP. [¶] "Iraq faces the biggest threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity" in years, he added.

....

Doubts are growing that the Iraqi security forces can hold back the militant tide, despite military commanders trumpeting a counter-offensive.

Soldiers and police retreated en masse as the insurgents, which included ISIS but also a litany of other groups including supporters of executed dictator Saddam Hussein, swept into Iraq's second city of Mosul a week ago, leaving vehicles and even uniforms in their wake.

Their retreat, despite their vast numerical advantage, is the result of what experts say are myriad problems, ranging from lackluster training and low morale, to corruption and an atmosphere of simmering sectarianism.

Prashant Rao, "Fighting nears Baghdad as U.N. warns crisis 'life-threatening'," [Daily Star](#), 17 June 2014.

Also at: [GlobalPost](#), 17 June 2014.

On 20-21 June, two days after Obama announced his Iraq [policy](#), ISIL captured three towns in Western Iraq and one Syrian border crossing operated by Iraq. ISIL had previously seized the Syrian side of the same border crossing. [Associated Press](#); [CNN](#).

The Associated Press notes that ISIL has caused the conflicts in Syria and Iraq to become "intertwined":

- ISIL is freely moving across the Syria/Iraq border in both directions.
- Approximately 25,000 Iraqi Shiite militiamen who were fighting in Syria are returning (or have returned) to Iraq, to fight ISIL in Iraq. The return of the Iraqi Shiite militias to Iraq leaves Assad with fewer soldiers to fight insurgents in Syria.

- The Associated Press also notes that "the Iraq chaos is putting a strain on Shiite powerhouse Iran, as it labors to prop up beleaguered allies in both Iraq and Syria."

[Associated Press](#), 21 June.

Perhaps some of the ISIL terrorists in Syria have also gone to Iraq, leaving fewer terrorists in Syria, but — until recently — Assad was not actively engaged in fighting against ISIL in northeastern Syria.

On 22 June, ISIL captured two more border crossings operated by Iraq. Once again, the Iraqi army fled without attempting to defend the crossings. The Associated Press wrote:

Sunni militants on Sunday captured two border crossings, one along the frontier with Jordan and the other with Syria, security and military officials said, as they pressed on with their offensive in one of Iraq's most restive regions.

The fall dealt Iraq's embattled Shiite prime minister a further blow and brought the war to the doorstep of Jordan, a key ally of the United States that also borders embattled Syria to its north.

The blitz by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Iraq's vast western desert take the al-Qaida-breakaway group closer to its dream of carving out a purist Islamic state straddling both Syria and Iraq.

Controlling the borders with Syria will also help it supply fellow fighters in Syria with weaponry looted from Iraqi warehouses, significantly reinforcing [ISIL's] ability to battle beleaguered Syrian government forces.

Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraqi Militants Seize 2 More Border Crossings," [Associated Press](#), 16:43 GMT, 22 June 2014.

On 24 June, the United Nations human rights team in Iraq reports "at least" 1075 people dead in Iraq during 5-22 June. That number includes numerous summary executions by ISIL. [U.N. News](#); [Associated Press](#). 1075 dead in 18 days is equivalent to 1790/month.

On 24 June, the Associated Press gave an example of how poorly the battle against ISIL is progressing in Iraq:

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is ready to concede, at least temporarily, the loss of much of Iraq to Sunni insurgents and is instead deploying the military's best-trained and equipped troops to defend Baghdad, Iraqi officials told The Associated Press Tuesday [24 June].

....

The Iraqi military, rife with corruption and torn by conflicting loyalties, lacks adequate air cover for its ground troops and armor, with the nation's infant air force operating two Cessna aircraft capable of firing U.S.-made Hellfire missiles. That leaves the army air wing of helicopter gunships stretched and overworked.

....

Furthermore, [the Shiite volunteer's] inexperience means they will not be combat ready for weeks, even months. Still, some were sent straight to battle, with disastrous consequences.

New details about the fight for Tal Afar — the first attempt to retake a major city from the insurgents — underscore the challenges facing the Iraqi security forces.

Dozens of young volunteers disembarked last week at an airstrip near the isolated northern city and headed straight to battle, led by an army unit. The volunteers and the accompanying troops initially staved off advances by the militants, but were soon beaten back, according to military officials.

They took refuge in the airstrip, but the militants shelled the facility so heavily the army unit pulled out, leaving 150 panicking volunteers to fend for themselves, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

The ill-fated expedition — at least 30 volunteers and troops were killed and the rest of the recruits remain stranded at the airstrip — does not bode well for al-Maliki's declared plan to make them the backbone of Iraq's future army.

Hamza Hendawi & Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraqi Prime Minister's Focus Is To Defend Baghdad," [Associated Press](#), 22:22 GMT, 24 June 2014.

This Associated Press story says the Iraqi police have 700,000 personnel, the Iraqi army has 400,000 soldiers, and ISIL has an estimated 10,000 terrorists. But "corruption, desertion and sectarian divisions have been a major problem" for the Iraqi police and army. *Ibid.*

On 28 June 2014, the Iraqi army reportedly captured the center of Tikrit from ISIL. [NY Times](#); [Daily Star](#)(AP); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#). If true, this would be the first major victory by the Iraqi government against ISIL. But, as explained below, the Iraqi government exaggerates its accomplishments and ignores its problems. Fighting in Tikrit continued on 29-30 June.

"Islamic State" (ISIL) proclaims caliphate

On 29 June, ISIL proudly proclaimed their establishment of a caliphate. ISIL (sometimes transliterated as ISIS) changed its name to "Islamic State". [Al-Jazeera](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP); [BBC](#); [The Guardian](#); [Washington Post](#). The announcement of the Islamic State caliphate was posted on the Internet in five languages (i.e., Arabic, English, French, Russian, and German.) [Al-Jazeera](#)(blog).

Ryan Lucas and Zeina Karam of the Associated Press wrote an insightful article.

A militant group's declaration of an Islamic state in territory it controls in Syria and Iraq touched off celebrations among its followers but drew condemnation and even ridicule from rivals and officials in Baghdad and Damascus.

The declaration of a caliphate was a bold move by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, not just announcing its own state governed by Shariah law but also claiming

legitimacy as a successor to the first Islamic rule created by the Prophet Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula 14 centuries ago.

In an announcement Sunday [29 June], the group proclaimed its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to be the caliph and demanded all Muslims around the world pledge allegiance to him.

....

The announcement was greeted with condemnation and disdain elsewhere in Syria, including from rival rebel groups who have been fighting the Islamic State since January.

"The gangs of al-Baghdadi are living in a fantasy world. They're delusional. They want to establish a state but they don't have the elements for it," said Abdel-Rahman al-Shami, a spokesman for the Army of Islam, an Islamist rebel group. "You cannot establish a state through looting, sabotage and bombing."

Ryan Lucas & Zeina Karam, "Alarm, ridicule for declaration of Islamic state," [Pueblo Chieftain](#), 11:38 EDT, 30 June 2014.

When I looked at 16:45 EDT on 30 June this story had disappeared from the Associated Press website, which is why I cite a small newspaper in Colorado. At 16:57 EDT, the [Associated Press](#) posted what is apparently a revised version of the above-quoted story.

My comment is that not even Osama bin Laden had the arrogance to appoint himself caliph. al-Baghdadi offers no evidence to support his claim to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Note that al-Baghdadi's name is *not* his name on his birth certificate, but is a nom de guerre. The behavior of al-Baghdadi's organizations show that he is really a terrorist.

Misinformation from Iraq

Sunni insurgents (not necessarily ISIL) have been battling the Iraqi army since 18 June for control of the big oil refinery in Baiji, in northern Iraq. That one refinery processes one-third of Iraq's crude oil. On 24 June, it seems that the insurgents won, but information is conflicting:

- [Press TV](#) in Iran at 09:37 GMT (all times on 24 June) and [Al-Jazeera](#) at 11:49 GMT both report that ISIL captured the refinery, but also report the Iraqi foreign minister says the Iraqi army still controls the refinery.
- The [Washington Post](#), at 14:04 GMT says that:
 1. A ceasefire was agreed on 23 June and 450 Iraqi soldiers fled from the refinery.
 2. A tribal councilman said "We now control 90 percent of the refinery."
 3. Iraqi military spokesman Qassim Atta in Baghdad claims: "We stress that the refinery is under the control and protection of security forces fully."
- [All Iraq News](#) at 16:13 GMT quotes the Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs

Hussein al-Shahristani as saying the oil refinery is under the control of the Iraqi army.

- The [Wall Street Journal](#) at 16:37 GMT says the Sunni insurgents now have "complete control" of the refinery.
- On 25 June at 08:09 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) reports: "Sunni militants launched a dawn raid Wednesday [25 June] on a key Iraqi oil refinery they have been trying to take for days but were repelled by security forces,"

Reading these news stories, one is totally baffled about who controls this oil refinery, because the information is contradictory.

I recall the propaganda spewed by "Baghdad Bob" during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. That propaganda was funny because it was so deluded, so implausible, and contained so much hyperbole. But it is essential in fighting a war to get a grip on reality, instead of dealing with fantasies.

In another example of false information from Iraq, on 24 June several Iraqi news websites (e.g., [All Iraq News](#); [Iraqi News](#)) reported that the U.S. military had launched missiles from drones to attack ISIL in Anbar Province of Iraq. These reports were false, according to the Pentagon. [Jerusalem Post](#).

Incidentally, beginning on 16 June, I have been looking at the English-language websites of four Iraqi newspapers. I am amazed to see a totally different coverage of the ISIL successes in Iraq in the Iraqi newspapers, compared with the Western news media (e.g., Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, BBC). The Iraqi newspapers tout the alleged — and probably fictitious — hundreds of ISIL terrorists killed each day, ignore the fact that ISIL has captured dozens of Iraqi towns, and ignore the fact that the Iraqi army repeatedly flees from ISIL. Because of the lack of credibility of Iraqi news sources, I do not cite them for facts. On 25 June, *The Washington Post* reported on some of the [misinformation](#) from the Iraqi army spokesman.

Atrocities by ISIL

ISIL is the worst of the insurgent groups in Syria. True to form, ISIL committed atrocities in Mosul, including executions of persons who ISIL believed were associated with the Iraqi government, and killing unarmed civilians. [Human Rights Watch](#); [Washington Post](#); [The Independent](#). On 13 June, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights threatened to prosecute ISIL for war crimes. [U.N.](#).

On 15 June, ISIL posted photographs on the Internet of dozens of Iraqi soldiers who had been captured and then executed by ISIL. [Associated Press](#). Such executions of captured soldiers are a war crime. Later on 15 June, ISIL boasted on the Internet of executing 1700 Shiite Iraqi Air Force recruits in Tikrit. [NY Times](#). The [U.S. State Dept.](#) said the unconfirmed boast by ISIL was "horrifying". But a later version of the [Associated Press](#) said a count of bodies in the photos showed approximately 170 soldiers executed. See also [Al-Jazeera](#). Regardless of whether the dead are air force recruits or army soldiers, and regardless of

whether there are 1700 or 170 dead, it is clear that ISIL is barbaric and committing war crimes. But we already knew that. Because of ISIL's repeated barbaric acts in Syria, other insurgent groups in Syria began fighting against ISIL on 3 Jan 2014. Note that ISIL not only commits barbaric acts, but also ISIL openly *boasts* about those crimes.

On 16 June, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said that "systematic series of cold-blooded executions, ... almost certainly amounts to war crimes". [U.N.](#)

On 26 June, Human Rights Watch reported that ISIL executed between 160 and 190 men in Tikrit during 11-14 June. Men in civilian clothing were lined up in trenches and shot by ISIL. [HRW](#); [Reuters](#).

Just to remind the reader of the barbaric values of ISIL, they *crucified* eight moderate rebels in Aleppo province of Syria on 28 June. [Reuters](#); [IBT](#).

My Comments on 11-12 June

Islamic terrorism thrives where there is a weak government (e.g., lawless region of northwest Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003, Libya after Gaddafi was assassinated in Oct 2011, etc.). In Syria, foreign support (from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc.) to the Syrian rebels in 2011 and 2012 overwhelmed Assad's government and created a climate in which jihadists and Al-Qaeda could flourish.

We should have learned that tyrants like Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Gaddafi in Libya were *better* than the anarchy that followed their overthrow. The same will be true in Syria: if the London11 group of nations prevail in their obsession with deposing Assad, then there will be anarchy in Syria too.

Some commentators and journalists say that ISIL shows how the war in Syria can "spill over" into neighboring nations (i.e., Iraq). But the history is that ISIL was founded in Iraq ten years ago, and ISIL has been fighting in Syria for only 13 months. So ISIL is an example of how Islamic terrorism in Iraq spilled over into Syria.

ISIL is well established in Iraq, and the Iraq government is weak, so ISIL may prevail in Iraq. However, Assad may be able to defeat ISIL in Syria, *if* foreign meddlers stop funding ISIL and *if* the London11 were to support Assad's fight against terrorists such as ISIL.

In reading news stories and commentary during 11-12 June, I am struck by the simplistic analysis. What happened in Iraq since the U.S. invasion in 2003 is complicated. What happened in Syria since the civil war began in March 2011 is complicated. Are these events too complicated for Americans to understand? Apparently they are too complicated, because U.S. foreign policy not only failed in both Iraq and Syria, but also helped cause the current success of ISIL. If we want to be simplistic, there are two errors. First, the U.S. Government (i.e., George W. Bush) was *wrong* to invade Iraq in 2003 and overthrow Saddam Hussein. Second, the U.S. Government (i.e., Obama) was *wrong* to make a Syria policy based on Obama's obsession with the resignation of Assad. The removal of the stable government of Hussein created weakness in Iraq, so Al-Qaeda could flourish. The foreign support for

terrorists in Syria, and the lack of support for Assad's fight against terrorists, created an environment in Syria where Al-Qaeda could flourish.

In fairness to Obama, if Obama had lost the presidential election in 2008, his opponent, John McCain, would likely have been worse for Assad. Senator McCain during 2011-2013 called for massive military aid to moderate rebels in Syria. (See, e.g., *New York Times* [Feb 2012](#); [Mar 2012](#).) In the 2012 election, Obama's opponent also wanted more military aid for rebels, leading to regime change in Syria. ([Romney](#)) Arguably, McCain and Romney would have weakened Assad more than Obama, and the weakening of Assad would have helped Islamic terrorism to flourish.

The problem with Western Europe and the USA is that they are too focused on regime change (i.e., removing tyrants like Hussein and Assad), and ignore the bigger problem of Islamic terrorism that flourishes in nations with weak governments. In my simplistic analysis, a strong government — even if it is a tyrannical dictatorship — prevents growth of Islamic terrorism.

U.S. Government Response to Debacle in Iraq

On 16 May 2014, the Iraqi Prime Minister asked Vice-President Biden for air strikes — either bombers or missiles launched from drones — on ISIL in Iraq. At that time ISIL was conquering a series of small towns in Western Iraq. Obviously, Obama said "no" to the request. [NY Times](#), 11 June. Looking backwards, if Obama had said "yes", perhaps ISIL could be stalled or defeated in Western Iraq, and the debacle in Mosul would not have occurred.

So what did the U.S. Government do in response to the ISIL seizure of Mosul? On 11 June, the White House issued a [press release](#) that "strongly condemns" the attacks by ISIL and promises to give some money to the Iraqi government, *after* Congress approves the funding. On 12 June, the U.S. State Department issued a [press release](#) that said the U.S. Government "is concerned that the deteriorating security situation ... in Iraq." So the USA will give more humanitarian aid to refugees in Iraq. On 12 June, [Obama](#) said his proposed funding of counterterrorism operations would extend the influence of the USA, "without sending U.S. troops to play Whac-A-Mole wherever there ends up being a problem in a particular country."

On 12 June, in his terse remarks to journalists after meeting the Prime Minister of Australia, Obama criticized the current Iraqi government for the persecution of Sunni Muslims by the Shiite majority. [Obama](#), specifically referred to Shiite/Sunni rivalries in government of Iraq "that accounts in part for some of the weakness of the state, and that then carries over into their military capacity." When the Iraqi government was desperately seeking immediate military aid to avoid being overthrown by ISIL was a poor time to criticize the Iraqi government.

At least since March 2014, the Iraqi government has been begging for military assistance from the U.S. Government, in order to stop the advances of ISIL. [NY Times](#). On 10 June,

ISIL captured Mosul, seized U.S.-supplied weapons, and robbed banks — creating an urgent crisis. Eight days later, Obama had done nothing except *talk*. On 14 June a cartoon in *The Daily Star*, a newspaper in Lebanon, shows ISIL preparing to behead the Iraqi eagle, the Iraqi eagle screams "Help!", but the bruised U.S. eagle limps away on crutches, with its broken arm in a cast.

On Saturday, 14 June, the U.S. Defense Secretary ordered a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier — U.S.S. George H.W. Bush — and two other ships to sail to the Persian Gulf and be ready to fly missions in Iraq. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 16 June, a U.S. Navy amphibious transport dock ship with 550 Marines entered the Persian Gulf. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).

On 18 June, the Iraqi government again requested U.S. air strikes on ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#)(AP).

On 24 June, the U.S. military began to deploy personnel to advise the Iraqi army and to assess the situation in Iraq. [Pentagon](#); [American Forces Press Service](#)

Iran Assists Iraq

In contrast to the reluctance of the USA to get involved again in Iraq, Iran is eager to help its neighbor defeat the Sunni extremists in ISIL. On 12 June, it was announced that Iran sent some of its Revolutionary Guards to help defend Baghdad from ISIL. There are also reports of Iran sending military advisors to help the Iraqi army. [IBT](#); [Fox News](#); [The Telegraph](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [CNN](#) ("In recent days, Iran has sent about 500 Revolutionary Guard troops to fight alongside Iraqi government security forces in Diyala province, a senior security official in Baghdad told CNN.").

But on 13 June, the Iranian government denied sending troops into Iraq. [FARS](#). Same on 14 June. [FARS](#). (Iran also denies it has military personnel in Syria, but several times each year a corpse of a senior Iranian military officer is flown from Syria to Iran for a funeral and burial.)

Western newsmedia continue to report that Iraqi government sources are saying Iranian Revolutionary Guards are in Iraq. [The Guardian](#), 14 June ("Iran has sent 2,000 advance troops to Iraq in the past 48 hours to help tackle a jihadist insurgency, a senior Iraqi official has told the Guardian."). Same on 15 June. [Al-Arabiya](#).

The active participation of Iran in fighting ISIL in Iraq would create an awkward problem for the USA. If the USA were to actively assist the Iraqi military, then the USA would be on the same side as Iran in the Iraq war, but on opposite sides from Iran in the Syrian civil war. ISIL operates in both Iraq (where it was created in the year 2004) and in Syria. The U.S. Government does not recognize Iran, after the Iranians captured the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and held Americans hostage for 444 days. Since 1979, Iran has been a rogue nation in many ways, with arms sales to North Korea, and anti-Semitic propaganda.

Beginning on 13 June, the commander of the elite Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards was in Baghdad "inspecting Iraqi defenses and reviewing plans with top commanders and Iranian-backed Iraqi Shiite militias". [The Guardian](#), 13 June; [Associated Press](#), 16 June; [The Guardian](#), 16 June.

On 20 June, Agence France-Press reports a Daily Press Briefing at the Pentagon in which it was admitted that "small numbers" of Iran's Revolutionary Guards were now operating in Iraq. [Daily Star](#). The Pentagon posted a transcript of the Press Briefing at its website:

QUESTION: I did ask you the same question last Friday. Can you confirm now if there are any Iranian Revolutionary Guards inside Iraq? Any information on that?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: What I can say is that we certainly have indications that there are some Iranian revolutionary operatives, Revolutionary Guard operatives in Iraq, but I've seen no indication of ground forces or major units or anything of that sort.

QUESTION: are cooperating with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: I'll let the Iranians speak for their activities and who they're talking to. But as I said, we have indications that there are at least some operatives inside Iraq. And, look, Iran has — their interference in Iraq is nothing new, and so I think it needs to be taken in that light.

QUESTION: do you have any number?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Small numbers would be our best indication. I'm not going to put a number figure on it, Joe. Small, small number. I've got time for one more [question]. What?

Daily Press Briefing, [Pentagon](#), 20 June 2014.

On 25 June, the [New York Times](#) reports that Iran is delivering 140 tons/day of military supplies to Iraq, and Iran is operating surveillance drones over Iraq.

On 27 June, the [Washington Post](#) reports that the Iranians may return some of the approximately 130 aircraft that the Iraqis flew into Iran during the 1991 Gulf war, as Iraqi pilots fled from the war.

Syria/Iraq Cooperation

As ISIL moved loot stolen from the Iraqi military into Syria, the Syrian Air Force bombed ISIL. That makes good sense, to destroy the looted equipment *before* it can be distributed and used against the Syria military. But what is really interesting is that Agence France-Presse reported that the Syrian military was "in coordination with the Baghdad [Iraq] government" on 14-15 June. [Daily Star](#)(AFP) in Lebanon; [Arab News](#). The details of the "coordination" were *not* specified.

On 16 June, it was revealed that the Syrian Air Force bombed ISIL inside Iraq on 14 June. [Fox News](#); [Global Post](#).

On 24 June, the Syrian Air Force again bombed ISIL inside Iraq. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#). Unfortunately, 57 civilians were killed in the bombing. [CNN](#). The [BBC](#) reports Iraqi Prime Minister said the airstrikes were on the *Syrian* side of the border, but he also said: "There was no co-ordination involved. But we welcome this action. We actually welcome any Syrian strike against Isis... But we didn't make any request to Syria."

my comments: Because ISIL operates on both sides of the Syrian/Iraq border, it makes sense for the Syrian and Iraqi governments (who are predominantly Shiite Muslims) to cooperate on the annihilation of ISIL (who are Sunni Muslim). But if Iraq becomes an ally of Assad, then Obama will surely be displeased with Iraq, and the U.S. might retaliate by reducing deliveries of munitions to Iraq. Even worse for Obama's foreign policy would be an alliance amongst the Shiite nations of Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Not only would such an alliance increase sectarian tensions amongst the Sunnis in Syria and Iraq, but it would also exclude the USA from influence in Iraq (because the USA is the enemy of both Assad and Iran).

If the USA had adequate military intelligence in Iraq (e.g., reconnaissance flights), and *if* the USA had adequate bomber aircraft near Iraq, then the USA could have destroyed the looted equipment that ISIL was transporting from Mosul to Syria.

What happens if U.S. airplanes fly a mission to bomb ISIL in Western Iraq, but discover Syrian Air Force airplanes are simultaneously doing the same mission? Obviously, Obama will never allow coordination between the U.S. military and Syria. But without coordination, there is a risk of fighting between Syria and the USA, when the two nations share the same goal of annihilating ISIL. I wish Obama would both (1) abandon his obsession with deposing Assad, and (2) support Assad's war against terrorists (e.g., ISIL).

Russia/Iraq Cooperation

Sometime before January 2014, the U.S. Government sold three dozen F-16 fighter jet aircraft and two dozen Apache attack helicopters to Iraq, but then the Americans delayed the delivery until Sep 2014. See, e.g., [Wall Street Journal](#); [NY Times](#).

In June 2014, the desperate Iraqi government then turned to the Russians, who arranged for prompt delivery of a dozen used Sukhoi SU-25 Russian fighter jets. [BBC](#), 26 June.

At night on 28 June, five SU-25 fighter jets arrived in Iraq aboard a Russian cargo airplane. [Haaretz](#); [ITAR-TASS](#); [Voice of Russia](#).

On 29 June, *The New York Times* reports that Russian technicians have arrived in Iraq to assemble and prepare the SU-25 aircraft. [NY Times](#).

The SU-25 aircraft will give the Iraqis the capability to bomb and strafe ISIL, something the Iraqis desperately need to do.

12-30 June 2014

U.S. Government remarks to journalists

During the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department on 12 June, it was again apparent that the arrogant U.S. Government is not capable of admitting it made mistake(s) and wasted taxpayer's money.

QUESTION: There have been concerns, though, over the past few days that the Iraqi — in many places the Iraqi army just fled in the face of the offensive. There's been billions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer money poured into training and equipping the Iraqi Government. Has this been squandered? Is it a failure?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Jo, obviously the last events —

QUESTION: Just say yes and get it over with. (Laughter.)

MS. PSAKI: The events of the last several days are clearly ... they're alarming. And I think there's no question about that. ... there was a clear structural breakdown [in Iraq]. We were disappointed by the reaction of — or the steps that were taken by a range of security forces. But our commitment to Iraq is long-term. We share a commitment to addressing the threats from groups like ISIL, and that's why we are continuing to take steps and consider steps to increase their capacity.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 12 June 2014.

During the Daily Press Briefing at the White House, it was plainly stated that the U.S. would *not* send troops into Iraq again.

QUESTION: In the considerations, have you specifically ruled out the use of any U.S. ground forces?

MR. CARNEY: We are not contemplating ground troops. I want to be clear about that. The President was answering a question specifically about air strikes. And he made clear that we are considering our options as part of the overall effort to support Iraq as part of the overall assistance that we provide and can provide Iraq in this fight. But we are not contemplating ground troops.

Daily Press Briefing, [White House](#), 12 June 2014.

On Friday noon, 13 June, Obama made a brief speech and answered four questions from journalists at the White House:

.... Now, Iraq needs additional support to break the momentum of extremist groups and bolster the capabilities of Iraqi security forces. We will not be sending U.S. troops back into combat in Iraq, but I have asked my national security team to prepare a range of other options that could help support Iraqi security forces, and I'll be reviewing those options in the days ahead.

....

I do want to be clear though, this is not solely or even primarily a military challenge.

Over the past decade, American troops have made extraordinary sacrifices to give Iraqis an opportunity to claim their own future. Unfortunately, Iraq's leaders have been unable to overcome too often the mistrust and sectarian differences that have long been simmering there, and that's created vulnerabilities within the Iraqi government as well as their security forces.

So any action that we may take to provide assistance to Iraqi security forces has to be joined by a serious and sincere effort by Iraq's leaders to set aside sectarian differences, to promote stability, and account for the legitimate interests of all of Iraq's communities, and to continue to build the capacity of an effective security force. We can't do it for them. And in the absence of this type of political effort, short-term military action, including any assistance we might provide, won't succeed.

....

.... So the United States will do our part, but understand that ultimately it's up to the Iraqis, as a sovereign nation, to solve their problems.

....

Look, the United States has poured a lot of money into these Iraqi security forces, and we devoted a lot of training to Iraqi security forces. The fact that they are not willing to stand and fight, and defend their posts against admittedly hardened terrorists but not terrorists who are overwhelming in numbers indicates that there's a problem with morale, there's a problem in terms of commitment. And ultimately, that's rooted in the political problems that have plagued the country for a very long time.

Obama, "Statement by the President on Iraq," [White House](#), 13 June 2014.

While Obama was on vacation in California, Kerry called the Iraqi Foreign Minister on Saturday, 14 June, and

[Kerry] emphasized to the Foreign Minister that assistance from the United States would only be successful if Iraqi leaders were willing to put aside differences and implement a coordinated and effective approach to forge the national unity necessary to move the country forward and confront the threat of ISIL.

[State Dept.](#), 14 June.

On 16 June 2014, during an interview with Katie Couric, Kerry said he might be willing to cooperate with the Iranians on security issues in Iraq. In Jan 2002, President George W. Bush labeled Iran as part of the "Axis of Evil". Now we are contemplating cooperating with Evil. Here is the relevant part of the interview:

QUESTION: [W]ill you reach out to Iran, and how can that country be helpful? Or is that like entering into a hornet's nest, because that will inflame the Sunnis?

SECRETARY KERRY: We're open — look, we're open to discussions if there's something constructive that can be contributed by Iran if Iran is prepared to do something that is going to respect the integrity and sovereignty of Iraq and the ability of the government to reform —

QUESTION: Can you see cooperating with Iran militarily?

SECRETARY KERRY: I — at this moment, I think we need to go step by step and see what, in fact, might be a reality, but I wouldn't rule out anything that would be constructive to providing real stability, a respect for the constitution, a respect for the election process, and a respect for the ability of the Iraqi people to form a government that represents all of the interests of Iraq, not one sectarian group over another. It has to be inclusive, and that has been one of the great problems of the last few years.

QUESTION: If Iran recognizes that, would you be willing to work with that country?

SECRETARY KERRY: Let's see what Iran might or might not be willing to do before we start making any pronouncements. I think we are open to any constructive process here that could minimize the violence, hold Iraq together, the integrity of the country, and eliminate the presence of outside terrorist forces that are ripping it apart.

"Interview With Katie Couric of Yahoo! News," [U.S. State Dept.](#), 16 June 2014.

In response to Kerry's hint of possible cooperation with Iran, the Pentagon promptly said "... there is absolutely no intention and no plan to coordinate military activity between the United States and Iran". The Pentagon did *not* release a transcript of that press briefing, but the statement was reported by [Reuters](#).

On 16 June, Obama's Deputy Press Secretary said: "... any conversations with the Iranian regime will not include military coordination. We will not be — we're not interested in any effort to coordinate military activities with Iran." [White House](#).

At the State Department's Daily Press Briefing on 16 June, the Spokesperson clarified what Kerry was trying to say about Iran:

PSAKI: We're not talking about coordinating any military action in Iraq with Iran. We would encourage Iran to push the Iraqis to act to address problems in a nonsectarian way.

....

QUESTION: Because frankly, at least in the short term, immediate term in terms of ISIL, it would appear as though you and the Iranians have a common interest in stopping them just solely on that one limited thing. And it seems to me that if there was going to be military intervention from both Iran and the United States, in this instance you wouldn't want them at cross-purposes. does cooperation mean coordination and consultation, or is it possible that there could be some cooperation?

MS. PSAKI: It means both.

....

QUESTION: Okay. Can you imagine a situation where, let's say, Al-Quds Brigade —

the Iranian special force — is going after the ISIS members while the United States is giving them air cover?

MS. PSAKI: I am not going to speculate. I think I've made very clear that we're not talking about military coordination or cooperation here.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 16 June 2014.

In the above Daily Press Briefing on 16 June, the word "Syria" appears only 3 times, but the word "Iraq" appears 94 times. The short-attention-span of journalists is apparent: nations that are *not* in crisis are boring. Being ignored is how problems like Syria and Iraq become out-of-control.

On the morning of 17 June, it became apparent that the prime minister of Iraq was continuing to blame Sunni Muslims for the problems in Iraq. Apparently, the prime minister was defying the demands of Obama and Kerry — as well as a call from the United Nations Secretary General — to be more inclusive and less sectarian. [Reuters](#); [Voice of America](#); [Rudaw](#) in Kurdish Iraq; [Globe & Mail](#); [Hurriyet Daily](#) in Turkey. One of the problems in writing my essays on current news is that news organizations will change their story, but keep the original URL. That means I can accurately cite an early version of their story, but later my text is wrong, after the news story is changed. Early versions of the Reuters and VOA article emphasized the prime minister's inflammatory words, and characterized him as "defying" the U.S. demands to be less sectarian. Later versions deleted the "defying", so I added links to three news articles that retained the earlier presentation.

My comment is that after the USA denies military aid to the Iraqi government — because the Iraqi government is not "inclusive" (i.e., too sectarian) — then the Iraqi government may accept military aid from Iran. No one knows where an Iraq-Iran alliance would lead. An Iraq-Iran alliance could naturally lead to an Iraq-Iran-Syria alliance, which could help Assad in Syria. In particular, ISIL would no longer have a refuge in Iraq from Assad.

On 17 June there was another Daily Press Briefing at the State Department:

MS. PSAKI: Well, as we noted or we released last night, but let me reiterate for all of you here, Deputy Secretary Burns met briefly with Iranians on the margins of the P5+1 meeting in Vienna [on ending the Iranian nuclear weapons program], separate from the trilateral meeting. It was a brief on the margins; it was separate from the discussions and the negotiations that are ongoing. They discussed the need to support inclusivity in Iraq and the need to refrain from pressing a sectarian agenda.

....

MS. PSAKI: ... I mentioned this yesterday, but it's worth repeating: We're not talking about military cooperation or military coordination. In fact, we don't think that the focus should be on the military component in Iraq. But clearly any country that can make the argument that there needs to be unity and the sectarian tensions that have been flaming in Iraq are harmful to the stability is one we would feel is useful. That is the message that was sent from our end.

....

QUESTION: Is that the primary reason why there is this overture to Tehran?

MS. PSAKI: Primary reason —

QUESTION: For the overture to get it to get the message to [Iraqi Prime Minister] Maliki and whoever is advising him that they shouldn't focus so much on fighting this threat as much as putting energy into political reconciliation and inclusivity.

MS. PSAKI: That certainly is a prominent component of our message, yes.

....

QUESTION: So you think that if al-Maliki were to just hold hands with Sunni leaders prominently and sing "Kumbaya" that this would somehow stop the advance of ISIL within 50 miles of Baghdad?

MS. PSAKI: That's not what I'm suggesting. But we do think that at this time a unified government across all of the sects is an important component of a successful long-term outcome.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 17 June 2014.

On 17 June, ISIL was attacking Baquba, a city only 60 km north of Baghdad. As the "Kumbaya" question indicated, it is ridiculous for the U.S. Government to demand that the Iraqi government should be focusing on "inclusivity" and "unity" — instead of Iraq concentrating on annihilating ISIL terrorists.

On 18 June, Reuters released a story with the headline: "In Washington, growing chorus calls for Iraq's Maliki to go".

President Barack Obama came under pressure from U.S. lawmakers on Wednesday to persuade Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to step down over what they see as failed leadership in the face of an insurgency threatening his country.

As Obama held an hour-long meeting with congressional leaders on U.S. options in Iraq, administration officials joined a chorus of criticism of Maliki, faulting him for failing to heal sectarian rifts that militants have exploited.

Patricia Zengerle & Matt Spetalnick, "In Washington, growing chorus calls for Iraq's Maliki to go," [Reuters](#), 20:07 EDT, 18 June.

Reuters says that U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and John McCain are amongst those calling for the resignation of Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki.

On 18 June, the White House Press Secretary said:

QUESTION: If not enough has been done, as you say, then should Maliki step down?

MR. CARNEY: That's not obviously for us to decide. As I noted earlier, this is a country that has had democratic elections. There was a recent election that produced

results that requires the formation of a coalition government. That has, at least in recent past, been a process that takes some time. Given the circumstances, moving expeditiously is obviously a good idea. But that is something for the Iraqi people to decide, not for the United States or any outside nation to decide.

....

MR. CARNEY: I would say that ISIL is clearly a threat, a common threat to the entire region, including Iran, but Iraq will only successfully overcome this threat by governing in a non-sectarian manner, building and investing in the capacity of Iraq's security forces and addressing the legitimate concerns of Iraq's Sunni, Kurd and Shia communities. Turning to Iran is not going to accomplish these important steps and it won't solve Iraq's problems.

Iraq's leaders need to make decisions that reinforce the idea for all of Iraq's citizens that the government represents all of them and defends all of them. And governing in a sectarian way or reinforcing a perception that the central government is pursuing sectarian interests is not a recipe for success when it comes to dealing with the common threat posed by ISIL.

QUESTION: As the process to form this coalition government plays itself out after the most recent election, is Nouri al-Maliki the optimal leader of that process? Would there not be a better chance of it succeeding if he and those closest to him were open to a possible alternative? And would the United States be supportive of an alternative?

MR. CARNEY: We don't choose Iraq's leaders. We encourage all of the leaders of Iraq, in this government and in the future government that has to be formed as a result of the recent elections, to pursue non-sectarian governance. That is the way that Iraq can successfully maintain its security —

QUESTION: Considering his history, is Maliki the optimal figure to do that?

MR. CARNEY: Again, it's not for us to make that decision on behalf of the Iraqi people.

Daily Press Briefing, [White House](#), 18 June 2014.

Also on 18 June, the U.S. State Department's Spokesperson similarly indicated that Maliki's resignation was a matter for the people of Iraq:

QUESTION: Do you still have confidence in Maliki as the head of state in Iraq?

MS. PSAKI: Well, Lesley, as you know, he's the democratically elected leader of Iraq. Obviously, they're working through their elections process now. It's up to the people of Iraq to determine who their leadership is. We have expressed and continue to have concerns about the lack of inclusivity and the way of governing in a sectarian manner. There have been some steps taken over the last couple of days that have been encouraging, but clearly there's more that needs to be done, and we certainly don't expect that a couple of steps will solve months, if not years, of concern.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 18 June 2014.

Nonetheless, as clearly stated by Obama and Kerry, if Maliki's policies offend the U.S. Government, there may be no military aid to Maliki from the USA. Denial of aid to Maliki's government could push Maliki to begging from Iran. Note that — despite the clarity and wisdom of Mr. Carney and Ms. Psaki — legislators in the U.S. Congress are *not* bound by policy decisions of the executive branch of the U.S. Government.

13-18 Jun 2014
my comments on U.S. response to Iraq crisis

I was astounded to learn that Obama departed from the White House and flew across the country to deliver a commencement [speech](#) on global warming at University of California at Irvine on 14 June. While in California, Obama also played golf and attended a fundraising event for Democrats in California. ([Associated Press](#)) Obama departed from the White House on Friday afternoon (13 June) and returned on Monday (17:30 EDT on 16 June), leaving him unavailable for meetings on Iraq during this critical time. Obama should have handed his written speech to someone else (e.g., Senator Boxer from California) to read at the University commencement. Further, Obama — who avoided science and mathematics in college — can *not* understand climate change. Obama should talk about something he understands, like how to make a failure of foreign policy.

Obama is conditioning urgent military aid on political changes in the Iraqi government. This urgent crisis gives Obama an opportunity to meddle in the internal government of a sovereign nation. It is unlikely that centuries of rivalries between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Iraq, and between Kurds and Arabs, can be simply put aside "to forge national unity" in Iraq. In the USA, much weaker rivalries between Democrats and Republicans have caused the U.S. Congress to be dysfunctional. And when there is overwhelming consensus, civil liberties generally suffer (e.g., the [Patriot Act](#) in 1991. See also my essay on the [Value of Dissent.](#)).

I think Obama is wrong when he said on 13 June that the ISIL crisis is *not* "a military challenge", but is primarily a political problem for the Iraqis to solve. As ISIL travels in a convoy toward its next target, U.S. military aircraft could strafe and bomb the convoy, annihilating the ISIL convoy. Such repeated military intervention could help solve the ISIL crisis. Waiting until after ISIL has captured a city creates a much more difficult military problem to clear guerrillas from an urban area. On the other hand, the time from detection of the convoy to the convoy's arrival at its destination could be less than an hour — giving little time to launch aircraft and travel to the convoy.

Obama is right to complain about the unwillingness of the Iraqi army to "stand and fight" against a numerically inferior ISIL. But better training of the Iraqi army will take time, and we need an immediate intervention. Using a Shiite militia to fight the Sunni terrorists in ISIL might solve the motivation and morale problem, but that will exacerbate sectarian tension that has plagued Iraq for a long time.

Given that the USA destroyed the stable government of Saddam Hussein in 2003, which unleashed terrorists inside Iraq, I think we have an obligation to provide some limited

military intervention to prevent ISIL from overrunning Iraq. I agree with Obama's limitation that there will be no U.S. troops on the ground fighting ISIL, as that would lead to deaths and injuries to Americans.

Let us be clear here. ISIL is *not* rebelling against some injustice perpetrated by the current Iraqi government. The goal of ISIL is to create a medieval Sunni muslim caliphate in both Iraq and Syria, which is a different concept for a government in Arab lands. ISIL is a terrorist group. For example, ISIL regards Shiite Muslims as heretics who deserve to die. ISIL has already committed *many* atrocities that show they are a threat to the freedom of everyone.

Issues of sectarianism or discrimination by the Iraqi government are separate issues that can be addressed *after* the terrorism and violent insurgency ends. So I disagree with the U.S. Government's policy that political change must occur in Iraq *before* the U.S. will help defeat ISIL. Regardless of the Iraqi government's policies, the USA has a strong interest in seeing ISIL defeated. Moreover, political change — and consequent trust by minorities — can take years to accomplish, while defeating ISIL is something that must be done in the next few days.

In 2003, the U.S. Government was demanding regime change in Iraq, and the USA invaded Iraq to depose Saddam Hussein. Since June 2011, the U.S. Government has been demanding that Assad resign in Syria. In 2012, the U.S. Government demanded the resignation of Gaddafi in Libya. On 18 June 2014, Reuters reports a "growing chorus" of U.S. Government officials calling for the resignation of al-Maliki in Iraq. (Ironically, al-Maliki was re-elected on 30 April 2014 — in a democratic election — to a likely third term as Prime Minister. [Reuters](#), 19 May 2014.) The arrogant U.S. Government seems to demand that foreign leaders resign if they offend the Americans. History shows that *after* Hussein and Gaddafi were removed in Iraq and Libya, those nations had a dysfunctional government that was worse than being ruled by a tyrant.

19 June 2014 Obama finally makes a decision

On 10 June, ISIL captured Mosul. *Nine days later*, Obama finally decided how to respond. At 13:32 EDT on 19 June, Obama said:

.... As I said last week, ISIL poses a threat to the Iraqi people, to the region, and to U.S. interests. So today I wanted to provide you an update on how we're responding to the situation.

First, we are working to secure our embassy and personnel operating inside of Iraq. As President, I have no greater priority than the safety of our men and women serving overseas. So I've taken some steps to relocate some of our embassy personnel, and we've sent reinforcements to better secure our facilities.

Second, at my direction, we have significantly increased our intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets so that we've got a better picture of what's taking place inside of Iraq. And this will give us a greater understanding of what ISIL is doing,

where it's located, and how we might support efforts to counter this threat.

Third, the United States will continue to increase our support to Iraqi security forces. We're prepared to create joint operation centers in Baghdad and northern Iraq to share intelligence and coordinate planning to confront the terrorist threat of ISIL. Through our new Counterterrorism Partnership Fund, we're prepared to work with Congress to provide additional equipment. We have had advisors in Iraq through our embassy, and we're prepared to send a small number of additional American military advisors — up to 300 — to assess how we can best train, advise, and support Iraqi security forces going forward.

American forces will not be returning to combat in Iraq, but we will help Iraqis as they take the fight to terrorists who threaten the Iraqi people, the region, and American interests as well.

Fourth, in recent days, we've positioned additional U.S. military assets in the region. Because of our increased intelligence resources, we're developing more information about potential targets associated with ISIL. And going forward, we will be prepared to take targeted and precise military action, if and when we determine that the situation on the ground requires it. If we do, I will consult closely with Congress and leaders in Iraq and in the region.

....

.... Now that the results of Iraq's recent [30 April] election has been certified, a new parliament should convene as soon as possible. The formation of a new government will be an opportunity to begin a genuine dialogue and forge a government that represents the legitimate interests of all Iraqis.

Now, it's not the place for the United States to choose Iraq's leaders. It is clear, though, that only leaders that can govern with an inclusive agenda are going to be able to truly bring the Iraqi people together and help them through this crisis. Meanwhile, the United States will not pursue military options that support one sect inside of Iraq at the expense of another. There's no military solution inside of Iraq, certainly not one that is led by the United States. But there is an urgent need for an inclusive political process, a more capable Iraqi security force, and counterterrorism efforts that deny groups like ISIL a safe haven.

Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Iraq," [White House](#), 19 June 2014.

My comments: On Obama's first point, on 16 June he announced that "up to approximately 275 U.S. military personnel are deploying to Iraq to provide support and security for U.S. personnel and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad." [White House](#). Protection of the U.S. Embassy is unremarkable, but a better plan might be to temporarily close the Embassy in Baghdad until the Iraqi security situation improves.

On Obama's third point, he is sending "up to 300" military "advisers" to Iraq to train and advise Iraqi soldiers. That is precisely how we got sucked into the Vietnam war. Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy sent a small number of "advisers" to Vietnam, and when that

proved inadequate, President Johnson had a half-million U.S. military in Vietnam. Moreover, Obama's third point seems to violate Obama's promise the previous week not to send troops into Iraq. In response to a question by Jim Acosta, Obama said: "American combat troops are not going to be fighting in Iraq again." But when the Iraqi army proves inadequate for the task of exterminating ISIL, the obvious next step is to have U.S. soldiers exterminate ISIL.

Obama's fourth point, the "targeted and precise military action", apparently includes air strikes on ISIL at some future time, *after* the USA develops military intelligence in Iraq.

Obama tells the Iraqi parliament to convene "as soon as possible" and choose a leader who is "inclusive" — but Obama also says "it's not the place for the United States to choose Iraq's leaders." The [Associated Press](#), and also in a [second story](#), noticed Obama's contradiction: "The U.S. leader stopped short of calling for Nouri al-Maliki to resign, saying 'it's not our job to choose Iraq's leaders.' But, his carefully worded comments did all but that."

Obama still seems to believe that sectarianism in Iraq's current government *caused* the recent success of ISIL in Iraq. But ISIL is a terrorist organization that is attempting to establish a medieval Sunni muslim caliphate in both Iraq and Syria. ISIL will fight against *any* secular government, especially a government that contains a majority of Shiite Muslims.

Obama makes the bewildering statement that "There's no military solution inside of Iraq". The annihilation of ISIL by the military would solve the ISIL problem. The other problems in Iraq may well have legal or political solutions.

ISIL has been on an active military campaign in Iraq, beginning with ISIL's capture of Fallujah on 4 Jan 2014. Why has Obama ignored ISIL's campaign — and the pleas of the Iraqi government — for six months, and let the crisis worsen? Apparently, no journalist dares to ask that question.

Perhaps the way to explain the crisis to the Americans is to create a hypothetical in which a gang of thousands of vicious white supremacists capture dozens of towns and small cities in Mississippi and Alabama, and were preparing to capture the capitols in Jackson and Montgomery. Would Obama wait six months from the first attack to assist these two states? Would Obama wait nine days after the white supremacists captured the big city of Birmingham, and then announce a tepid plan? Would Obama call on the governors of Mississippi and Alabama to be more inclusive of moderate white supremacists?

12 June: McCain's rant

On 12 June, U.S. Senator John McCain called for the resignation of Obama's entire national security team, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, because of their failure to prevent the success of ISIL in Iraq. McCain blamed the withdrawal of U.S. military from Iraq in Dec 2011 for the current crisis. [The Hill](#); [Politico](#); [CNN](#).

McCain's call for the resignations was ignored by major newspapers in the USA. The best citation is to the transcript of McCain's [speech](#) on the floor of the U.S. Senate, published at 160 Congressional Record S3628-S3630 (12 June 2014).

But remember that the withdrawal of all U.S. military from Iraq in 2011 was actually the result of the Iraqi government refusing to extend immunity in Iraqi courts for alleged crimes committed in Iraq by U.S. military personnel (i.e., refusal to extend the Status of Forces Agreement). Therefore, the blame for the withdrawal is on the Iraqi government, *not* Obama.

Further, the withdrawal in 2011 had much popular support in the USA, because the nine-year war in Iraq had killed more than 4400 Americans, maimed tens of thousands of Americans, and cost the U.S. taxpayers more money than they could afford, all for *no benefit* to the USA.

On 12 June, McCain called for Obama to return Petraeus to government service. But, on 18 June at a conference in London, Petraeus seemed to endorse Obama's plan for political change in Iraq *before* U.S. military support in Iraq. [Spectator](#) in UK; [Washington Post](#); [NBC News](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Arab News](#).

My comments on 21 June: In retrospect, McCain's speech on 12 June was seen as a rant of an angry old man who had been ignored in 2011. And McCain was ignored again in June 2014.

When the USA deposed Saddam Hussein in 2003, the Americans gave the Iraqi people the gift of democracy. The Iraqi people squandered that gift, with a sectarian government, rampant corruption, and a cowardly army. (Remember the cowardly Iraqi soldiers stripped off their uniforms and fled when ISIL invaded Mosul on 10 June, even though the soldiers greatly outnumbered ISIL.) But one is reluctant to say that innocent Iraqi citizens *deserve* to live under a repressive ISIL government.

More importantly to foreign nations, it is *not* acceptable to allow ISIL to have a base in Iraq, from which ISIL can attack neighboring arab nations in a future expansion of the ISIL terrorist regime. And a successful ISIL could unleash terrorists to attack Western Europe and the USA, the way that Osama bin Laden did in the 1990s and on 11 Sep 2001.

My criticism of Obama is limited to Obama's failure to act in January 2014, when ISIL captured Fallujah, and Obama's series of subsequent failures: the lack of air strikes on ISIL convoys in Iraq, Obama's demand for political change in Iraq as a precondition for U.S. military aid, and Obama's tepid response on 19 June.

What is important now is to stop blaming people for the ISIL disaster in Iraq, and focus on the annihilation of ISIL. That means McCain needs to stop criticizing Obama's withdrawal of soldiers from Iraq in 2011, and Obama needs to stop criticizing the current Iraqi government for failing to be "inclusive". The focus should be on annihilating ISIL in Iraq and Syria. See Michael Gerson's editorial in the [Washington Post](#), 19 June 2014.

23 June 2014
USA decides to fight ISIL

On 23 June, 13 days after ISIL captured Mosul, Kerry finally agreed that the USA would fight against ISIL, even if the Iraqi government was not immediately inclusive. Kerry's

remarks came at the end of a day of meetings in Baghdad with Iraqi leaders, including Maliki. Kerry said:

Now, President Obama asked me to visit Baghdad today to demonstrate America's support for Iraq and its people during this time of crisis. This is clearly a moment when the stakes for Iraq's future could not be clearer. ISIL's campaign of terror, their grotesque acts of violence and repressive ideology pose a grave danger to Iraq's future. ISIL is not, as it claims, fighting on behalf of Sunnis. ISIL is not fighting for a stronger Iraq; quite the contrary. ISIL is fighting to divide Iraq and to destroy Iraq.

So this is a critical moment for Iraq's future. It is a moment of decision for Iraq's leaders, and it's a moment of great urgency. Iraq faces an existential threat, and Iraq's leaders have to meet that threat with the incredible urgency that it demands. The very future of Iraq depends on choices that will be made in the next days and weeks. And the future of Iraq depends primarily on the ability of Iraq's leaders to come together and take a stand united against ISIL — not next week, not next month, but now.

In each of my meetings today, ... I emphasize that defending Iraq against ISIL depends largely on their ability — all of them — to form a new government and to do it quickly. It is essential that Iraq's leaders form a genuinely inclusive government as rapidly as possible within their own constitutional framework.

....

So I encouraged the leaders today to start this process and to move along a path that is outlined by Iraq's constitution itself. Nothing that the United States through President Obama sending me here today — nothing that we asked them to do or offered is outside of the constitutional process or without complete respect for the choices of the leaders of Iraq. The United States is not choosing any leader; we are not making any preconditions with respect to who can or can't take part. That is up to Iraq. It's up to the people of Iraq to make that decision. And what we asked for today is also very much in line with the message that Grand Ayatollah Sistani offered just a few days ago. As I told Iraqi leaders today, and as I've made clear to my counterparts in the region, neither the United States nor any other country has the right to pick who leads Iraq. That is up to the people of Iraq. So it is when all of Iraq's people can shape Iraq's future, when the legitimate concerns and aspirations of all of Iraq's communities — Sunni, Shia, Kurd — are all respected, that is when Iraq is strongest. And that is when Iraq will be the most secure.

....

QUESTION [Michael Gordon of The New York Times]: Given these security developments [i.e., the rapid conquest by ISIL of dozens of towns and cities in Iraq], can the United States really afford to wait until the government formation process in Iraq is complete before taking some form of action, potentially air strikes? Thank you.

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, let me answer the last part of that question first. President Obama has not declared that he will wait. He has made it very clear in his

most recent statement that he is preparing with the increased intelligence and the work that the military is doing at this point in time, and the President is prepared to take action when and if the President decides that is important. Clearly, everyone understands that Samarra is an important line. Historically, an assault on Samarra created enormous problems in Iraq. That is something that we all do not want to see happen again. And so the President and the team, the entire security team, are watching this movement and these events very, very closely.

....

[In response to a question from Andrea Mitchell of NBC News, Kerry said:]

And the fact is that [ISIL does] pose a threat. They cannot be given safe haven anywhere. Because given safe haven, they will continue to plot against governments locally, regionally, and abroad. And that is clear from their own communications and from our knowledge of them. So that's why they pose a serious threat. They are destabilizing. There isn't one country — not Iran, not Iraq, not Jordan, not Israel, not Turkey, not anybody in the region — who believes that ISIL is something that can be tolerated in this region. That's why it is important to focus now on ISIL, and that's why again I reiterate the President will not be hampered if he deems it necessary if the formation [of an inclusive, unity government in Iraq] is not complete.

One thing I want to emphasize: If the President of the United States makes a decision that he has to do something with respect to ISIL because of the urgency, it has nothing to do with support for a specific government, or for — let me rephrase that. It's not specifically support for the existing prime minister or for one sect or another. It will be against ISIL, because ISIL is a terrorist organization, and I think everybody today that we talked to understood the urgency and the ability to separate what the United States might do from their government formation process itself.

John Kerry, "Press Availability on Syria and Iraq," [State Dept.](#), 23 June 2014.

My comments: Kerry was wrong when he said "ISIL is fighting to divide Iraq and to destroy Iraq." ISIL is trying to establish a medieval Sunni Islamic caliphate in Iraq. If that "divides and destroys" Iraq, it will be an incidental consequence of ISIL's goal, not something that ISIL intended. Kerry is preaching inclusiveness and unity, and "divide and destroy" is the antithesis of unity.

The Iraqis had an election on 30 April. Their new parliament has, as of 23 June, not yet met. Parliament needs to convene, so they can choose a speaker, a president, and then a prime minister. The Iraqi constitution specifies a deadline of 30 June for the first meeting of parliament, and it appears that the Iraqis will wait until the last possible moment to convene their new parliament and make decisions. The Iraqi process appears glacially slow. But in the USA we have elections in the first week of November and convene the new government in January, which is also a delay of two months. The problem is that Iraq is being rapidly overrun by ISIL and the Iraqi army is *ineffective* — so the Iraqis *no longer* have the luxury of weeks or months in which to make leisurely decisions. Despite the urgency, the Iraqi Parliament did *not* meet in the two weeks after the fall of Mosul on 10 June.

Kerry strongly stated that the choice of leaders for Iraq would be solely the decision of the

Iraqi people: "The United States is not choosing any leader; we are not making any preconditions with respect to who can or can't take part." Why is the U.S. policy different for Syria, where Obama/Clinton/Kerry have been saying since June 2011 that Assad *must* resign? Both Iraq and Syria are sovereign nations in which terrorists are fighting against the lawful government.

Kerry is wrong when he said: "President Obama has not declared that he will wait." Obama's remarks on 13 June and 19 June — quoted above with citations to the White House website — clearly said the Iraqi government would need to become more inclusive *before* the U.S. would provide military assistance in fighting ISIL. Moreover, all of the talk by Obama, Kerry, Psaki, etc. about inclusiveness and unity clearly said that changes in the Iraqi government were a requirement. Kerry pretends that Obama's policy has *not* changed, when it is a significant change of policy to discuss having U.S. airstrikes *before* an inclusive Iraqi government is formed.

I am glad that Obama finally came to the realization that we must immediately have U.S. military strikes against ISIL in Iraq. However, because Obama waited six months after ISIL captured Fallujah, and because Obama waited 13 days after ISIL captured Mosul, we now face the much more difficult problem of dislodging ISIL from cities, where ISIL can take refuge inside buildings. It is inevitable that innocent civilians will be killed and buildings will be destroyed, as a result of Obama's failure to act promptly.

Finally, Kerry is correct to make explicit that U.S. military action would be to annihilate ISIL, and *not* to support specific political leaders in Iraq. That is a consequence of the doctrine that it is solely the decision of the Iraqi people to choose their leaders.

24-26 June 2014

Whoa! U.S. will wait to strike ISIL U.S. reacts to Iran and Syria in Iraq

On 24 June, Kerry gave a series of interviews with journalists, in which he further explained the U.S. response to the debacle in Iraq.

The first interview was with Margaret Brennan of CBS.

SECRETARY KERRY: If the President were to just make some decision to strike here or there [in Iraq], there's no backup, there's no "there" there in the Iraqi Government, it could be completely wasted. It's not a pathway to victory. So what you need to do first is get the government formation done here in Iraq. You need to have leadership that can unify Iraq, reconstitute the military, the army itself here in Iraq, and help them to be able to push back.

....

.... It would be a complete and total act of irresponsibility for the President just to order a few strikes, but there's no government, there's no backup, there's no military, there's nothing there that provides the capacity for success.

John Kerry, "Interview With Margaret Brennan of CBS," [State Dept.](#), 24 June 2014.

On 23 June — and quoted above — Kerry said Obama could decide to have airstrikes in Iraq *before* the Iraqis finished forming an inclusive government. But in the 24 June interview with Brennan — and quoted above — Kerry said such airstrikes "could be completely wasted." A journalist noted the contradiction during a White House Press Briefing on 24 June:

QUESTION: Secretary Kerry said this morning that to have a U.S. aircraft bomb in Iraq before the formation of a new government would be completely wasted.

Yesterday, he said that the administration would not have to wait for a new government in order to strike. What has changed? Is it now a precondition of U.S. help from the air that there be a new Iraqi government?

MR. EARNEST: I think there was a — the context in which he made those comments was important. What Secretary Kerry was talking about is something that I referred to yesterday. Somebody asked if the President was willing to sort of keep open the option on the table to consider military action in Syria to confront the threat that's posed by ISIL. What this President has made clear is a willingness to act unilaterally anywhere in the world to protect our national security interests. So when it comes to protecting our core national security interests, the President is willing to use the strongest, most powerful military in the history of the world to protect our national security interests.

.....

And what we've been very clear about, and what the President himself was very clear about when he spoke in front of the helicopter 10 days ago [actually on 13 June] was that to take any sort of direct military action along those lines in pursuit of that goal, we would need to see a clear commitment from Iraq's political leaders to the pursuit of an inclusive governing agenda.

White House Press [Briefing](#), 24 June 2014.

Continuing the 24 June interview of Kerry by Margaret Brennan:

QUESTION: But as that political process goes on, on the battlefield ISIS is making gains and the Iraqi army just walked away. I mean, is the U.S. willing to strike at safe havens in Syria and in Iraq?

SECRETARY KERRY: The President is going to make the judgment based on what Iraqi's themselves determine they're prepared to do and based on the security threat that is defined over the course of these next days. The President —

QUESTION: But nearly every Iraqi leader —

SECRETARY KERRY: Let me just answer. Let —

QUESTION: — asked you for military help.

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, the President — sure. I'm sure he'd like to have the United States have — become his air force. But the question is: Is he prepared to become a legitimate government? Is the government here prepared to do what's

necessary?

QUESTION: Maliki, you're talking about?

SECRETARY KERRY: Not just Maliki. Will they all come together in a unified government that has the ability to make whatever the President decides to do a success? It would be a complete and total act of irresponsibility for the President just to order a few strikes, but there's no government, there's no backup, there's no military, there's nothing there that provides the capacity for success.

So what we are doing is a deliberate, careful, thoughtful approach, listening to the people here, listening to the allies, listening to the partner countries in the region, and putting together something that can work. And the President always reserves the right, as he does anywhere in the world in any crisis, to use force if it's going to be to the advantage of a particular strategy. And he reserves that right. But he and I and our government are insisting that the constitutional process needs to be respected in Iraq, there needs to be a unity government that is prepared to stand up to ISIL, prepared to reconstitute the military, prepared to make the decisions that actually can turn the present —

QUESTION: That takes time.

SECRETARY KERRY: No — well, it's happening very rapidly right now. It's one of the reasons why I've been here [in Iraq]. In the next few days, they will be meeting and deciding. In about a week from now, they will convene as a Council of Representatives in order to elect a speaker, elect a president, and then move to the election of the prime minister. And if in the meantime there's a need, the President obviously reserves the right to do what might be necessary. But his focus and mine is on the issue of government formation so we're not making some decision about American force in a vacuum, but it's, rather, tied into a prospect for success in the long run.

John Kerry, "Interview With Margaret Brennan of CBS," [State Dept.](#), 24 June 2014.

My comments: The White House Press Spokesman is wrong to say one needs to look at the "context" of Kerry's remarks. Kerry is being inconsistent, as Kerry attempts to avoid the fact that Obama and Kerry have ignored a string of ISIL victories in Iraq since 4 Jan 2014, and now the USA is unprepared to use airstrikes to attack ISIL.

Kerry's rhetorical question "Is [Maliki] prepared to become a legitimate government?" implies that Iraq does *not* currently have a "legitimate government". That is a pretty harsh condemnation of Maliki. Lack of "legitimacy" is the criticism that Hillary Clinton and Obama made about Assad in Syria.

Note that Obama "reserves the right" to use military force in Iraq. But instead of using airstrikes to *prevent* ISIL from capturing cities, Obama is going to wait for Iraq to form an inclusive government, then let the Iraqi army dislodge ISIL from each of dozens of captured cities. That ignores the problem that dislodging ISIL from each captured city will be difficult, and will kill civilians and destroy buildings. But that is Kerry's "thoughtful approach".

Margaret Brennan, the journalist interviewing Kerry, kept making the valid point that forming an effective unity government that the Iraqi people trust will take time (months?, years?), and meanwhile ISIL has gained control of much of the Sunni area in Iraq. Kerry's response to her point was *not* convincing to me. Frankly, Kerry seems to be spewing slogans and clichés at a time when ISIL is conquering Iraq and the incompetent Iraqi government really needs military assistance, like airstrikes on ISIL convoys.

In an interview with the BBC, Kerry said:

QUESTION: You're fighting ISIS. You're calling on your allies to fight ISIS. President Assad of Syria says he's fighting ISIS. How long until the U.S. is going to turn around and work with President Assad again?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, President Assad is one of the principal reasons — the principal reason — that ISIS exists. President Assad is a magnet for jihadists and foreign fighters from around the world, and that's why they've been conglomerating in Syria and spreading their tentacles out. So if President Assad really wants to fight terrorists, he would declare that he is not going to continue to serve, he will work for a transition government, and he will end the crisis of Syria. That's the way you deal with it.

John Kerry, "Interview With Kim Ghattas of BBC," [State Dept.](#), 24 June 2014.

My comments: Does Kerry really believe the fantasy that if Assad resigns, then all of the terrorists in Syria will depart from Syria? ISIL has been very clear about its goal of establishing a medieval Sunni Muslim caliphate in Iraq and Syria. The Nusra Front in Syria wants to establish a Sunni Muslim government in Syria. These terrorists want to *control* Syria.

Obama/Clinton/Kerry have an obsession with deposing Assad. The reality is that Assad is winning the civil war in the most populated part of Syria, Assad is firmly in control of the lawful Syrian government, and Assad was recently re-elected to another seven-year term. And if Assad is deposed, it will create a power vacuum in which terrorists will flourish.

One of the worst foreign policy mistakes of Obama was to demand the resignation of Assad in 2011 and then continue that erroneous demand. Moreover, it is inconsistent for Obama and Kerry to tell Assad to resign, but say the leader of Iraq is solely the choice of the Iraqi people.

Above, I discussed [Iran's](#) response and [Syria's](#) response to the debacle in Iraq. On 25 June, Kerry gave a press conference in Brussels. In response to the final two questions by journalists, Kerry commented on the role of Iran and Syria in Iraq:

With respect to Iran and its intentions and role in Iraq, frankly, you should best direct that question to Iran and to the Government of Iraq. But from our point of view, we've made it clear to everyone in the region that we don't need anything to take place that might exacerbate the sectarian divisions that are already at a heightened level of

tension. And so it's very important that nothing take place that contributes to the extremism or could act as a flash point with respect to the sectarian divide. And —

QUESTION: Has the war been widened?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, widened from what? Widened from five minutes ago, an hour ago, yesterday? It's been widened, obviously, in the last days with the reports of [Iran Revolutionary Guards] personnel, of some people from Iran being engaged in Iraq, with perhaps even some Syrian activities therein. And that's one of the reasons why government formation is so urgent so that the leaders of Iraq can begin to make decisions necessary to protect Iraq without outside forces moving to fill a vacuum.

John Kerry, "Press Availability at NATO Headquarters," [State Dept.](#), 25 June 2014.

Also on 25 June, Bernadette Meehan, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council at the White House, said:

The solution to the threat confronting Iraq is not the intervention of the Assad regime, which allowed [ISIL] to thrive in the first place. The solution to Iraq's security challenge does not involve militias or the murderous Assad regime, but the strengthening of the Iraqi security forces to combat threats.

"Flashpoint'? US officials concerned about Iran, Syria intervention in Iraq," [Fox News](#), 25 June 2014.

Ms. Meehan's statement was *not* posted at the White House website.

On 25 June, Obama's Press Secretary echoed Meehan's statement:

QUESTION: And if I could just switch to the situation in Iraq. We now have Syria launching airstrikes against ISIL. We have Iran deepening its military involvement in support of the Iraqi government. How concerned is the U.S. that Iraq is just becoming this military playground with the U.S. also involved as well?

MR. EARNEST: Well, let me start by saying that we're aware of reports that the Syrian government has taken strikes against targets in Iraq. We have no reason to dispute those reports. But for confirmation or additional details about what those strikes may have included, I would refer you to the government in Iraq.

More broadly, I would underscore that the solution to the threat confronting Iraq is not the intervention of the Assad regime. In fact, it's the Assad regime and the terrible violence that they perpetuated against their own people that allowed ISIL to thrive in the first place. The solution to Iraq's security challenge does not involve militias or the murderous Assad regime, but the strengthening of the Iraqi security forces to combat threats.

Iraq's sovereignty must be respected, and the government of Iraq must focus now on strengthening its internal political and security institutions in an inclusive way. Ultimately, the long-term solution to the instability that we see in Iraq right now will require the political leadership of Iraq to make the kinds of decisions that will unite the country. That means bolstering the security forces. The best way to bolster the security forces is to pursue the kinds of inclusive policies that make sure that the security forces

are representing the interests and security of everyone in that country. And they need to do a similar thing on the political front as well.

....

.... The fact of the matter is it's the responsibility of the people of Iraq to make decisions about their country, to make decisions about their political leadership,

....

.... We have made clear that it's the view of this administration that Assad has lost his legitimacy to lead and that he should leave.

White House Press [Briefing](#), 25 June 2014.

My comments: First, let me comment on Ms. Meehan's inflammatory statement, which was echoed by the White House Press Secretary. Assad did *not* "allow ISIL to thrive". ISIL was created in Iraq in 2004 (under the name of "Al-Qaeda in Iraq"), then spread to Syria in May 2013. While Assad has been concentrating on battling insurgents in heavily populated western Syria, and spending less resources on battling ISIL in northern and eastern Syria, Assad is *not* allowing ISIL to thrive.

Further, the "the strengthening of the Iraqi security forces" will require months of training, but Iraq needed military strikes on ISIL beginning in January 2014 when ISIL captured Fallujah. The need for military strikes on ISIL in Iraq intensified on 10 June, when ISIL was capturing Mosul. The U.S. Government *should* be grateful to Syria for attacking ISIL in Iraq, thereby killing terrorists and helping Iraq.

The White House Press Secretary asserts that "Iraq's sovereignty must be respected". This is strange, because the Iraqi government is *not* complaining of any violation of their sovereignty by either Syria or Iran. In fact, the Iraqi government seems to welcome the cooperation and support of Syria and Iran.

Once again, the White House inconsistently says that the choice of leaders for Iraq is solely the choice of the Iraqi people, while in Syria the U.S. Government says Assad should resign.

Second, responding to Kerry's statement in Brussels that was quoted above, it is true that intervention by Shiite governments in Syria or Iran would "exacerbate the sectarian divisions" in Iraq. But Kerry stopped short of saying that *everyone* in Iraq hates the USA, so not only will American intervention *not* "exacerbate the sectarian divisions", but also will strengthen the Iraqi consensus to hate Americans. (See [Voice of America](#))

Responding to Kerry's final sentence quoted above, why doesn't Kerry recognize the same problem for Syria — the defeat of Assad would create a "vacuum" that would be filled by jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL? A strong government — even a tyrant or a dictator — makes it difficult for terrorists to succeed.

On 25 June, al-Maliki rejected what he called a "national salvation" government.

[The Guardian](#); [BBC](#); [Gulf News](#). This "salvation government" seems to be a temporary government until the new parliament can agree on a new prime minister, a process that took 9 months in 2010, the previous time a new government was formed in Iraq.

On 26 June, the Iraqi government announced that the new Parliament would convene for the first time on 1 July, the last possible date under the Iraqi constitution. [Reuters](#). Sadly, the current Iraqi government does *not* understand the urgent crisis that faces it, as they continue to procrastinate. Or maybe those currently in power in Iraq are enjoying their last few days of power, before the new Parliament turfs them out. One might say that Maliki is a bad puppet for failing to dance to the tune of Kerry and Obama.

On 26 June, the [New York Times](#) and the [Associated Press](#) report that support has declined amongst Shiites for Maliki to have a third-term as prime minister.

On 26 June, Kerry was in Paris, where interest was more focused on the crisis in the Ukraine, and less on Syria and Iraq.

27 June

On the morning of 27 June, the head Shiite cleric in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, called on the new Parliament to decide on the parliament speaker, president, and prime minister *before* the first session of Parliament on 1 July. Because 27 June (Friday) is the weekly holy day for Muslims, that deadline gives only three days for a decision of a contentious issue, with at least four publicly named candidates for prime minister (i.e., al-Jaafari, Jabr, Abdul-Mahdi, and Allawi). [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon; [Al-Jazeera](#) blog; [Reuters](#).

Other Topics About Iraq

Consequences of Funding ISIL

On 18 June, the president of the Syrian National Coalition gave an extraordinarily undiplomatic speech to the delegates from 57 nations at the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Saudi Arabia:

It is far too late to issue any more warnings; disaster has now struck, and the threats of which we've repeatedly warned the world are now a nightmarish reality threatening the entire region with implications to world security and peace.

....

ISIS, with atrocities that has taken the world aback, is not a monster from a different world. It is the result of years of political, social, and security depravity. ISIS was formed in the Middle East, and those who created it, knowingly or not, are sitting here today pretending to fight it.

....

Finally, let us be realists and face the facts on the ground together. We cannot remain silent about ISIS's activities in Iraq and Syria. It is shameful to cut off an arm of a sinister octopus and leave the head intact to continue to move the rest of its evil arms. Ahmad al Jarba, "President Jarba's Speech to the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers," [SNC](#), 18 June.

On 18 June, the Associated Press reported that Arab nations were awakening to consequences of their past financial support of ISIL.

Saudi Arabia and other petro-powerhouses of the Gulf for years encouraged a flow of private cash to Sunni rebels in Syria. Now an al-Qaida breakaway group that benefited from some of that funding has stormed across a wide swath of Iraq, and Gulf nations fear its extremism could be a threat to them as well.

Those countries are trying to put the brakes on the network of private fundraisers sending money to the rebel movement, hoping to halt financing going to the radical Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Fundraising clerics complain that they are being told not to collect money for any Syrian rebels.

....

The Islamic State has emerged as one of the most radical factions in Syria's civil war and its priority, more than ousting Assad, has been to achieve its dream of a cross-border "Islamic emirate" in the region, starting with Iraq and Syria. Even before the Islamic State swept over Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, a week ago, Gulf nations began to worry the group is too uncontrollable, too ambitious and a potential threat to their rulers, who al-Qaida and other radicals have long said should be toppled.

Aya Batrawy & Matthew Lee, "Gulf Nations Struggle With Iraq Militant Blowback," [Associated Press](#), 22:11 GMT, 18 June 2014.

My comments: Funding terrorists in ISIL threatens *all* Arabs, including donors. But the supporters of ISIL were blind to the obvious consequences, perhaps because of the hatred of Sunni Muslims towards Shiite Muslims (e.g., Assad in Syria, Maliki in Iraq), or perhaps because the supporters of Sunni Muslim extremists believed themselves more pious than mainstream Muslims.

We see the same kind of blindness by politicians in Europe, who condemned Assad. But then a Frenchman returned from fighting with ISIL in Syria and murdered four people in Brussels, as described [above](#). Those murders awakened Europeans to the dangers of terrorists returning from Syria. But the Europeans — as well as Obama and Kerry — are still *not* willing to support Assad in the battle against terrorism.

Shiite vs. Sunni in Iraq

On 20 June, *The Independent* in London had an insightful article about Maliki's future, after

the U.S. Government refused to provide military aid until *after* Maliki had changed his policies.

Isolated and discredited by humiliating military defeat, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, is likely to go soon, battered as he is by only slightly veiled demands for his immediate departure from powerful figures who once supported him. Within hours of President Obama making it implicitly clear that he wants a change of political leadership in Baghdad, the spiritual leader of the Iraqi Shia, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, was calling for a new and "effective" government that avoided the mistakes of the old. Nobody in Baghdad has any doubts that he wants the Prime Minister gone.

The longer Mr Maliki clings on to power the more likely it is that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isis) will win further victories and the Sunni community will remain united behind the al-Qa'ida-type group. Military sources in Baghdad say Mr Obama's clear signal that the US was not going to use its air force to preserve the status quo in Baghdad has "damaged the army's morale and self-confidence". The army had been hoping somewhat unrealistically for a promise of air strikes to stem the advance of Isis and its allies.

....

... Mr Maliki has become a hate figure for the five or six million-strong Iraqi Sunni community. Hostility to the Prime Minister as responsible for their oppression has enabled Isis fanatics to collaborate with disparate Sunni armed groups whom they were previously fighting. For the Sunni, hatred and fear of Mr Maliki is a powerful uniting force just as detestation of Saddam Hussein used to enable the Shia and Kurds to plaster over their differences.

....

A problem in the present crisis is that Iraqi political leaders may be relying too much on the US or Iran to bail them out. "They like to believe that the Americans have a magic wand and the Iranians will always stick with them regardless," says Ghassan al-Attiyah, Iraqi political scientist and activist. "The Americans may be willing to fight Isis but they do not want to be dragged into a sectarian war against the Sunni."

Patrick Cockburn, "Iraq crisis: Maliki's days in power numbered as Iran and US lose faith," [The Independent](#), 20 June 2014.

Cockburn's article was cited by [All Iraq News](#), 21 June.

The Iraqi belief that the Americans have a "magic wand" later appears in a 22 June background [briefing](#) by an anonymous senior U.S. Government official, who said: "All of [the Iraqi government leaders] look to us for answers and solutions and like a magic wand." Reported in the news media by [Fox News](#). My comment is that seeking a magic wand is a sign of incompetence and bewilderment, by bunglers who have no understanding of how to manage a nation.

During Saddam Hussein's government (1979-2003) most of the senior government and military leaders were from the minority Sunni sect. When the USA invaded in 2003, they

purged Hussein's people from the Iraqi government, thereby creating two problems. First, all of the experienced Iraqi leaders were tainted Sunnis, so purging them created an inexperienced and incompetent government. Second, the new Shiite government inflicted revenge on the Sunnis for past discrimination. The mirror image of the second problem is that the Sunnis felt entitled under Hussein, but were now discriminated against. Note that the democratic government created by the USA was *not* inclusive of Sunni Muslims who had participated in Hussein's government.

I do not see any easy way to quickly create an "inclusive" government that satisfies both Shiites and Sunnis. In free and fair democratic national elections, the Sunnis will always be a minority in Iraq, because there are approximately three times more Shiites than Sunni Arabs. (About 62% Shiites, 20% Sunni Arabs, and 18% Kurds, according to the [CIA Factbook](#).)

As in many third-world nations — both during Hussein's reign and after Hussein — "public service" in Iraq was seen as a way of enriching oneself through corruption, not as serving the nation. But at least during Hussein's reign, the Iraqi military was strong and threats were defeated.

On 23 June, Fox News described a chilling alliance between Hussein-era leaders and ISIL: For 10 years, members of Saddam Hussein's Baathist party — including many of the dead dictator's top generals — have hidden in the shadows of Iraq, persecuted by government in Baghdad and plotting, praying and preparing for the chance to reclaim their country.

Now they are back, paired in a bloodthirsty alliance with the brutal jihadis of the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria/Levant. These vicious Islamic radicals fighting alongside top officials from Hussein's dictatorship, are working to seize control of the battle-scarred nation. For now, their objectives converge.

"[We are] unified by the same goal, which is getting rid of this sectarian government, ending this corrupt army and negotiating to form a Sunni Region," a senior Baathist leader told FoxNews.com.

....

Much has been written about ISIS's blitzkrieg across northern Iraq, but it is unlikely the fighters would have been as successful without the Baathists. Three of Saddam's former generals led the takeover of Mosul, and eight of the top 10 generals in the ISIS army are believed to be Baathists. Izzat Douri, a former military commander who Saddam considered to be like a brother, is widely rumored to be in Mosul, overseeing the conflict after hiding out in Qatar and Syria for a decade.

Benjamin Hall, "ISIS joins forces with Saddam loyalists in bid to take Baghdad," [Fox News](#), 23 June 2014.

21 June 2014
Secret Program "Fizzled"

On 21 June, *The Wall Street Journal* reported:

Amid growing signs of instability in Iraq, President Barack Obama authorized a secret plan late last year to aid Iraqi troops in their fight against Sunni extremists by sharing intelligence on the militants' desert encampments, but devoted only a handful of U.S. specialists to the task.

So few aircraft were dedicated to the program, which also faced restrictions by the Iraqis, that U.S. surveillance flights usually took place just once a month, said current and former U.S. officials briefed on the program.

Instead of providing Iraqis with real-time drone feeds and intercepted communications from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, the militant group that has overrun parts of Iraq, U.S. intelligence specialists typically gave their Iraqi counterparts limited photographic images, reflecting U.S. concerns that more sensitive data would end up in Iranian hands, these officials said.

....

... Then, at the end of April, the Pentagon dispatched a team of special-operations personnel to assess the capabilities of Iraq's security forces, a defense official said.

The assessment they brought back was bleak: Sunni Army officers had been forced out, overall leadership had declined, the Iraqi military wasn't maintaining its equipment and had stopped conducting rigorous training. The response in Washington, summed up by a senior U.S. official, was: "Whoa, what the hell happened here?"

....

Unmanned surveillance flights over Iraq began in late 2013 but the pace was irregular. U.S. officials said the Iraqis imposed restrictions on when and where the aircraft could fly. The U.S. officials said they expected flights to take place roughly once a week, but they ended up occurring about once a month instead.

Adam Entous, Julian E. Barnes, & Siobhan Gorman, "Secret U.S. Plan to Aid Iraq Fizzled Amid Mutual Distrust," [WSJ](#), 21 June 2014.

Conclusions

Here is what 39 months of military conflict in Syria have accomplished:

- At least 162,000 dead people by 18 May 2014, increasing at approximately 7500/month.
- Approximately 2,800,000 refugees have fled from Syria. ([Reuters](#))
- More than six million refugees have been displaced inside Syria.
- Syrian economy in shambles. The Syrian gross national product (GNP) contracted by 39% during 2012-13. ([AP](#)) Many buildings are in ruins. The United Nations

estimates "nearly half" of people in Syria now need humanitarian assistance. ([Reuters](#), 6 Feb 2014.)

- Exacerbated religious differences between Alawites (branch of Shiite muslims), Sunni muslims (e.g., Sunni jihadists and Al-Qaeda), and Christians in Syria. This has wrecked a secular Syrian nation, created a religious civil war, and may possibly lead to a future Islamist government in Syria with Sharia law.
- No clear military victory for either Assad, the rebels, or the jihadists.

Here is what United Nations diplomats have accomplished on the Syrian crisis:

- **almost nothing** — There was a successful evacuation of approximately 1400 women, children, and elderly men from Homs during 7-12 Feb. But the United Nations estimates that there are a quarter-million people in besieged cities in Syria, of whom only 3000 were in Homs before the evacuation. On 8 Feb there was a first delivery of humanitarian aid to Homs that was agreed in Geneva 13 days earlier, on 26 Jan. At the end of the food delivery on 12 Feb, the remaining people in Homs had enough food for only one month.

On 8 April, there was a small delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo, using 54 hand-pulled carts.

On 20 Jan 2014, the Associated Press eloquently summarized the Syrian civil war:

Both the government and the insurgents have suffered enormous losses, but even now, neither side appears desperate enough to budge from its entrenched position. At this point, just getting the antagonists into the same room to start what is expected to be a long process that could drag on for years would be perceived as a success.

....

Syria's crisis began in the heyday of the Arab Spring uprisings that swept away authoritarian leaders in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. Unlike the others, Syria's leadership responded to largely peaceful protests for political reform with a withering crackdown. That slowly forced the opposition to take up arms and gave birth to a civil war that has also spawned a proxy battle between regional Shiite Muslim power Iran and Sunni heavyweight Saudi Arabia.

The cumulative effect of the war has been disastrous. Syria lies in ruins, its economy shattered, its rich social fabric shredded.

Zeina Karam & Ryan Lucas, "UN Rescinds Invitation To Iran To Attend Talks," (previously titled: "Syria Talks Set To Open Amid Low Expectations"), [Associated Press](#), 18:48 EST, 20 Jan 2014.

Despite Assad's significant delay in delivering his chemical weapons to OPCW, and despite Assad being suspected of violations of international law, I still believe that Assad is the strongest leader that Syria — or the Syrian exiles — have. Moreover, Assad is ruthless, a

good quality to have in the pursuit of jihadists and Al-Qaeda terrorists. It seems to me that Assad is the least worst leader of Syria, particularly compared with either (1) the indecisive and inexperienced Syrian National Coalition, (2) the Al-Qaeda terrorists, or (3) the jihadists. Perhaps some of Assad's undesirable qualities could be controlled by a more effective legislature and judiciary in Syria, with checks and balances. I admit Assad appears to be growing more contemptuous of the United Nations, which makes it more difficult to continue supporting Assad. Also Assad hurts his own cause by remaining in hiding and operating a nasty military campaign. Assad could — and should — appear more like a statesman, by making more public speeches, and by taking the initiative in both ceasefires and delivery of humanitarian aid.

My conclusions are similar to those in my [second](#), [third](#), [fourth](#), [fifth](#), [sixth](#), and [seventh](#) essays on Syria:

1. The USA and Western Europe *should* have supported Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorists. Moreover, Assad's government is secular, with toleration for other religions, unlike the jihadists and unlike Al-Qaeda. Assad is certainly better than Al-Qaeda.
2. The Syrian National Coalition has no credibility as a leader of a nation, because it is unable to make simple decisions (e.g., unable to decide to attend Geneva2 without preconditions), and because it 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 until 7 Feb).
3. The Geneva2 conference was proposed by Russia and the USA in a meeting on 7 May 2013, but began on 22 Jan 2014. The eight-month delay cost approximately 40,000 deaths in the continuing civil war, estimating at 5000 dead/month. That is a horrendously expensive delay by the Syrian National Coalition.

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

4. The United Nations negotiations process is continuing to insist on a "transitional governing body" mentioned in Geneva1. Instead of a discussion of an unnecessary "transitional governing body" that affects only *leaders* of Syria, there *should* be negotiations about ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, re-integration of moderate rebels (i.e., Free Syrian Army) into the Syrian army, and other issues that affect the *people* living in Syria.

The London11 group — acting through United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, §16 (27 Sep 2013) — inadvertently managed to kill the Geneva2 negotiations by demanding that the "transitional governing body" be a major part of the agenda at Geneva2.

Because the Syrian National Coalition is absolutely united in their demand that Assad

must resign, and Assad has no intention of resigning, negotiations on this issue are futile. (For other reasons why Geneva2 is futile, see my separate [essay](#).)

5. During the meetings of the London11 group of nations, and 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: remove Assad from power. But there are at least three good reasons to keep Assad in power:
 - A. Syria already has a stable government with a strong leader (i.e., Assad), so Syria does *not* need a transitional government. Moreover, Assad is winning the civil war in heavily populated western Syria.
 - B. The rapid success of ISIL conquering western and northern Iraq in June 2014 shows the importance of having a strong government and effective military in preventing advances by terrorists. If Assad were removed in Syria, terrorists would surely exploit the power vacuum that was formed by Assad's removal. (I develop this point more fully in my separate [essay](#).)
 - C. 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.
6. As shown by the failure to implement the 26 Jan 2014 agreement in Homs until 7 Feb — and by the failure in Jan/Feb 2014 to agree to any other ceasefires, the failure to agree to any other delivery of humanitarian aid, or the failure to agree to any release of prisoners — *neither* 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 in March 2014, journalists began to report that Assad appears to be winning the civil war, although insurgents still control some regions of Syria and parts of some cities.
7. 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.
8. The violations of the ceasefire in Homs on 8-9 Feb 2014 illustrated basic problems by the barbarians in Syria: a lack of military discipline, a lack of military professionalism, and — worse — a depraved, criminal disregard for values of decent human people. These remarks appear to apply to the rebels, jihadists, Al-Qaeda, *and* Assad's military — although we often do *not* have accurate information on who is responsible for each

individual barbaric act. No one seems to be collecting forensic evidence, so these barbarians will never be held responsible in any court for their crimes. Parts of Syria (e.g., Homs) have become uncivilized, lawless regions, like Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan.

9. By 13 March 2014, people in Western Europe and the USA were frustrated with continuing bad news from Syria.
 - o No one knows how to compel Assad to quickly deliver his chemical weapons to OPCW for destruction. Assad has violated U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, §7.
 - o *All* of the parties in Syria are ignoring U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139.
 - o No one knows how to motivate the parties in Syria — many of whom refuse to meet other parties face-to-face — to negotiate an end to their civil war. The stubborn, belligerent nature of *all* of the parties defies a rational solution to the civil war. The essential problem is that the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda *want* the civil war to continue, and their foreign supporters are continuing to supply these insurgents with munitions.

The United Nations, Western Europe, and the USA are trying to help the people of Syria — in particular, help the Syrian National Coalition — but are met again and again with irrational positions, preconditions, demands, delay, and belligerence. The reaction should be to abandon the Syrian National Coalition. In this dismal situation, I suggest that the least worst solution is simply to abandon Geneva2, recognize that Assad was re-elected, and let Assad eventually win the civil war.

10. 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.

For the above reasons, I believe the USA and Western Europe have been following a flawed foreign policy in Syria. 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.

However, even *if* we were to support Assad and *if* the moderate rebels rejoin the Syrian army, it will be a tough job to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria. As of 30 June 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria10.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

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