

Syria & Iraq: August 2014

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Foreword

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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

This essay is particularly important because President Obama authorized airstrikes on ISIL in Iraq, beginning 8 Aug, as explained [below](#). That began the active U.S. involvement in the war in Iraq. Then, on 22 Aug, Obama's advisor, [Ben Rhodes](#), appeared to suggest U.S. airstrikes on ISIL in Syria, but without the permission of Assad's lawful government. I chronicle these two significant developments, with quotations from U.S. Government documents and news reports. These two events may be the beginning of U.S. Military involvement in Iraq and Syria for *many years*. As I read the speeches, press conferences, and statements from the U.S. Government, I have the feeling I am watching a huge disaster slowly develop.

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.

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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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. Iraq is *not* on Daylight Savings Time, so this summer Beirut and Baghdad have the same time, +3 hours 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. The Islamic Front is the largest group of jihadists.
3. And 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.

On 29 June 2014, ISIL changed its name to "Islamic State", when it declared a caliphate. I continue to use the old name ISIL, for consistency with my previous essays. Moreover, using the term "Islamic State" appears to give legitimacy to their so-called "State", which is only a band of terrorists.

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, or any part of the opposition. Thus, there is different word usage between my text and quotations from journalists. Worse, journalists commonly refer to the opposition as "rebels", "militants", or "extremists", without mentioning the name of the group. With the exception of the Free Syrian Army, *all* of the insurgents in Syria are some kind of radical Islamic extremist, so labels like "extremist" lack precision.

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, the Coalition is the least objectionable 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 August 2014: Destruction of Chemical Weapons

On 5 August, the Associated Press reported that: "The United States informed the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday [5 Aug] that it has neutralized about 60 percent of Syria's most toxic chemicals." [Associated Press](#), 22:03 EDT, 5 Aug; [Washington Post](#)(AP).

On 11 Aug, the [Pentagon](#) reported that "Today, a Pentagon spokeswoman confirmed that the Cape Ray crew now has neutralized 100 percent of the [methylphosphonyl difluoride] DF and is beginning to work on the mustard." See also [OPCW](#) on 13 Aug.

On 19 Aug, it was announced that the M.V. Cape Ray had neutralized *all* of the chemicals sent from Syria. OPCW announced:

In an unprecedented undertaking, the U.S. Maritime Vessel Cape Ray has completed destruction of its entire consignment of 600 metric tonnes of Category 1 chemicals from the Syrian Arab Republic. This ends a crucial stage in the complex international maritime operation to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile. I wish to congratulate and thank the United States, the crew aboard the Cape Ray, and our OPCW inspectors and demilitarisation experts for this remarkable achievement.

The Cape Ray's consignment included the most dangerous chemicals in Syria's arsenal: 581 metric tonnes of DF, a binary precursor for sarin gas, and 19.8 metric tonnes of ready-to-use sulfur mustard (HD). They were neutralised with two Field Deployable Hydrolysis Systems (FDHS) on the Cape Ray, which reduced their toxicity by 99.9 percent in line with the requirements of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Furthermore, the operation was successfully completed weeks ahead of the 60-day schedule the U.S. had estimated would be needed, and OPCW inspectors aboard the ship verified that no chemicals of any kind escaped into the sea or otherwise impacted the environment. The Cape Ray will now transport the effluent from the hydrolysis operations to Finland and Germany, where it will be offloaded for disposal at land-based facilities.

Ahmet Üzümcü, "Statement by the OPCW Director-General on the Destruction of Syrian Chemicals Aboard the MV Cape Ray," [OPCW](#), 19 Aug 2014.

Nontechnical statements on 18 Aug by [Obama](#), [Kerry](#), U.S. Defense Secretary [Hagel](#), and United Nations Secretary General [Ban](#).

My opinion: The original schedule called for the Syrians to deliver *all* of their Category 1 chemicals before 31 Dec 2013. Not only did the Syrians deliver nothing by that deadline, but also the Syrians completed their delivery on 23 June — 174 days late. In contrast, the M.V. Cape Ray received the chemicals on 2 July and finished the neutralization on 18 Aug — taking only 47 days to do an unprecedented job that was estimated to take at least 60 days.

As I predicted in my [sixth essay](#) on Syria, in April 2014, no one now cares that Assad substantially missed deadlines for delivery of his declared chemical weapons.

It would be wonderful to say that this completes the Syrian chemical weapons problem. But work must continue to resolve the following four issues:

1. destruction of chemical weapons production facilities in Syria,
2. omissions and discrepancies in Syria's declaration of their chemical weapons,

3. determine *who* released chemical weapons in Syria in 2013, and
4. finish fact-finding mission on chlorine gas release in Syria in April 2014.

OPCW decided to disband on 30 Sep the OPCW/UN team headed by Sigrid Kaag. [Reuters](#).

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

Introduction

The opposition says that Assad's government used chemical weapons at sunset on 11 April at the village of Kafr 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. Both sides agree that chlorine gas was 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 on 3 May. The OPCW fact-finding team maintained a low profile — with zero press releases and no interviews with journalists. On 27 May, the OPCW team was attacked by insurgents in Syria while attempting to investigate chemical weapons use in Kafr Zeita. The team departed from Syria on 30 May.

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 was 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 compromised their investigation.

For details of the early history of chemical weapons use at Kafr Zeita, see my [sixth essay](#) on Syria, which chronicles events during April 2014.

My [ninth essay](#) on Syria discusses a report by the OPCW fact-finding team, which describes their failed mission and lack of facts.

OPCW apparently did nothing public about this investigation during July or August 2014. However, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has a Commission of Inquiry on human rights violations in Syria, and that Commission issued a Report on 27 Aug 2014 that mentioned:

115. Government forces attacked civilian-inhabited areas in Idlib and Hama governorates: Kafr Zeita on 11, 12, 16 and 18 April, Al-Tamana'a on 12, 18 and 29 April and Tal Minnis on 21 April 2014.

116. Witnesses saw helicopters drop barrel bombs and smelled a scent akin to

domestic chlorine immediately following impact. Accounts of victims, and of medical personnel involved in administering treatment, provide descriptions of symptoms compatible with exposure to chemical agents, namely vomiting, eye and skin irritation, choking and other respiratory problems.

117. Chlorine gas is a chemical weapon as defined in the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, of 1992. The use of chemical weapons is prohibited in all circumstances under customary international humanitarian law and is a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

118. Reasonable grounds exist to believe that chemical agents, likely chlorine, were used on Kafr Zeita, Al-Tamana'a and Tal Minnis in eight incidents within a 10-day period in April. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that those agents were dropped in barrel bombs from government helicopters flying overhead.

"Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic," [Eighth Report](#), page 19 of 45, A/HRC/27/60 (13 Aug 2014).

Syria

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

My [previous 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

There are at least seven major problems in the world that divert attention and resources from Syria:

- Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the Ukraine, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. 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 appeared to be winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border. But on 28 June, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil war. On 17 July, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels.

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 130 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 16 July, Islamic rebels attacked the airport at Tripoli, destroying airplanes and damaging the terminal building. On 31 July, Islamic extremist rebels seized control of Benghazi. On 23 Aug, Islamic extremists rebels captured the airport at Tripoli.
- On 10 June 2014, 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 my essays for [June](#), [July](#), and information [below](#).) The crisis in Iraq pushed Syria out of the news in Western newsmedia. Moreover, the capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — [changed](#) the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.
- On 12 June, palestinians kidnapped three boys in Israel and killed them. Their dead bodies were found in a field on 30 June. After terrorists in Gaza fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells into Israel, the Israeli military began a military campaign in Gaza on 8 July. Despite the blatant provocations by the palestinians, the Arab newsmedia pushed Syria and Iraq out of the news in order to hysterically report the so-called "Israeli aggression" in Gaza. On 14 July, Egypt proposed a ceasefire in Gaza, which Israel accepted but Hamas in Gaza rejected. After more than 1300 rockets and mortar shells were fired from Gaza into Israel since 8 July, the Israeli Army invaded Gaza on the evening of 17 July.

During 21-26 July, Kerry was in the Middle East, where he attempted to arrange a ceasefire in Gaza, but failed. On 29 July, Agence France-Presse reported that "waning US influence and John Kerry's failed peace bid [in April 2014] are hampering efforts to reach a Gaza truce". [Global Post](#)(AFP). On 2 Aug, *Arab News* reported a story titled "Cease-fire's failure further diminishes US influence". [Arab News](#). Reuters reported a story titled "US struggles in Middle East, with fewer allies and less influence", which says: "U.S. credibility has also been undercut by its reluctance to intervene in Syria's civil war; Kerry's failed push for wider Israeli-Palestinian peace, which collapsed in April; and Iraq's instability despite a decade of massive U.S. intervention." [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(Reuters); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters).

On 4 Aug, although Israel had pulled most of their Army from Gaza, Israeli air strikes in Gaza continued, and Gaza continued to dominate the foreign news in both Arab nations and the USA. A 72-hour ceasefire began at 05:00 GMT on 5 Aug. Israel agreed to extend the ceasefire, but on the morning of 8 Aug, 18 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel. [Reuters](#).

The death rate in Syria was 8706/44 days during 8 July to 20 Aug 2014, see [below](#). For the same time, the death toll in Gaza was only 2047 palestinians, see [Daily Star](#). Despite the fact that the recent death rate in Syria is more than four times higher than in Gaza, journalists gave more news coverage to Gaza.

On 26 August, a ceasefire of indefinite duration was arranged in Gaza.

My comments: With the deterioration of many Muslim nations (e.g., Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan) and African nations (e.g., Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, etc.) and the Ukraine, the Secretary General of the United Nations will soon be spending *all* of his time condemning atrocities, war crimes, crimes against humanity, violations of international law, and other serious misconduct. The United Nations is ineffective in all of these civil wars and crises, except for a limited amount of humanitarian aid.

There are some similarities between the crisis in Gaza and the Syrian civil war. The Islamic terrorists in Gaza (principally Hamas) are militarily weaker than the Israeli military, but that does *not* stop these terrorists from continuing to fire rockets and mortar shells into Israel. The Israeli retaliation splatts the Islamic militants again and again. The palestinians in general, and Hamas in particular, have repeatedly refused peace treaties. My impression is that the palestinians would prefer to fight, be defeated, and suffer great casualties and immense damage to infrastructure — instead of negotiating a peace treaty with Israel. The belligerence of these Islamic terrorists has crippled the palestinian economy and prevented the development of a self-supporting nation.

Similarly in Syria, the Free Syrian Army refuses to recognize that it has been defeated and it has no hope of victory. The jihadists and Al-Qaeda have some small hope of victory in parts of Syria. All of these insurgents continue to fight, with huge numbers of casualties and immense damage to buildings and infrastructure owned by other people. These insurgents refuse to consider peace negotiations. The belligerence of these Islamic terrorists has crippled the Syrian economy. On 7 June 2014, Brahimi predicted that Syria would continue to deteriorate: "[Syria is] going to be a failed state, with warlords all over the place." (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria.)

Death Toll in Syria

At approximately monthly intervals the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reports its count of the total number of dead people in the Syria civil war. This death toll is a useful reminder of the failure of insurgents and diplomats to end this civil war.

On the morning of 21 Aug 2014, the Arabic-language SOHR released its monthly death toll. Agence France-Presse reported:

The Britain-based monitoring group, which relies on a network of sources on the ground, said it had documented the deaths of 180,215 people.

Among them were 58,805 civilians, including 9,428 children and 6,036 women.

The group said 49,699 members of the armed opposition had been killed, among them fighters from jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State. It did not break the figures down further.

The new toll includes 66,365 regime forces — 40,438 from the military, and 25,927 members of a pro-regime militia.

The Observatory also documented the deaths of 561 members of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, which is fighting alongside the regime, and 1,854 other non-Syrian pro-regime fighters.

The toll also includes 2,931 unidentified people whose deaths the Observatory has confirmed without being able to record their identities.

"Syria war toll over 180,000" [Global Post](#)(AFP), 13:49 GMT, 21 Aug 2014.

At 23:00 EDT on 21 Aug neither the Associated Press nor Reuters had reported this new death toll. The [Al-Jazeera](#) Syria blog repeated the Agence France-Press announcement that I cited above.

Later, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon published a more detailed translation of the SOHR press release, which says in part:

The group, which relies on a network of sources inside the country for its reports, said that while it had documented 180,215 deaths, it believed the actual figure was higher by at least 70,000, due to the "extreme secrecy" on the part of various sides in the conflict, meaning more than a quarter-million lives lost.

"Death toll tops 180,000: Observatory," [Daily Star](#), 21:09 GMT, 21 Aug 2014.

On 27 Aug, the most recent English-language news story at the SOHR website is dated 23 June. Apparently, communicating with English-language speakers is *not* a high priority for SOHR. In previous reports by SOHR on deaths in Syria (See quotations in my [sixth](#) and [seventh](#) essays on Syria.), SOHR spoke of their "loss of hope in an international community" that would stop the killing in Syria. But the continuing civil war is *not* the fault of English-speaking politicians — the continuing civil war is the result of mainly Arab funding for insurgents, and the refusal of the insurgents to surrender.

On 22 Aug, the United Nations [Human Rights](#) Office in Geneva announced that at least 191,369 people had been killed in Syria from March 2011 to 30 April 2014. Notice that the SOHR death toll given is a *minimum* value. There was no SOHR report at the end of April 2014, but in mid-May the SOHR reported a minimum of 162,000, with approximately 70,000 additional dead amongst Syrian military and insurgents. With that understanding, the U.N. estimate of 190,000 is consistent with the SOHR range from 162,000 to 232,000.

My comments:

On 8 July, the total was 171,509. On 20 Aug, the total was 180,215 which is 8706/43 days, which corresponds to 6074/30 days.

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of death tolls announced by SOHR beginning 31 Aug 2013, including the death rate per 30 days.

U.S. Military Aid to Rebels in Syria

opinion polls in the USA

On 1 August, the Associated Press released the results of an opinion poll that it sponsored: Americans surveyed in last month's poll [conducted July 24-28, 2014] were not optimistic about the chance that a stable democratic government will be established in either country. Seventy-eight percent said it was either not too likely or not at all likely in Afghanistan and 80 percent said the same about Iraq.

Roughly three out of four Americans polled think that in hindsight, each war will be deemed as an outright "complete failure" or "more of a failure than success."

A majority of those polled, or 70 percent, said the United States was right to withdraw American troops from Iraq in 2011 and pull most U.S. forces out of Afghanistan by December. The two conflicts have consumed the nation for more than a decade and claimed the lives of 6,800 U.S. troops.

....

The situations in Afghanistan and Iraq are distinct. But in each, the U.S. has spent more than a decade trying to set up democratic governments that could effectively police their own territories and stamp out threats to the American homeland. And in both countries that objective is in peril — their futures threatened by a combination of poor leadership, weak institutions, interethnic rivalry, insurgencies and extremist rebellions.

Americans surveyed in the poll think more bad news is on the horizon. [9] Fifty percent — up 18 points in the past seven months — think the situation in Afghanistan will get worse. Fifty-eight percent — up from 16 percent in December 2009 — expect conditions in Iraq will worsen. The poll was conducted shortly after Sunni extremists conducted an offensive that shattered security in Iraq.

Deb Riechmann, "AP-GfK Poll: Public Ready To Close Book On 2 Wars," [Associated Press](#), 15:43 EDT, 1 Aug 2014.

My comments: While the polls were about Afghanistan and Iraq, politicians in the USA should be very reluctant to send U.S. Military personnel into Syria or Iraq, given the strong public opinion that past military involvement was a mistake.

"moderate" rebels reorganize to include jihadists

On the morning of 3 August, [Al-Jazeera](#) posted a terse item on its Syria blog about the

merger of 14 [sic] rebel groups in Syria. On the night of 3 August, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported more detail about the reorganization of the rebels in Syria:

Eighteen rebel factions in Syria announced Sunday the formation of a new unified “Revolutionary Command Council” based inside the country, in the latest bid to address the rebels’ fragmentation. The factions include leading groups from the Free Syrian Army, namely the Hazm Movement and the Syria Rebel Front, as well as members of the Islamic Front, such as the Islam Army and Suqour al-Sham.

Notably, the announcement leaves out the Islamic Front’s Ahrar al-Sham militia as well as the Nusra Front, which cooperates with Islamist militias in many parts of the country although it is not a part of the seven-member Islamic Front.

The signatories to the hand-written document said the move was needed to bolster unity, and pledged to select a military leader, and a set of military and judicial bodies, within 45 days.

"Eighteen rebel factions announce new military grouping," [Daily Star](#), 21:21 GMT, 3 Aug 2014.

On Monday evening, 4 August, the Syrian National Coalition posted a terse news item on their homepage:

Eighteen rebel factions announced the establishment of the “Revolution Command Council” with the aim of creating a coherent rebel force and a unified judicial body. Signatory factions said that an overall leader would be elected within a maximum period of 45 days from the date of signing the statement. The signatory factions are:

1. Harakat Hazm,
2. SRF,
3. Jaish al-Mujahideen,
4. Jabhat al-Souriya al-Tahrir,
5. Faylaq al-Sham,
6. Jaish al-Islam,
7. Suqor al-Sham,
8. Ittihad al-Islami Ajnad al-Sham,
9. Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zinki,
10. Hayat Duru al-Thowra,
11. Division 13,
12. Division 101,
13. Forsan al-Haq,
14. Liwa al-Haq,
15. Suqor al-Ghab,
16. Jabhat Haq al-Muqatila,
17. Alwiya al-Ansar,
18. Tajamu Kataib wa Alwiya Shuhada Souriya.

"18 Rebel Factions Form the Revolution Command Council," [SNC](#), 4 Aug 2014. (numbered list added by Standler)

My search of Google News on 15:25 EDT on 4 Aug for the queries "syria rebels FSA" and

"syria rebels reorganize" found only *The Daily Star* article. I am surprised that there are no other reports of this important event in rebel ranks in Syria.

My comments: Incorporating jihadists from the Islamic Front in the formerly moderate rebels should scare the USA into stopping supplying weapons to these rebels. Notice that this new rebel organization seems to ignore the Supreme Military Council that was partly controlled by the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), which hints that the rebels are moving away from the SNC. Further, the rebels will establish "judicial bodies", which puts them into conflict with the interim government established by the SNC. So, the reorganization seems to divorce the rebels from the SNC, making the SNC more irrelevant than before.

What happened to General al-Bashir, commander of Free Syrian Army?

On 27 June 2014, Ahmad Tohme — head of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) interim government — disbanded the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), because of suspected corruption by the SMC. Also, Tohme sacked the head of the FSA, Brig. Gen. Bashir. Later that same day, SNC President Jarba returned to the SNC headquarters in Turkey from a trip to Saudi Arabia, and reversed Tohme's decisions. (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria.) On 22 July, the Coalition sacked the entire interim Syrian government, including Tohme. (See my [ninth essay](#) on Syria.)

On 5 August, I realized that I had not recently read anything about General Bashir, despite my spending hours each day reading news reports from Syria. So I did a search of Google News for the query: General al-Bashir "Free Syrian Army" The most recent news about General Bashir was on 5 July when he publicly asked for more weapons, as reported in my [ninth essay](#) on Syria.

When I repeated this Google News search on 30 Aug, I found only one item: an interview with General Bashir on [CNN](#). That interview includes: "Al-Bashir told Christiane Amanpour that his forces in the field are on the brink of defeat because they simply do not have the weapons."

On 30 Aug 2014, my search of the Syrian National Coalition website for "al-Bashir" returned only one item, a 9 July 2014 press release about the FSA needing weapons. A search of the Coalition website for "Bashir" also returned some earlier items, from 18 February 2014 to 15 May 2014.

I find it strange that the commander of an army that is engaged in active battles is absent from the news continuously for two months. This absence of news makes me suspect that something political is happening in the Syrian National Coalition with regard to the Free Syrian Army, and Bashir is deliberately keeping a low profile.

On 5 August, I looked at the Syrian National Coalition website. The website has a series of tabs, that are pull-down menus for detailed information. The tab labeled "Coalition Components" has an item for [FSA Staff Command](#), but that item returns an "item not found" message (404 error). There are mentions of the FSA in various press releases at the Coalition

website, but no webpage devoted to either the FSA or Supreme Military Council. Again, this is really strange, given that the Coalition hopes to depose Assad by military force through the FSA. On 30 Aug 2014, I confirmed the facts in this paragraph.

Syria Not Important

Obama has never ordered airstrikes in Syria, and Obama has never ordered airdrops of food and water to besieged civilians in Syria. But on 7 Aug 2014 — four days after ISIL captured Sinjar in Iraq — Obama ordered airstrikes and airdrops in Iraq. The failure of Obama to get militarily involved in Syria speaks louder than any words. The Syrians will probably understand that Obama believes that Iraq is more important than Syria. Surely, this message must be devastating to the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Coalition. On 13 Aug, I looked at the website of the Syrian National Coalition and they were silent about the U.S. military action in Iraq, except for a link to a 12 Aug [article](#) titled: "Airstrikes in Iraq, But Why Not Syria". Incidentally, the real reason that Obama is militarily involved in Iraq, but not in Syria, is that the Iraqi government *invited* U.S. Military involvement. Obama would be loath to do anything that might help Assad.

Moderate Rebels in Syria Fearing Demise

On 15 August, the [NY Times](#) published a news article by Anne Barnard, titled "Dual Threat Has Mainstream Syrian Rebels Fearing Demise". The rebels (e.g., Free Syrian Army) have been fighting against Assad and Hezbollah, and — since 3 Jan 2014 — also fighting against ISIL. Currently, the rebels are being blasted by Assad's military in Aleppo city, and blasted by ISIL in Aleppo province, particularly in an attempt by ISIL to cut rebel supply lines from Turkey. Barnard says: "Some insurgents have joined ISIS rather than fight it, either to save themselves from beheadings or out of frustration that their own leaders have been unable to secure weapons and money." See also: Bassem Mroue, "Jihadists Closing In On Syrian Rebel Stronghold," [Associated Press](#), 16 Aug.

someone gave anti-aircraft missiles to insurgents in Syria

On 18 Aug, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) [prohibited](#) U.S. airlines from flying over Syria, because "Armed extremist groups in Syria are known to be equipped with a variety of anti-aircraft weapons which have the capability to threaten civilian aircraft."

On 19 Aug, the Associated Press reported:

Armed groups opposing the Assad regime in Syria have already amassed an estimated several hundred portable anti-aircraft missiles that are highly mobile, difficult to track and accurate enough to destroy low-flying passenger planes, according to a new [report](#) by Small Arms Survey, a respected Switzerland-based research organization that analyzes the global flow of weapons.

The report was released Tuesday [19 Aug], hours after the Federal Aviation Administration issued a notice Monday to U.S. airlines banning all flights in Syrian

airspace. The agency said armed extremists in Syria are "known to be equipped with a variety of anti-aircraft weapons which have the capability to threaten civilian aircraft." The agency had previously warned against flights over Syria, but had not prohibited them.

....

The Small Arms Survey report said that several hundred anti-aircraft missile systems in rebel arsenals are mostly Russian and Chinese in origin and were either seized from government forces or smuggled in from nations sympathetic to the insurgents.

....

The report names Sudan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia as likely sources for MANPADS [man-portable air defense systems] systems smuggled to insurgents inside Syria but cautions there still is no certainty about their origins. Rebel groups have also boasted of seizing anti-aircraft launchers and missiles from Syrian forces.

Stephen Braun, "New Report Warns Of Anti-Aircraft Weapons In Syria," [Associated Press](#), 18:04 GMT, 19 Aug 2014.

Note there is no precise identification of *who* provided the anti-aircraft missiles, and no precise identification of which terrorist groups in Syria now have the missiles.

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 1-2 August, it was reported that tribes in three villages (Kishkieh, Abu Hamam, and Grani) in eastern Syria (Deir Ezzor province) had expelled ISIL. Fighting continued in three other villages. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Daily Star](#)(AP); [Global Post](#)(AFP). This event seems to be the beginning of a popular revolt against ISIL in Syria, and will help Assad defeat ISIL.

On 3 August, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported that local tribesmen in eight towns along the road between Raqqa and the Iraq border were organizing small cells, called "White Shrouds", to fight against ISIL. Instead of engaging in massive battles, these cells kill individual ISIL members or small groups of ISIL. But these cells are also opposed to Assad's regime and Hezbollah. [Daily Star](#).

On 11 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL "have crushed a tribal uprising against their rule in eastern Syria after three days of clashes in a string of villages near the border with Iraq, killing and beheading opponents along the way". See also [Reuters](#).

On 14 Aug, the Associated Press reports: "Syrian government troops captured a fiercely contested suburb of the capital Thursday after five months of heavy fighting,...." The suburb

is Mleiha, 10 km southeast of downtown Baghdad. The Associated Press then summarizes: Over the past year, the opposition has watched as one stronghold after another has either slipped into government hands or been forced to strike lopsided truces.

The military's campaign around Damascus has succeeded in pushing the rebels farther from the heart of the city, while also strengthening President Bashar Assad's once shaky hold on the capital. Those gains, coupled with significant victories elsewhere in Syria in recent months, have swung the momentum in Syria's 3□-year-old conflict firmly in the government's favor.

In the country's north and east, however, government forces have fallen back in the face of an advance by the extremist Islamic State group, which has seized several military bases and outposts and killed hundreds of soldiers and pro-government fighters. The group, which has declared a self-styled caliphate in areas straddling the Iraq-Syria border, continued to advance in the northern Aleppo province Thursday [14 Aug] after seizing a string of towns and villages a day earlier, activists said.

Ryan Lucas, "Syrian Troops Seize Contested Damascus Suburb," [Associated Press](#), 15:47 GMT, 14 Aug 2014.

[Reuters](#) and [Al-Jazeera](#) also reported that Assad's army had captured Mleiha.

On 24 Aug, ISIL captured the Syrian air base in Raqqa province, which was the last step in defeating Assad's government in Raqqa province. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#); [McClatchy](#); [Financial Times](#). On 27 Aug, Nusra Front captured the Golan Heights inside Syria, at the border with Israel. [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#). These two events raises concerns about Assad's grip on Syria. On 29 Aug, [Reuters](#) reports criticism of Assad in Syria.

New U.N. Peace Negotiator for Syria

On 10 July 2014, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban, appointed Staffan de Mistura as the new peace negotiator for the Syrian civil war. After the appointment ceremony, de Mistura disappeared from public view.

I would expect de Mistura to spend a week reading United Nations resolutions and reports on Syria. Ban has issued a series of monthly Reports on the failure of U.N. Resolution 2139. The U.N. Human Rights organization in Geneva has issued some Reports on possible violations of international law in Syria. After digesting those Reports, I would expect de Mistura to visit the previous negotiators (Koffi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi) for a few days each, to get their confidential views on the problems and personalities in Syria. That should help de Mistura frame questions and formulate tentative plans.

Then de Mistura might want to meet with Assad and his foreign minister, to learn their current position.

I wonder why such private, initial steps are consuming so much time. On 17 July 2014, the U.N. Secretary General said he and de Mistura would "spare no effort to help stop the

violence and achieve a Syrian-led inclusive political solution". [U.N. News](#). On 21 Aug 2014, the one-year anniversary of the biggest chemical weapons attack in Syria, the U.N. Secretary General issued a [statement](#) that said: "The United Nations, the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, will continue to do their utmost in pursuit of ... an end to this expanding conflict" in Syria.

The real difficulty is that there is *no* opposition group that wants to negotiate a surrender, with Assad remaining in power. The Syrian National Coalition is firmly committed to the removal of Assad, furthermore the Coalition is increasingly irrelevant inside Syria. The jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL consistently refuse to negotiate with Assad.

U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2165

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, Ban, issued Reports in March, April, May, June, and July 2014, each of which recognized that Resolution 2139 had failed.

On 14 July, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 2165, to repair some of the defects in Resolution 2139. (See my [ninth essay](#) on Syria.)

On 21 Aug, Ban issued his monthly report required by Resolutions 2139 and 2165. Ban reported some improvement in the delivery of aid, for the first time since his reports began in March 2014. [Reuters](#). As noted in my three previous essays, the U.N. document delivery system has been nonfunctional since 16 May 2014. On 29 Aug, I downloaded a copy of Ban's Report from [ReliefWeb](#).

Here are some paragraphs in Ban's Report that I find interesting or significant:

3. Conflict and high levels of violence continued across the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period [22 July to 18 August 2014], particularly in the governorates of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Deir ez-Zor, Rif Dimashq, Damascus, Hasakeh, Idlib, Dar a and Raqqa. Indiscriminate aerial bombings by Government forces and indiscriminate shelling and attacks by armed opposition, extremist and designated terrorist groups [ISIL and Nusra Front] continued to result in death, injury and displacement. According to data collected by human rights organizations from various sources, July 2014 was the deadliest month in the Syrian Arab Republic since the start of the conflict in March 2011, with over 1,000 civilian deaths and injuries. [But see ¶53: "Reportedly, over 1,000 civilian deaths have occurred in August, the deadliest since the start of the war."]

....

5. Government-controlled cities and areas continued to be subject to indiscriminate mortar attacks, shelling and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices by armed opposition groups and extremist groups, notably in Aleppo, Homs and Damascus

governorates.

....

7. All parties to the conflict continued to target vital services resulting in interruptions to the supply of safe drinking water and electricity. In Aleppo city, damage caused to the main water pumping station, Suleiman al-Halabi, by armed opposition groups on 2 June continues to result in water shortages for more than 700,000 people. While repairs to the pumping station in Aleppo have continued since 19 July, the water station pumping capacity remains low due to electricity cuts and lack of fuel for generators. Reports were received last week that the Islamic Front cut the water supply multiple times from the main Aleppo pumping station to the Tishreen collective tank, supplying an internally displaced person (IDP) area. Reduced availability of vital services, such as water and electricity, also continued to be reported in various contested areas in Dar`a, Idlib, Hama, Deir ez-Zor and Rif Dimashq governorates, also as a result of insufficient availability of fuel.

....

17. On 25 July, ISIL reportedly captured and executed over 40 Government soldiers in Raqqa. Internet-based footage depicted gruesome images of dead army soldiers, some of whom appeared to have been decapitated, their heads placed on sticks or metal poles in the centre of Raqqa city.

....

23. For the first time in these monthly reports to the Security Council I can report some improvement in access across borders and across lines. Access across borders following the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014) has resulted in broader reach to areas in Aleppo, Dar`a, Rif Dimashq, Idlib and Ladhqiayah governorates.

....

29. Designated terrorist groups [ISIL and Nusra Front] continued to severely constrain access to the eastern governorates of the Syrian Arab Republic. As a result, almost 390,000 people could not be reached with planned food assistance in Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor and Hasakeh during the reporting period. On 6 August, an 18-truck convoy of WFP food en route from Deir ez-Zor to Raqqa came under attack from an unknown group. Two truck drivers were killed and two were injured, and the contents of four trucks were damaged or destroyed. The remaining 14 trucks, carrying assistance for 59,445 people, proceeded to Raqqa. The assistance is now being distributed. Armed opposition groups, including the Islamic Front and ISIL, continued to block humanitarian access to each other's areas of control. In Aleppo and northern Hasakeh, ISIL continued to block humanitarian access, in particular to Kurdish areas and to villages in Deir ez-Zor that oppose its rule.

....

52. Once again, I appeal to the Governments of the region and to all those with influence to stop the flow of arms, fighters and resources to all parties to the conflict and to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring financial resources and weapons.

53. Armed opposition and extremist groups continued indiscriminate attacks with mortars, shelling and car bombs. I remain deeply concerned about continued targeting of infrastructure for vital services for civilians, also a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014)," S/2014/611, 21 Aug 2014.

Ban notes that the Free Syrian Army is responsible "for more than half of the [more than 120 total] cases" of recruitment of children for military service in 2014. [¶15] The Free Syrian Army is the moderate rebels who are favored by Obama and Kerry.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2170 Passed

Beginning in 2012, the United Nations Security Council has passed a long series of Resolutions on Syria. All but one of these Resolutions have been ineffective. (The one exception is Resolution 2118 on chemical weapons in Syria. However, we have weak assurances that Syria has declared *all* of their chemical weapons, Syria still has not destroyed all of its chemical weapons facilities, and OPCW was unable to investigate sites of alleged chlorine use.) The biggest effect of past Resolutions has been to expose the weaknesses of the United Nations. So I am skeptical and apathetic when the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2170 on 15 Aug.

On 15 Aug 2014, the Associated Press reported:

Responding to the growing terrorist threat in Iraq and Syria, the U.N. Security Council imposed sanctions [i.e., global travel ban and asset freeze] Friday [15 Aug] on six men for recruiting or financing foreign fighters [for al-Nusra Front and/or ISIL in Syria] and threatened additional sanctions against those supporting terrorist groups.

The U.N.'s most powerful body, in a resolution adopted unanimously, also demanded that the Islamic State extremist group and all al-Qaida-linked groups end violence and disarm and disband immediately.

Edith M. Lederer, "UN Approves Measure To Combat Al-Qaida Fighters," [Associated Press](#), 19:41 EDT, 15 Aug 2014.

See also [U.N. News](#); [Reuters](#).

The exact wording of the U.N. demands on terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq:

4. Demands that ISIL, ANF [Al Nusrah Front] and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida cease all violence and terrorist acts, and disarm and disband with immediate effect;

HTML full-text of [Resolution 2170](#).

My opinion is that someone would need to be seriously delusional to believe this paragraph will have *any* effect on ISIL or Al-Nusra Front. These terrorists not only operate outside the norms of Western Civilization, but also these terrorists completely ignore the United Nations. So Resolution 2170 is probably a worthless scrap of paper.

What I think is significant about Resolution 2170 is that it condemns *neither* Assad *nor* his government — this Resolution only considers ISIL, Al-Nusra Front, and "entities associated with Al-Qaida". This Resolution may be an example of the change in the Western view of the insurgency in Syria that I mention in the [Conclusion](#) of this essay.

On Sunday, 17 Aug, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait agreed to comply with Resolution 2170 in ending financial support to ISIL and Nusra Front. Four of the six blacklisted people in Resolution 2170 are citizens of either Saudi Arabia or Kuwait. Reuters reports:

Western officials believe that wealthy Gulf Arabs, in countries that include Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have been a main source of funding for Sunni Islamist militants fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"Saudi Arabia, Kuwait to abide by U.N. blacklisting of citizens," [Reuters](#).

War Crimes Prosecution

Ban — and the London11 group of nations — often call for the prosecution of war crimes in Syria. But history is clear that prosecution of war crimes does *not* deter continuing and future war crimes. (This is a topic that I previously discussed in my [fifth essay](#) on Syria.)

The trial of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for war crimes committed during 1992-95 had already consumed 49 months and was continuing, when he died of a heart attack in March 2006 at age 65 y. The International Court of Justice is, in March 2014 hearing the case of *Croatia v. Serbia*, which involves genocide committed in the years 1991-95, and a case filed in July 1999. The process of the International Court is glacially slow.

On 4 March 2009, The International Criminal Court indicted Sudanese President Omar al Bashir for various crimes. On 12 July 2010, the International Criminal Court issued a second arrest warrant for Bashir, this time for genocide in Darfur. [ICC](#). However, the government of Sudan refuses to deliver Bashir for trial at the International Criminal Court. That lack of cooperation by the government of Sudan frustrates Justice for the genocide in Darfur.

In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was hanged on 30 Dec 2006. [BBC](#).

Ali Hassan al-Majid (aka "Chemical Ali") was convicted of — amongst other crimes — ordering poison gas attacks that killed about 5000 Kurds in 1988. Chemical Ali was arrested in August 2003 and hanged on 25 Jan 2010. [BBC](#). Chemical Ali's execution was 21 years after his crime and 6 years after his arrest.

Note that the relatively recent prosecutions and executions of Hussein and Chemical Ali did *not* deter atrocities in Syria and Iraq during 2013-2014.

During 1975-79, the Khmer Rouge controlled Cambodia. Pol Pot, the head of the Khmer Rouge, died in 1998, without ever facing Justice. In 2011, the United Nations began the trial of the two most senior living Khmer Rouge leaders on charges of crimes against humanity. They were found guilty on 6 Aug 2014 and sentenced to life in prison, which is probably less than ten years given their current ages of 83 and 88 y. These same two leaders now face a second trial on charges of genocide. [NY Times](#); [The Telegraph](#); [The Guardian](#).

In my opinion, there are at least three problems with war crime prosecutions:

1. Finding and arresting a terrorist is a complex task that can consume years. Osama bin Laden was wanted by the U.S. Government since 1998. After hiding from the USA for 13 years, Osama bin Laden was killed during a raid of his home in Pakistan on 2 May 2011. As another example, since Oct 2011, there has been a ten million dollar bounty on the head of al-Baghdadi, the head of ISIL, but the U.S. is unable to capture him. The long times between criminal acts and arrest weaken any deterrent value of the criminal justice system.
2. The judicial proceedings are glacially slow, which are boring and do *not* generate coverage by journalists that would inform people of the disgusting criminal acts. Criminal trials should educate people. The long times between arrest and conviction weaken any deterrent value of the criminal justice system.
3. A few of the Nazi leaders in Germany were executed. But since then, with the exception of Iraq, convicted war criminals have mostly received relatively comfortable prison sentences. Such punishment is not severe enough to deter future crimes.

My comments: What purpose is served by lengthy judicial trials of old men for something that happened in Cambodia more than 30 years ago? Their trial in Cambodia did *not* have any deterrent value in discouraging today's tyrants and terrorists.

While a criminal trial can express revulsion of civilized society at criminals, the recent trial in Cambodia consumed an estimated US\$ 200,000,000. In my opinion, there are better uses for such large amounts of money.

Worse, *repeatedly threatening* Assad and insurgents with prosecution for war crimes is an ineffective way to obtain compliance with international law, and only exposes the weakness of the United Nations. During 12-22 May 2014, the French proposed referring parties in Syria to the International Criminal Court for investigation and possible prosecution, but the proposal was vetoed by both Russia and China, as explained in my [seventh essay](#) on Syria.

Good parents know not to threaten to punish a misbehaving child. Instead, good parents punish their misbehaving child, so the child learns that misbehavior always leads to swift punishment.

ISIL Beheads James Foley in Syria

James Foley was a freelance journalist in Syria who submitted stories to Agence France-Press and Global Post. Foley was kidnapped by insurgents in Syria in November 2012. ISIL posted a video at a website on 19 Aug 2014 that shows them beheading Foley. Foley was 40 y old and a native of New Hampshire, USA. "American Killed In Syria A Journalist At Heart," [Associated Press](#). The U.S. Government authenticated the beheading of Foley. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) reports that the ISIL executioner spoke with a British accent, suggesting that someone from Britain had joined ISIL in Syria.

Foley immediately became a symbol of barbaric conduct of ISIL in beheading innocent noncombatants. Condemnation of ISIL was swift. The United Nations Secretary-General "condemns in the strongest terms the horrific murder of journalist James Foley, ..." [U.N.](#)

[Kerry](#) condemned the murder of Foley: "There is evil in this world, and we all have come face to face with it once again. Ugly, savage, inexplicable, nihilistic, and valueless evil. ISIL is the face of that evil, a threat to people who want to live in peace, and an ugly insult to the peaceful religion they violate every day with their barbarity."

This incident received even more attention when Obama personally condemned ISIL for the beheading of Foley:

Jim Foley's life stands in stark contrast to his killers. Let's be clear about ISIL. They have rampaged across cities and villages — killing innocent, unarmed civilians in cowardly acts of violence. They abduct women and children, and subject them to torture and rape and slavery. They have murdered Muslims — both Sunni and Shia — by the thousands. They target Christians and religious minorities, driving them from their homes, murdering them when they can for no other reason than they practice a different religion. They declared their ambition to commit genocide against an ancient people.

So ISIL speaks for no religion. Their victims are overwhelmingly Muslim, and no faith teaches people to massacre innocents. No just God would stand for what they did yesterday, and for what they do every single day. ISIL has no ideology of any value to human beings. Their ideology is bankrupt. They may claim out of expediency that they are at war with the United States or the West, but the fact is they terrorize their neighbors and offer them nothing but an endless slavery to their empty vision, and the collapse of any definition of civilized behavior.

....

The people of Iraq, who with our support are taking the fight to ISIL, must continue coming together to expel these terrorists from their communities. The people of Syria, whose story Jim Foley told, do not deserve to live under the shadow of a tyrant or terrorists. They have our support in their pursuit of a future rooted in dignity.

From governments and peoples across the Middle East there has to be a common effort to extract this cancer, so that it does not spread. There has to be a clear rejection of these kind of nihilistic ideologies. One thing we can all agree on is that a group like ISIL has no place in the 21st century.

Friends and allies around the world, we share a common security and a common set of values that are rooted in the opposite of what we saw yesterday. And we will continue to confront this hateful terrorism, and replace it with a sense of hope and civility. And that's what Jim Foley stood for, a man who lived his work; who courageously told the stories of his fellow human beings; who was liked and loved by friends and family. Obama, "Statement by the President," [White House](#), 20 Aug 2014.

My comments: Sadly, the calls by Obama, Kerry, and Ban for accountability for the murder of Foley are futile. Finding those personally responsible for every crime committed by ISIL, and proving their guilt in a court would be a very expensive undertaking that would further bleed the taxpayers in the USA and Western Europe. Instead, I suggest that simply annihilating ISIL would be adequate punishment.

While emotional calls for "accountability" may be attractive on 20 Aug 2014, the reality is that such legal accountability is a slow process that may not be worth the risk and effort, and may not be the best use of taxpayer's resources:

1. The leaders of ISIL — like other successful terrorist organizations — take care to avoid being captured. For example, Osama bin Laden evaded capture by the U.S. Government for 13 years (i.e., from 1998 to 2011).
2. It would be a high-risk operation to fly a helicopter with U.S. Military into an ISIL camp, to arrest and remove ISIL terrorist(s).
3. I suggest it would be a better use of the U.S. Military to conduct low-risk airstrikes on ISIL convoys, but airstrikes in Syria would need prior permission of Assad.
4. Engaging in the arrest, trial, and punishments of the kidnappers/murders of *one* U.S. citizen — while ignoring terrorists who have murdered thousands of Syrians and Iraqi civilians — sends a message to Arabs that we care more about Americans than Arabs.

Technically, because the crimes of kidnapping and murder occurred in Syria, then Syria should have jurisdiction for any criminal trial of ISIL terrorist(s) involved with Foley. I oppose ignoring centuries of criminal jurisdiction law, to accommodate an emotional desire to punish terrorists.

In this context, note that the U.S. Government captured and imprisoned more than 700 terrorists at the U.S. Navy base in Guantánamo, beginning in Jan 2002. Sadly, attorneys for the Bush administration made frivolous arguments why terrorist suspects imprisoned at Guantánamo were outside of U.S. law — but those arguments were rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, 548 U.S. 557 (2006). Most of these terrorists were never tried in any judicial proceeding. Many were released to some nation, and an unknown number resumed terrorist activity. The experience with Guantánamo suggests that the U.S. Government lacks competence in criminal trials for terrorists.

On 22 August, the U.S. Government floated the idea of conducting airstrikes against ISIL inside Syria without the prior permission of Assad. [Below](#), I describe and criticize such

airstrikes inside Syria, which are partly retaliation for the beheading of Foley.

U.S. Attempt to Rescue James Foley

On 20 Aug, the Pentagon revealed that the U.S. Military had attempted to rescue James Foley at some unspecified time, but they were unable to find him, and the U.S. team departed empty-handed.

The United States attempted a rescue operation recently to free a number of American hostages held in Syria by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This operation involved air and ground components and was focused on a particular captor network within ISIL. Unfortunately, the mission was not successful because the hostages were not present at the targeted location.

As we have said repeatedly, the United States government is committed to the safety and well-being of its citizens, particularly those suffering in captivity. In this case, we put the best of the United States military in harms' way to try and bring our citizens home.

The United States government uses the full breadth of our military, intelligence and diplomatic capabilities to bring people home whenever we can. The United States will not tolerate the abduction of our people, and will work tirelessly to secure the safety of our citizens and to hold their captors accountable.

Admiral Kirby, "Pentagon Provides Statement on Rescue Operation," [Pentagon](#), 20 Aug 2014.

On 20 Aug, the White House released a statement by Obama's counterterrorism adviser:

As the Department of Defense has now announced, earlier this summer the President authorized an operation to attempt the rescue of American citizens who were kidnapped and held by ISIL against their will in Syria. The President authorized action at this time because it was the national security team's assessment that these hostages were in danger with each passing day in ISIL custody. The U.S. Government had what we believed was sufficient intelligence, and when the opportunity presented itself, the President authorized the Department of Defense to move aggressively to recover our citizens. Unfortunately, that mission was ultimately not successful because the hostages were not present.

Given the need to protect our military's operational capabilities, we will not be able to reveal the details of this operation. But the President could not be prouder of the U.S. forces who carried out this mission and the dedicated intelligence and diplomatic professionals who supported their efforts. Their effort should serve as another signal to those who would do us harm that the United States will not tolerate the abduction of our people, and will spare no effort to secure the safety of our citizens and to hold their captors accountable.

Lisa Monaco, "Statement by Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Lisa Monaco on Attempted Rescue Operation," [White House](#), 20 Aug 2014.

The Associated Press summarized:

President Barack Obama sent special operations troops to Syria this summer on a secret mission to rescue American hostages, including journalist James Foley, held by Islamic State extremists, but they did not find them, officials say.

The rescue mission was authorized after intelligence agencies believed they had identified the location inside Syria where the hostages were being held, administration officials said Wednesday [20 Aug]. But the several dozen special operations forces dropped by aircraft into Syria did not find them at that location and engaged in a firefight with Islamic State militants before departing, killing several militants. No Americans died but one sustained a minor injury when an aircraft was hit.

....

Officials revealed the rescue operation a day after the militants released a video showing the beheading of Foley and threatened to kill a second hostage, Steven Sotloff, if U.S. airstrikes against the militants in Iraq continued.

....

Caitlin Hayden, spokeswoman for the White House National Security Council, said the administration never intended to disclose the operation. But she said the U.S. went public Wednesday [20 Aug] because a number of media outlets were preparing to report on the operation and the administration "would have no choice but to acknowledge it."

....

Administration officials would not say specifically when or where the operation took place, citing the need to protect operational details in order to preserve the ability to carry out future rescue missions.

Julie Pace, "US Special Ops Tried But Failed To Find Hostages," [Associated Press](#), 05:25 EDT, 21 Aug 2014.

Agence-France Presse reported that ISIL asked for a 100 million Euro (approximately US\$132,000,000) ransom for Foley:

"GlobalPost CEO Philip Balboni confirms that the initial ransom demand from Jim Foley's captors was 100 million euros," a spokesman for the news website told AFP.

....

Balboni said the captors made contact with GlobalPost and the Foley family fewer than half a dozen times, and "the kidnapers never really negotiated" over their huge sum, but simply made their demand.

"We never took the 100 million (euro) figure seriously," Balboni told CNN.

Balboni said he and the family provided all information about their search for Foley and their contact with his captors to authorities at the FBI and State Department. "Foley captors demanded \$132 million ransom," [GlobalPost](#), 17:15 EDT, 21 Aug 2014.

My comments: Note that both Admiral Kirby and Ms. Monaco want "to hold their captors [of U.S. citizens] accountable." [Above](#), I explain why I believe it would be undesirable to hold ISIL terrorists accountable in a court for kidnapping U.S. citizens.

Such rescue operations would be easier if the U.S. Government were cooperating with Assad in the fight against terrorism, and there was sharing of intelligence between the U.S Military and the Syrian government about the location of hostages.

The U.S. Government has a policy of *never* paying ransom for hostages. I agree with that policy. Such payments finance more terrorist activity, just as ISIL robbing a bank finances their terrorist activities. Furthermore, paying ransoms gives kidnappers an incentive to kidnap more hostages.

On 22 Aug, [Reuters](#) reported third-hand information on how the U.S. attempted to rescue American hostages in Syria. I am opposed to publishing such information, because it could compromise future operations to rescue hostages. However, the widespread publication by Reuters has catapulted the information into the public domain. Reuters says the U.S. Delta Force used Black Hawk helicopters to enter Syria after midnight on 4 July 2014.

Debacle in Iraq

Ethnic Cleansing & Other Atrocities in Iraq

Back in June 2014, ISIL executed hundreds of Shiite soldiers in Mosul and Tikrit. (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria.)

In July 2014, there were more reports of atrocities in Iraq, as described in my [ninth](#) essay.

Atrocities Against Yazidis

On 3 Aug, ISIL invaded Sinjar, causing at least tens of thousands of Yazidis to flee to the mountains to escape from persecution by ISIL, citations [below](#). Possible genocide against the Yazidis was one of the reasons that on 7 Aug Obama ordered airdrops of humanitarian supplies in Iraq, as well as airstrikes against ISIL, as described [below](#).

At night on 8 Aug, the Associated Press described some of the persecution of Yazidi by ISIL: Hundreds of women from the Yazidi religious minority have been taken captive by Sunni militants with "vicious plans," an Iraqi official said Friday, further underscoring the dire plight of Iraq's minorities at the hands of the Islamic State group.

Kamil Amin, the spokesman for Iraq's Human Rights Ministry, said hundreds of Yazidi women below the age of 35 are being held in schools in Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. He said the ministry learned of the captives from their families.

"We think that the terrorists by now consider them slaves and they have vicious plans for them," Amin told The Associated Press. "We think that these women are going to be used in demeaning ways by those terrorists to satisfy their animalistic urges in a way that contradicts all the human and Islamic values."

The U.S. has confirmed that the Islamic State group has kidnapped and imprisoned Yazidi women so that they can be sold or married off to extremist fighters, said a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because the information came from classified intelligence reports. There was no solid estimate of the number of women victimized, the official said.

Sameer N. Yacoub, "Iraq Official: Militants Hold 100s Of Yazidi Women," [Associated Press](#), 20:02 GMT, 8 Aug 2014.

On 10 Aug, Reuters reports on the persecution of Yazidi by ISIL:

Islamic State militants have killed at least 500 members of Iraq's Yazidi minority, burying some alive and taking hundreds of women as slaves, an Iraqi government minister [human rights minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani] told Reuters on Sunday [10 Aug].

....

In comments likely to put pressure on Washington to step up its response to Islamic State, Iraqi rights minister Sudani said: "The terrorist Islamic State has also taken at least 300 Yazidi women as slaves and locked some of them inside a police station in Sinjar and transferred others to the town of Tal Afar. We are afraid they will take them outside the country.

"In some of the images we have obtained there are lines of dead Yazidis who have been shot in the head while the Islamic State fighters cheer and wave their weapons over the corpses," he added. "This is a vicious atrocity."

Ahmed Rasheed, "Islamic State kills at least 500 from Iraq's Yazidi minority: Baghdad," [Reuters](#), 13:15 GMT, 10 Aug 2014.

Terse report at [Iraqi News](#).

On 16 August, the Associated Press reported ISIL surrounded the village of Kocho on 4 Aug (12 days ago), ISIL moved into the village on 15 Aug, and then massacred at least 80 male inhabitants, because the Yazidi inhabitants refused to convert to Islam:

Islamic extremists shot scores of Yazidi men to death in Iraq, lining them up in small groups and opening fire with assault rifles before abducting their wives and children, according to an eyewitness, government officials and people who live in the area.

....

The militants told people to gather in a school, promising they would be allowed to leave Kocho after their details were recorded, said the eyewitness and the brother of the Kocho mayor, Nayef Jassem, who said he obtained his details from another witness.

The militants separated the men from the women and children under 12 years old. They took men and male teens away in groups of a few dozen each and shot them on the edge of the village, according to a wounded man who escaped by feigning death.

The fighters then walked among the bodies, using pistols to finish off anyone who appeared to still be alive, the 42-year-old man told The Associated Press by phone from an area where he was hiding.

....

It was not clear precisely how many men were killed. Iraqi and Kurdish officials said at least 80 men were shot. Yazidi residents said they believed the number was higher, because there were at least 175 families in Kocho, and few were able to escape before the militants surrounded their hamlet.

Diaa Hadid & Sameer N. Yacoub, "Islamic Fighters Kill Scores Of Yazidi Men In Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 22:23 GMT, 16 Aug 2014.

Also see "Islamic State 'massacres' 80 Yazidis in north Iraq — officials," [Reuters](#), 16:37 GMT, 16 Aug; "Jihadists kill dozens in north Iraq massacre," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 09:01 GMT, 16 Aug.

On 30 August, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that ISIL had kidnapped 300 Yazidi women, transported them to Syria, where some of them were sold into marriage. *Iraqi News* reported:

On Saturday [30 Aug], the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights revealed that the organization of the Islamic State trafficked and sold about 300 Yazidi girls and women, who were abducted from Mosul, Iraq, to its members in Syria during the past weeks.

The Syrian Observatory said, in a statement published by the Arab media and followed by [IraqiNews.com](#), that “The organization of the Islamic State distributed between its elements in Syria, during the past days and weeks, about 300 girls and women from the followers of the Yazidi religion, who were abducted in Iraq several weeks ago on the basis that they are slaves from the spoils of war of the unbelievers.”

The Syrian Observatory said in a statement that “it has documented several instances of human tracking in which the elements of ISIS sell abducted Yazidi females to other elements of the organization in Syria, with an amount of money of \$1000 per female, to be married to the fighters of the organization who have paid the money.”

"300 Iraqi Yazidi girls sold as slaves to ISIS terrorists in Syria," [Iraqi News](#), 30 Aug 2014. But [Al-Jazeera](#)(blog) and [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP) report that SOHR confirmed only 27 marriages, although 300 women were kidnapped. See also [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan.

Attack on Sunni Mosque

On 22 Aug 2014, during Friday noon prayers in a Sunni mosque in the town of Imam Wais in Diyala province, an attack killed at least 70 worshippers. Early news reports blamed Shiite militias for the attack. But Iraqi security forces blamed four ISIL terrorists for the attack in the mosque. See, e.g.,

- "Shiite militiamen kill 70 at Iraq Sunni mosque," [Daily Star](#), 11:36 GMT, and later updated, 22 Aug 2014.
- "Scores dead in attack on Sunni mosque in Iraq," [Al-Jazeera](#), 18:23 GMT, 22 Aug 2014.
- "Shi'ite militia kill dozens of Iraqi Sunnis in mosque shooting," [Reuters](#), 00:45 GMT, 23 Aug 2014 (Machine gun fire kills 68 of approximately 150 people inside the mosque.).

Sunni politicians made a hysterical overreaction to the attack on this mosque by halting their cooperation with the formation of a new, inclusive government, as described [below](#).

On 23 Aug, Agence France-Presse reported:

Doctors and the officers put the toll from the attack, in which worshippers were sprayed with machine-gun fire, at 70 dead and 20 wounded.

Two officers had earlier blamed ISIS for the attack, saying it had included a suicide bombing, a hallmark of the group, but most accounts pointed to Shiite militiamen.

The interior ministry announced it is conducting an investigation into the attack, which it said was carried out by two gunmen on a motorbike following a bombing targeting security and volunteer forces in the area.

"Iraq works to ease tensions after mosque attack kills 70," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 11:53 GMT, 23 Aug 2014.

On 23 Aug, the Associated Press reported reprisal attacks that killed 31 people in Kirkuk and killed 11 people in Baghdad, as well as the investigation of the attack on the mosque:

Bombings in Baghdad and the northern city of Kirkuk killed at least 42 people in Iraq on Saturday [23 Aug] as the government investigated a deadly attack on a Sunni mosque the day before that has heightened sectarian tensions amid a fragile political transition.

....

The attacks came after parliament speaker Salim al-Jabouri said that a committee of security officials and lawmakers were probing Friday's [22 Aug] attack against a village mosque in Diyala province, northeast of the capital, which killed more than 60 people. The results of the investigation are expected in two days' time.

It remained unclear whether the attack in the village of Imam Wais was carried out by Shiite militiamen or insurgents from the Islamic State group who have been advancing

into mixed Sunni-Shiite areas in Diyala and have been known to kill fellow Sunni Muslims who refuse to submit to their harsh interpretation of Islamic law.

....

Local security officials in Diyala said Friday's attack began with a suicide bombing near the mosque entrance. Gunmen then stormed the building and opened fire on worshippers. At least 64 people were killed, including four Shiite militiamen who stumbled upon bombs planted by the militants as they rushed to the scene with security forces.

Sinan Salaheddin & Vivian Salama, "Bombings Kill 42 In Iraq After Sunni Mosque Attack," [Associated Press](#), 20:49 GMT, 23 Aug 2014.

On 25 Aug, the Associated Press reported more attacks: Multiple car bombs "hit Shiite towns south of Baghdad, kill at least 23 people." [Associated Press](#) Two car bombs in Baghdad killed at least 15 people [Associated Press](#). No details were reported. Later, the [Associated Press](#), reported at least 58 people died in various attacks on "Shiite areas" in Iraq on 25 Aug.

Attacks on shopping areas, government buildings, residential areas, and mosques have been a routine part of terrorism in Iraq since the U.S. invasion in 2003. Therefore, it is difficult to sense whether terrorism is increasing, except by looking at monthly death tolls. It is also difficult to understand whether an increase in terrorism is in retaliation for a previous attack, or whether there is another cause.

The mosque in Diyala province was bombed on Friday, 22 Aug. On 23 Aug, the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Salim al-Jabouri, promised to release results of an investigation within two days (i.e., on 25 Aug). [Guardian](#); [Al-Jazeera](#). But at the end of the day on 31 Aug there were still no public results of an investigation. The delay in releasing results of the investigation will *not* be reassuring to the Sunnis. And the delay is another indication that the Iraqi government is incompetent.

ISIL possible crimes against humanity in Iraq

On 25 Aug 2014, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, announced that ISIL had murdered "up to 670" prisoners in Mosul on 10 June. She also denounced the pattern of criminal behavior by ISIL that includes:

- "targeted killings,
- forced conversions,
- abductions,
- trafficking,
- slavery,
- sexual abuse,
- destruction of places of religious and cultural significance, and
- besieging entire communities for ethnic, religious or sectarian affiliation."

[UNHCR](#); [UNAMI](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

ISIL executes at least 160 Syrian soldiers

On 28 Aug, it was revealed that ISIL in Syria has executed at least 160 captured Syrian soldiers. The Associated Press reports:

The Islamic State group killed more than 160 Syrian government troops seized in recent fighting, posting pictures Thursday [28 Aug] of terrified young conscripts stripped down to their underwear before meeting their deaths in the arid Syrian countryside.

....

More recently, the jihadists have turned their attention to Assad's forces, seizing a series of military bases in northeastern Raqqa province. In the process, they have killed hundreds of pro-government forces, beheading some and later displaying their severed heads on poles and fences and posting the pictures online.

Most of the dozens killed over the past 24 hours were rounded up Wednesday near the Tabqa airfield three days after Islamic State fighters seized the base. The government troops were among a large group of soldiers from the base who were stuck behind front lines after it fell to the jihadi fighters.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said around 120 captive government troops from Tabqa were killed near the base. Islamic State fighters also killed at least another 40 soldiers, most of whom were taken prisoner in recent fighting at other bases in the Hamrat region near Raqqa city, the group's stronghold.

Zeina Karam & Ryan Lucas, "Jihadists Kill Dozens Of Captured Syrian Soldiers," [Associated Press](#), 21:52 GMT, 28 Aug.

[Reuters](#) reports that ISIL in Raqqa, Syria claims to have executed 250 Syrian soldiers.

Islamic Public Relations Problem

When an act of terrorism occurs, Christian politicians and Christian religious leaders publicly condemn the act of terrorism. This seems to be an act of leadership, and expresses a community consensus, although the public condemnation is ineffective in stopping terrorism. When Islamic extremists perpetrate an act of terrorism, there is generally silence from mainstream Muslim leaders. This silence may be interpreted as acceptance of the Islamic terrorists. (See, e.g., my [ninth essay](#) on Syria, in the section on Islamic condemnation of ISIL caliphate, where I remarked that most of the condemnation was from competitors of the ISIL caliphate.)

On 12 Aug, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue called for Muslim leaders to "unequivocally condemn" the "barbarity" of ISIL's persecution of Christians and Yazidis. [Associated Press](#), 14:16 GMT; [Reuters](#), 14:47 GMT; [Vatican Radio](#); all on

12 Aug.

Back on 22 July 2014, the top religious authority in Turkey condemned ISIL. [Reuters](#).

On 12 Aug, Al-Azhar's Grand Mufti Shawqi Allam, the top religious authority in Egypt, condemned ISIL as "corrupt" and "tarnishing" the image of Islam. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#); [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 15 Aug, [Fox News](#) published a story titled: "Arab press blasts Islamic State militants for tarnishing Muslims worldwide". While Muslim journalists and commentators are beginning to speak up, the Muslim clerics are still mostly silent about terrorism and atrocities by Islamic extremists.

On 19 Aug, Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti, Sheikh al-Sheikh, the highest religious authority in Saudi Arabia, condemned ISIL. Because of its importance, I quote the entire Saudi Press Agency news release:

The Grand Mufti of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and President of Council of Senior Scholars and General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Al-Sheikh issued today a statement titled "Foresight and Remembrance," saying that under these conditions that prevail in the Islamic nation, many nations and conceptions have been disrupted and the more dangerous ideas are those ideas being marketed in the name of religions.

He said that the tolerance of Islam is one of the characteristics of Islamic Sharia and the largest one of its objectives, noting that the tolerance has a great effect on spreading Islam and its continuation.

The statement said:

In light of these great objectives, the fact of moderation appears as it is the perfection and beauty of this Islam, and that the ideas of extremism, immoderation and terrorism do not belong to Islam at all, but they are the first enemy of Islam and Muslims have been its first victims, as seen in the crimes of the so-called Daash [ISIL] and Al-Qaeda and their affiliated groups.

These foreign groups do not belong to Islam and Muslims adhering to it; but they are an extension of the Kharijites who were the first group that deviated from the religion because they accused Muslims of disbelief due to their sins and allowed killing them and taking their money.

We call in this regard to unify and coordinate educational, call [sic], and developmental efforts to enhance the thought of moderation stemming from our true Islamic Sharia through formulating a complete plan with clear objectives and an executive plan that achieves those goals as a concrete reality.

As the world today is witnessing disturbances around us, we in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, are bestowed by Allah Almighty by the unity of word and rank around the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah

bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Crown Prince and Deputy Crown Prince. We should maintain this firm entity and not make the reasons for discord and disagreement beyond the borders as reasons for disagreement among us, and we in the Kingdom have managed our debates about what concerns us from the issues of religion and the homeland in a lofty style without accusing each others.

"Kingdom's Grand Mufti issues statement," [Saudi Press Agency](#), stories 23-24, 12:12 GMT, 19 Aug 2014. (website does *not* permit linking to individual news stories).

Reuters reported:

"Extremist and militant ideas and terrorism which spread decay on Earth, destroying human civilisation, are not in any way part of Islam, but are enemy number one of Islam, and Muslims are their first victims," [the Grand Mufti] said in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency.

He later compared them to the Kharijite movement in early Islam, which assassinated the Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law Ali for making compromises to a rival Muslim faction, and has been seen as heretical by most subsequent Muslim sects.

"Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti denounces Iraq's Islamic State group," [Reuters](#) 11:52 GMT, 19 Aug.

Reuters appears to have used a different translation of the Grand Mufti's statement than the translation subsequently posted at the Saudi Press Agency.

The [Associated Press](#) briefly reported the Grand Mufti's condemnation of ISIL, along with some judicial sentences for terrorists in Saudi Arabia.

On 24 Aug, the Associated Press reported more condemnation of ISIL from Egypt:

The top Islamic authority in Egypt, revered by many Muslims worldwide, launched an Internet-based campaign Sunday challenging an extremist group in Syria and Iraq by saying it should not be called an "Islamic State."

The campaign by the Dar el-Ifta, the top authority that advises Muslims on spiritual and life issues, adds to the war of words by Muslim leaders across the world targeting the Islamic State group, which controls wide swaths of Iraq and Syria. Its violent attacks, including mass shootings, destroying Shiite shrines, targeting minorities and beheadings including American journalist James Foley, have shocked Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Shawki Allam, previously said the extremists violate all Islamic principles and laws and described the group as a danger to Islam as a whole. Now, the Dar el-Ifta he oversees will suggest foreign media drop using "Islamic State" in favor of the "al-Qaida Separatists in Iraq and Syria," or the acronym "QSIS," said Ibrahim Negm, an adviser to the mufti.

This is part of a campaign that "aims to correct the image of Islam that has been tarnished in the West because of these criminal acts, and to exonerate humanity from such crimes that defy natural instincts and spreads hate between people," Negm said according to Egypt's state news agency MENA. "We also want to reaffirm that all

Muslims are against these practices which violate the tolerant principles of Islam." Sarah El Deeb, "Islamic Authority: Extremists No 'Islamic State'," [Associated Press](#), 16:43 GMT, 24 Aug.

ISIL Recruiting

Later on 19 Aug, Reuters reports that ISIL is recruiting new fighters in Syria at the fastest rate ever:

Thousands of new fighters joined Islamic State in Syria last month in its fastest expansion to date, a body monitoring the war said on Tuesday [19 Aug].

....

Islamic State recruited at least 6,300 men in July, Rami Abdelrahman, founder of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told Reuters — a big expansion from early estimates suggesting the group numbered around 15,000. Around a thousand of the new fighters were foreign, and the rest Syrian, he said.

"Islamic State recruits at record pace in Syria — monitor," [Reuters](#), 13:24 GMT, 19 Aug. See also [Al-Jazeera](#), which says ISIL claims to have 50,000 fighters in Syria and 30,000 fighters in Iraq, but Al Jazeera cannot verify those numbers.

One wonders *why* so many Muslims are flocking to join ISIL, one of the most Evil organizations in world history. Some of the Syrians joining ISIL may be deserters from other insurgent groups, who flock to ISIL because ISIL had the best equipment (stolen from U.S. supplies in Iraq) and because ISIL has the most money. One of the reasons that Muslims from Europe and the USA are joining ISIL is that there seems to be discontented young Muslims who are dissatisfied with Christian-dominated Western Civilization, and who find ISIL attractive. Such discontented youth may be partly analogous to the hippies in the USA during the 1960s and 1970s, who dropped out of mainstream society to use illicit drugs and pursue their anti-materialistic views.

Implausible Information From Iraq

All Iraq News recently reported a steady stream of claims from the Iraqi government of high death tolls allegedly suffered by ISIL in Iraq. Here is a list of citations in the *All Iraq News* to incidents where at least 35 ISIL terrorists were killed:

- On 27 July, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 200 ISIL terrorists in southern Kiruk. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 28 July, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 150 ISIL terrorists in Mosul. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 29 July, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 40 ISIL terrorists in southern Samara. [All Iraq News](#).

- On 1 August, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 60 ISIL terrorists in Anbar province. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 2 August, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 50 ISIL terrorists in northeastern Baquba. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 3 August, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 35 ISIL terrorists in southern Baghdad. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 3 August, the Mayor of Haditha district, Abdulkareem al-Jighaifi, said "Iraqi security forces and tribes" killed 70 ISIL terrorists in western Anbar. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 3 August, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 45 ISIL terrorists in Tikrit. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 4 August, the Baghdad Operations Command claimed the security forces had killed 176 terrorists in the southern and western sides of Baghdad. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 5 August, the security forces claimed to kill 50 ISIL terrorists in the Dhilo'aya district of southern Tikrit. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 6 August, the Iraqi Army claimed to kill 60 ISIL terrorists at a prison in the city of Mosul. [Daily Star](#)(AP); [Reuters](#).
- On 7 August, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 60 ISIL terrorists of northern in Amirli district in Diyala. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 8 August, the Iraqi Army claimed to kill 130 ISIL terrorists "in Gwier town, outside of Mosul". [BAS News](#) in Kurdistan.
- On 9 August, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 28 ISIL terrorists in the Sa'adiya district in Baquba. [All Iraq News](#).
- On 11 August, 39 ISIL terrorists were reported killed in Iraq. [All Iraq News](#) (Iraqi Air Force claims 9 ISIL terrorist dead "in Himreen mountains of Sa'adiya district" of Baquba); [All Iraq News](#) (Iraqi security forces claim 15 ISIL terrorists dead in "Haditha city of western Anbar"); [All Iraq News](#) (Peshmerga killed 8 ISIL terrorists "in Khanaqeen district of northeastern Baquba"); [All Iraq News](#) (Iraqi Army claims 7 ISIL terrorists killed "in Dijla district of southern Tikrit city").
- On 12 August, 173 ISIL terrorists were reported killed in Iraq. [All Iraq News](#) (19 killed in northern Hilla); [All Iraq News](#) (Air Force claims 65 killed in northwestern Hilla.); [All Iraq News](#) (Dijla Operations Command claims 89 killed "in Atheem district in Diyala.").
- On 14 August, the Iraqi Air Force claimed to kill 71 ISIL terrorists "in the Barwana area of western Anbar". [All Iraq News](#).

- On 16 August, 78 ISIL terrorists were reported killed in Iraq. [All Iraq News](#) (Iraqi army killed 11 terrorists "in Himreen area of northeastern Baquba."); [All Iraq News](#) (U.S. airstrikes kill 17 at Mosul dam.); [All Iraq News](#) (Iraqi Air Force kills 25 "in Jurf al-Sakhar district of northern Babel"); [All Iraq News](#) (Iraqi army kills 25 "south of Baghdad").

The above cited reports claim to kill a total of 1515 terrorists during 21 days, an average of 72/day. *But if* ISIL terrorists were really dying at a rate of 72/day, ISIL — which has an estimated 10,000 terrorists — would be annihilated in 139 days, which is approximately 5 months. But no one believes that ISIL will be defeated in 5 months, with the current tepid campaign against ISIL in Iraq. Therefore, these reports of high death tolls are probably hysterical exaggerations by the Iraqi government, who are engaged in propaganda to make it *appear* that the Iraqi military is successfully fighting against ISIL.

I blame this problem on the Iraqi government which releases fictitious reports. A secondary problem is journalists who report these implausible numbers without mentioning the lack of confirmation and without mentioning the implausibility. Note that reliable news agencies (e.g., the Associated Press and Reuters) are usually *not* reporting these death tolls from the Iraqi government.

Daily News About Iraq 1 August 2014

At Friday prayers, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's top Shiite cleric, announced through his spokesman: "The big challenges facing Iraq require that the next government command national and broad acceptance ... to face the crises that are hitting the country.... No one should make himself an obstacle in achieving national consensus." Journalists interpreted these remarks as criticism of Maliki for continuing to seek a third term as prime minister. [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star](#).

3 August 2014

On Saturday, 3 August, ISIL captured

1. two towns (Zumar and Sinjar) and approximately a dozen villages. In these towns and villages many Yazidi live, who practice an ancient religion that goes back to Zoroastrianism. ISIL calls the Yazidi "devil worshippers". ISIL immediately demanded that the Yazidi either convert to Islam, pay a tax, flee their homes, or be beheaded. To escape from ISIL, the Yazidi fled into the mountains near Sinjar, where there is no drinking water.
2. the Ain Zalah oil field. ISIL is already selling oil to finance its expanding caliphate.
3. There are conflicting reports whether ISIL has also captured a nearby dam in Iraq. The capture of the dam — the largest dam in Iraq — would give ISIL the ability to sell water and electricity to finance its expanding caliphate.

References:

- "Islamic State takes Iraqi oilfield and towns," [Al-Jazeera](#), 11:55 GMT, 3 Aug.
- "ISIS takes over Iraq's biggest dam," [Al-Arabiya](#), 12:47 GMT, 3 Aug.
- "Kurdish Forces Suffer Major Losses Against Islamic State," [Voice of America](#), 18:49 GMT, 3 Aug.
- "Sunni Insurgents Seize Small Towns In Iraq's North", [Associated Press](#), 22:22 GMT, 3 Aug.
- "Islamic State grabs Iraqi dam and oilfield in victory over Kurds," [Reuters](#), 23:06 GMT, 3 Aug.
- [blog entry about Yazidi] [Al-Jazeera](#), 04:44 GMT, 4 Aug.
- "Iraq's Yazidis face Islamic State or perilous mountains," [Reuters](#), 16:41 GMT, 5 Aug.
- "U.N. says some rescued from Iraqi mountain siege, 200,000 flee," [Reuters](#), 10:38 GMT, 7 Aug.
- "Iraq's Yazidis cling to a mountaintop as Islamic State advances," [Reuters](#), 17:03 GMT, 7 Aug.

On the night of 3 August, U.S. State Department Spokesperson posted a press [statement](#) that condemned the ISIL attacks on Sinjar. The final sentence says: "We further call on all Iraqi leaders to move swiftly pursuant to their constitutional timeline to form a new government that can help pull the country together and harness national resources against this common enemy." Unfortunately, the words "swiftly" and "Iraqi leaders" do *not* belong in the same sentence, although it would be appropriate to say "ISIL swiftly"

4 August 2014

There were two big news stories from Iraq on 4 August. First, Maliki ordered the Iraqi Air Force to support the Kurdish militia (i.e., peshmerga) in expelling ISIL from Kurdistan. [Associated Press](#), 22:46 GMT; [Reuters](#), 21:36 GMT. This is significant because Maliki rarely cooperates with the Kurds. Second, ISIL began a campaign in Western Iraq to capture the Haditha dam, the second largest dam in Iraq. [Associated Press](#).

At the U.S. State Department Daily Press [Briefing](#) on Monday, 4 Aug there were *zero* mentions of "Syria", despite the reorganization of the Syrian rebels that is discussed [above](#). There were eight mentions of "Iraq", all in context with yesterday's invasion by ISIL.

Everyone is focused on the military campaign of ISIL and atrocities committed by ISIL. But in June, when ISIL captured Mosul, there was also an effect on food prices in Iraq. Baghdad imports most of its food from Turkey, and the main road from Turkey to Baghdad passes through Mosul. So food is now scarce in Baghdad and prices have risen 30%. [Al-Jazeera](#).

5 August 2014

Meeting of Iraqi Parliament: background in June and July 2014

On 17 June 2014, the results of the 30 April election were certified. Parliament *could* meet anytime after 17 June.

During meetings with Kerry on 23 June, senior Iraqi leaders agreed about the urgency of forming a new government. But the first meeting of Parliament was postponed until the *last possible day* under the Iraqi constitution, 1 July.

On 27 June, the top Shiite cleric in Iraq called for the top three new leaders to be determined *before* the first meeting of Parliament, but Parliament failed to select any of the three leaders at that time.

On 1 July only 78% of the members (255 of 328 legislators) attended the beginning of Parliament. On 13 July, 233 (71%) of 328 members attended the third session of Parliament. On 15 July, Parliament elected a speaker, with 273 (83%) of 328 members attending. On 24 July, Parliament elected a president with 269 members (82%) attending. These low attendance figures are evidence of a lack of seriousness by 17% to 29% of the Iraqi Parliament. The failure of Parliament to form a new government during six weeks since the election results were certified is evidence of the dysfunction of the Iraqi government, which seems more interested in petty bickering than annihilating ISIL.

Citations to the above facts are given in my [eighth](#), and [ninth](#) essays.

According to the Iraqi Constitution, the deadline for election of a prime minister is 15 days from the election of the president, which happened on 24 July. The 15 day deadline is Friday, 8 Aug, except that Parliament is given two extra days because of the Eid al-Fitr holiday on 29 July. [All Iraqi News](#).

Parliament meeting on 5 August 2014

Parliament convened around noon on 5 August, with 245 members (75%) present. [All Iraqi News](#). After meeting less than four hours, Parliament adjourned until 7 August. [All Iraqi News](#). The Associated Press reported:

Iraq's parliament postponed a discussion Tuesday [5 Aug] to decide who will be the country's next prime minister, instead focusing on the growing refugee crisis as a lawmaker from one persecuted minority [Yazidi] issued a tearful plea to "save us!"

....

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's State of Law bloc won the most votes in elections in April, but lawmakers still cannot agree on whether State of Law or the larger coalition it is part of should put forward the nominee for the country's top political office, Kurdish lawmaker Perwan Muslih told The Associated Press. The discussion over the new prime minister is now set for Thursday, she said.

Al-Maliki has vowed to stand for a third four-year term as prime minister, but many of his critics have called for his removal, accusing him of monopolizing power and

alienating Sunni and Kurdish minorities. The other parties in the National Iraqi Alliance coalition oppose al-Maliki.

Vivian Salama & Sameer N. Yacoub, "Iraqi Lawmakers Postpone PM Discussion," [Associated Press](#), 14:01 GMT, 5 August 2014.

[Reuters](#) reports that Iranian government is "working with" Iraqi politicians to find an alternative prime minister to Maliki. The Iranians have reportedly "reached the conclusion that Maliki cannot preserve the unity of Iraq". Reuters mentions only two possible candidates for prime minister: Ibrahim Jaafari and Ahmad Chalabi.

My comments: It would be more logical to elect a prime minister first, then begin to discuss substantive issues. Who nominates the prime minister is important, because the State of Law party will presumably nominate Maliki, while the National Iraqi Alliance will nominate someone else. But if Maliki is nominated, he will be defeated by a vote in Parliament.

As an example of the idiocy that sometimes appears, a journalist asked a question during the U.S State Department Daily Press [Briefing](#) on 5 Aug that said "there is a perception in the Middle East that the U.S. was behind the creation of ISIL in the region." The Arabs who believe this nonsense are using the failure of the U.S. Military to attack ISIL as evidence that their nonsensical belief is true. But the U.S. Military has failed to attack, because Obama decided to wait for the Iraqi Parliament to form a new government that was inclusive, before the USA would get involved. This question, and Psaki's response, were the only mentions of Iraq in the 5 Aug Briefing, although important events were happening in Iraq.

5 August 2014 Battles in Sinjar, Iraq

[Reuters](#) reports that the Kurdish peshmerga are armed with AK-47 assault rifles, while ISIL has mortars, artillery, and machine guns that ISIL stole from the Iraqi army. [Daily Star](#)(Reuters). In some places, the peshmerga fled when they exhausted their supply of ammunition. [Daily Star](#).

The White House Press Spokesman was asked what the U.S. response would be to the current ISIL assault in northern Iraq:

QUESTION: I wanted to ask about Iraq. Over the weekend, Baghdad took the extraordinary step of sending forces to bolster the Kurdish fighters. And so I'm wondering if you guys are considering anything to help aid the Kurds, as ISIS is kind of pushing farther into their territory, and if you remain confident in their ability to kind of hold the ground in Iraq right now?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Justin, the United States is supporting the Iraqi security forces [ISF] and Kurdish Peshmerga forces working to defend these areas. Our joint operation centers in Erbil and Baghdad are sharing information with the ISF and the Peshmerga. We welcome the statement from officials in Baghdad that Iraqi security forces will provide air support to the Peshmerga as they counter the ISIL offensive. The Peshmerga have played a critical role in addressing this threat, and all parties must

continue to enhance cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil.

I would also point out that U.S. officials from Washington and Baghdad are also in contact with Iraqi officials from Baghdad and Erbil to discuss a coordinated approach to the humanitarian situation in that region of the country. We urge all Iraqi authorities, civil society and international partners to work the United Nations and its partners to deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance.

White House Press [Briefing](#), 5 Aug 2014.

On Tuesday, 5 Aug, [UNICEF](#) said 40 Yazidi children had died from violence, heat, and dehydration. [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 09:58 GMT, 5 Aug.

My comments: Journalists are reporting as many as 200,000 Yazidi and Christians have fled from towns in the Sinjar region. These persecuted people have no water in high temperatures that are sometimes above +48 celsius. The U.S. response is to babble slogans about "enhance cooperation" and "coordinated approach". These suffering people *need* water and food, and they needed it on Monday, 4 August. So Tuesday was already too late for some of these persecuted people.

6 August 2014

On Wednesday evening, 6 August, two car bombs exploded in predominantly Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad, killing at least 51 people. [Associated Press](#), 19:26 GMT, 6 Aug.

Neither the U.S. State Department nor the White House held a Daily Press Briefing on 6 August.

7 August 2014

7 Aug: Iraqi Parliament

Around noon on Thursday, 7 Aug, the Iraqi Parliament convened for the second time in August. [All Iraq News](#) reported: "The session agenda does not involve naming the largest bloc to be tasked to form the government." This means, three days before the constitutional deadline, they were *not* even trying to select a new prime minister. Three hours later, Parliament adjourned until Sunday, 10 Aug. [All Iraq News](#).

The new president and new speaker of Parliament "called the Iraqi National Alliance to settle nominating biggest bloc before 11:00 p.m. on Thursday [7 Aug]." [All Iraq News](#).

My [ninth essay](#) on Syria discusses a news story in *Iraqi News* on 30 July in which Maliki had agreed to resign. But on 7 Aug, *Iraqi News* reported:

Political sources of the Iraqi National Alliance announced that the alliance does not trust Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki who reneged on his promise to give up the Prime Minister nomination for a 3rd term in return for some concessions.

Those sources, who declined to be named, revealed that al-Maliki had requested from the INA, in return for the withdrawal of candidacy,

- the position of Vice President,
- a large personal security detail and
- authority over the Defense Ministry for at least two months, until Iraqi Security Forces regain full control of the provinces of Nineveh, Salahuddin and Anbar
- in addition to other privileges which were accepted by the Iraqi National Alliance[.]

[H]owever, [al-Maliki] surprised them by renegeing on his promise. IraqiNews.com was first to break the news of the deal as revealed on July 30, 2014 [[link](#) to story titled:] Prime Minister Maliki withdraws from 3rd term candidacy, National Alliance nominates 5 candidates says MP al-Saadi[.]

According to inside sources, the commander of Iran's al-Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, who is in charge of the Iraq issue, told Al Maliki about Iran's desire in abandon his candidacy for a 3rd term. As a result of these statements, Al Maliki insisted on his candidacy for Prime Minister against the wishes of Tehran and the Religious Authority that has the same opinion.

Abdelhak Mamoun, "URGENT: Maliki breaks his promise with INA to give up 3rd term nomination for Prime Minister," [Iraqi News](#), 7 Aug 2014. (Bulleted list added by Standler to make run-on sentence easier to read.)

I had thought the story of Maliki withdrawing his candidacy on 30 July was false, because of a lack of confirmation by other news media, but that story was apparently a significant exclusive report. The story subsequently became false only when Maliki renegeed on his own promise. Note that Maliki's desire to control the Defense Ministry *until* the army expels ISIL from three provinces could give Maliki control of the critical Defense Ministry for a long time, possibly beyond the next national election in the year 2018. Given Maliki's poor performance during his previous terms as prime minister — and given Maliki's unacceptability to many members of Parliament outside Maliki's State of Law party, as well as unacceptable to both Iran and the USA — Maliki should *not* be entrusted with either the Vice-President or Defense Minister position(s).

7 Aug: U.S. Response to Continuing ISIL Victories

While the Iraqi Parliament continued to fail to select a prime minister, ISIL continued its conquest of Iraq. The [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL seized the largest dam in Iraq that had been contested since 3 Aug. Also, ISIL has seized Qaraqosh, the largest Christian town in Iraq. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [The Telegraph](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

In my opinion, Obama's made a stupid decision on 19 June to wait for the Iraqi Parliament to select a new, inclusive government *before* Obama would order any U.S. airstrikes on ISIL in Iraq. The Iraqi Parliament continues to procrastinate. Meanwhile, there is no relief for the residents of Mosul, which was captured by ISIL on 10 June. ISIL is now well entrenched in

areas it captured in January 2014 through June 2014. Additional towns are being captured by ISIL almost every day. Additional strategic assets (e.g., oil fields, dams) have been captured by ISIL.

So, on the morning of 7 August, Obama convened his national security team. Obama was particularly concerned with the threatened genocide of Yazidi by ISIL, so on the night of 7 Aug, Obama ordered U.S. cargo aircraft to air drop food, water, and humanitarian supplies to Yazidis who had fled to mountains near Sinjar. Additionally, Obama ordered U.S. airstrikes against ISIL who threatened U.S. citizens at the U.S. Consulate in Erbil or the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Mission creep began on 16 Aug when U.S. airstrikes began to dislodge ISIL from Mosul Dam.

I grouped all of the reports of airstrikes, airdrops of humanitarian aid, and U.S. military policy in Iraq in a separate section of this essay, [below](#). The Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Dept. for 7 Aug is summarized [below](#), because it is mostly concerned with military policy.

8 August 2014

8 Aug 2014: U.S. State Dept. Press Briefing

On 8 August at 13:48 EDT, Marie Harf gave a Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department. (Psaki was in godforsaken Afghanistan with Kerry.) There were 109 occurrences of the word "Iraq" during this Briefing.

QUESTION: Could you talk a little bit about the capabilities of the Peshmerga?

There's been some reporting that they have very strong capabilities. I think there is a lot of evidence to suggest otherwise, that they are not particularly armed very well, don't have a lot of uniform uniforms, for lack of a better phrase. So could you talk about your assessment of their capabilities and to the extent that the U.S. is going to be helping them?

MS. HARF: Well, first, we have been advising and assisting the Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish forces, including the Peshmerga, that are working to defend these areas broadly against ISIL. We have continued to have, for example, extensive ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] operations over Iraq. This is something we ramped up after we saw ISIL make some initial gains some weeks ago, as we talked about. And as well, as I mentioned, our joint operation centers in Erbil and Baghdad, they are sharing information with ISF, with Kurdish Peshmerga commanders right now. So those are very strong relationships.

And look, we're in constant consultation with the Government of Iraq and the KRG about how we can best provide this urgent assistance. We are fully supportive and encouraged that today the Iraqis had offered to provide air support and ammunition to the Peshmerga. So they're working together, really I would say in an unprecedented way — the Iraqi Security Forces and the Peshmerga — in a way we haven't always seen in the past to counter this threat together. The Kurdish forces have played a

critical role in addressing this threat. We understand their need for additional arms and equipment and are working to provide those as well so they are reinforced.

So we are bringing a lot of firepower to bear against this threat, mainly by helping the Iraqis, but as you saw today, with some strikes as well.

QUESTION: Okay. And so regarding the strikes, the President has said repeatedly these — and I think other Administration officials have said repeatedly these will be limited airstrikes. What is it that the Administration wants to see before it stops strikes? I know there's only been one so far with the threat of more. What will it need to see before — from ISIL regarding some kind of retreat before it lays down that threat?

MS. HARF: Well, as you saw the President say last night, he has authorized the U.S. military to take targeted strikes in accordance with the principles he outlined and the guidance he outlined last night. The first priority — well, there are a couple first priorities. The first several priorities are really to stop the advance towards Erbil. And ... we have personnel in Erbil, Erbil is a key city. That has been one of our top priorities. Also to provide expedited support to the Iraqis, to the Kurds, to help them do this.

I'm not going to outline tactically what we would need to see. I don't think we'd want to outline for the enemy that we're fighting what would make us take or not take airstrikes. I think we are confident that the combination of U.S. airpower being brought to bear against these targets and the Peshmerga really regrouping — giving them some space to regroup with the airstrikes, but also then regrouping and fighting ISIL will provide a check on their advance. That's really, again, our primary goal right now.

....

QUESTION: Is this an acknowledgment that 11 years-plus of U.S. training of the regular Iraqi armed forces was all for naught, and what you have in Iraq today is a number of militias with the strongest militia being ISIL?

MS. HARF: Well, I wouldn't describe ISIL as a militia.

QUESTION: Whatever it is. A group?

MS. HARF: I would describe ISIL as something much, much worse.

QUESTION: Okay. I mean, armed groups — that Iraq has really turned into a bunch of armed groups with the strongest one being ISIL. I mean, seeing how the Peshmerga just collapsed.

MS. HARF: Well, I wouldn't — I would not use that term. This is a tough fight.

QUESTION: Retreated.

MS. HARF: That's an ongoing fight, and obviously they are a very good fighting force and we are working with them to help them get better to be able to fight ISIL here.

[**Comment by Standler:** Notice how Harf evaded the real question ("Is this an acknowledgment that 11 years-plus of U.S. training of the regular Iraqi armed forces was all for naught...?"). First, Harf picked at word choice: "militia" vs. "group". Incidentally, ISIL is a militia in the sense that it is a military group that does not belong to an established nation. Second, Harf again picked at word choice: "collapsed" vs. "retreated". After those two diversions, everyone forgot about the original question. The obvious answer is yes, the USA wasted a huge amount of money training and equipping the Iraqi security forces. Two years ago there was an article by Lara Jakes of the [Associated Press](#) that was published — amongst other places — in the [Army Times](#) that said the USA wasted more than \$200 million training the Iraqi police, which is part of the Iraqi security forces.]

....

QUESTION: I want to come back to this question of Islamic State's military capability. A senior Administration official said in last night's conference call that a, quote, sophisticated response was needed to deal with them because they basically have shown that they are, for all intents and purposes, a fighting army. They're not just a bunch of ragtag militants. Has the U.S. promised the Iraqi Government that while it tries to reconstitute chunks of its military, which basically melted away once IS moved from Syria into Iraq, that it's not going to bring in U.S. forces and take their place, because soldiers just are not made overnight?

MS. HARF: That's true.

QUESTION: But has the U.S. promised Iraq that it's not going to do its fighting for the Iraqi people?

MS. HARF: I mean, the President, I think, said that very clearly last night. We're not talking about putting troops back in Iraq. We're not talking about fighting this fight for them. The Iraqi security forces have made quite a bit of gains. There's a lot more work that needs to be done. The Peshmerga have traditionally been a very courageous and strong fighting force. We think with some time to regroup they will be up to the task of defending Erbil as well. So ... this is not an American fight.

....

MS. HARF: So we've seen progress towards formation of a new government, and hopefully we'll have a new prime minister for a new government very soon, hopefully. But [the political solution] needs to be matched with a security strategy, and part of that is the assistance we can provide, part of that is governing in an inclusive manner and helping the security forces work together, like we've seen them already start to do. So they really need to go hand in hand.

....

QUESTION: Second thing. You several times have said that it is — that your goal is for the Iraqis to be able to deal with this themselves and you've talked about U.S. assistance to them in that regard. What makes you think that the Iraqis will ever be capable of doing this themselves and of fielding ... an army capable of maintaining order throughout their country when they were unable to do so even after a decade of significant U.S. troops presence, training, financial assistance, political/diplomatic assistance — a decade, a lot of money, they couldn't do it then, what makes you think they can do it now?

MS. HARF: Well, they actually did it for a number of years. We left in December of 2011 and for many of those months actually they did. But when they were — that's a fact, too — when they were confronted with the overwhelmingly rapidly advance of ISIL that was a challenge they were not at the time prepared to face. But we believe working with us in a long-term, sustained way we can get them back.

....

MS. HARF: Well, we certainly have said we are broadly very supportive of the Iraqi Government, but that they need to move forward with government formation very, very quickly. We've made that clear publicly and privately in the many, many conversations we've had. So they have a new council speaker, they have a new president, and hopefully very, very soon we'll have a new prime minister. I don't think there is any doubt that the United States believes that they should form a new government as soon as possible. It's not up to us to say who that is, but that's what we need to see happen very soon.

Daily Press Briefing, U.S. [State Dept.](#), 8 Aug 2014.

Some journalists appear confused about what is happening, and I did not want to waste space in this essay by quoting the Briefing on this confusion. The USA is doing two things simultaneously. First, there are airdrops of humanitarian supplies to a mountain near Sinjar, to prevent genocide of the Yazidi. Second, there are airstrikes on ISIL to stop ISIL from conquering Erbil, a city where there are a considerable number of U.S. citizens.

Journalists are properly concerned that the Iraqi security forces in Mosul just disappeared when ISIL began to invade Mosul in June 2014. No one seems to remember that the Iraqi security forces also disappeared in March 2003 when the U.S. military invaded Iraq. These two examples show there is a history of cowardice in the Iraqi security forces. It is *not* clear how U.S. training can overcome that cowardice. Perhaps their loyalty to their tribe is stronger than their loyalty to their nation, so they are unwilling to risk dying for their nation.

The job of the press spokesperson is to explain current government policy. During times of crisis, many journalists become piranhas seeking a quotation that would embarrass or humiliate the government. While the government deserves to be embarrassed, it is a rude way to treat the innocent press spokesperson, who is *not* responsible for the government's mistakes.

9 August 2014

Regrettably, the Iraqi Parliament will be in violation of the timeline in their constitution that requires a prime minister be selected not more than 15 days after the president is selected. That 15 day deadline expired on 8 Aug, except that Parliament had an extra two days because of a religious holiday (see [above](#)). The next meeting of Parliament was scheduled for 10 Aug, the deadline with the two-day extension. But today that meeting was postponed until 11 Aug "to give the political blocs a chance to finalize its discussions to nominate a candidate for the Premier Post." [All Iraq News](#). Today's postponement puts Parliament past the constitutional deadline, but the news reports were silent on this matter.

About five hours later, the same news source reported that the parliament rapporteur said Parliament would hold a session on 10 Aug, and the agenda included: "discussing the file of the displaced families and the formation of the parliamentary committees." There was no mention of selection of the prime minister and no mention of the inconsistent previous story. [All Iraq News](#).

The Wall Street Journal was amongst a few newspapers who noticed that the Iraqi Parliament was about to miss the constitutional deadline for electing a new prime minister. But the *Journal* says: "And no broadly acceptable alternative to Mr. Maliki appears to have emerged, further complicating the political situation." [WSJ](#), 19:12 EDT, 9 Aug.

U.S. Senator John McCain told the [NY Times](#) that he favored (1) broader airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq intended to stop ISIL, (2) "heavy military equipment should be rushed into Erbil", and (3) also having airstrikes against ISIL in Syria. *The New York Times* reports: "ISIS has erased the boundary between Iraq and Syria," Mr. McCain said. Yet the president, he said, 'has failed so far to even mention Syria.'" [Reuters](#) summarized *The Times*' article.

My comments: In the conclusion of my [ninth essay](#) on Syria, I said that ISIL's capture of Mosul had changed the Western view of the insurgency in Syria. Unfortunately, on 9 Aug, there is still no public indication that either Obama or Kerry recognize this changed view. Now Assad and Obama are each bombing ISIL. Assad and Obama are both fighting against the same terrorists, but without Assad and Obama cooperating with each other. Frankly, Obama's continuing feud with Assad looks as petty as some of the sectarian bickering in the Iraqi Parliament. It would be logical if Obama were to cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL.

10 August 2014

The Iraqi Parliament met on 10 Aug, with 230 members (70%) attending. [All Iraq News](#). About six hours later, Parliament adjourned, "after the meeting discussed the displaced file and formed the permanent committees of the council." The next meeting is scheduled for 19 Aug. There is no mention of discussion of candidate(s) for prime minister. [All Iraq News](#). Also see [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

Given that Parliament failed to nominate a prime minister by the deadline in the constitution,

and given a continuing active insurgency by ISIL, it is outrageous that Parliament takes an 8 day vacation.

The Iraqi constitution specifies that the president will ask the leader of the largest political party to form a new government, including choosing the new prime minister. The members of Parliament who oppose a third-term for prime minister Maliki are exploiting an ambiguity. Is the largest party (1) Maliki's State of the Law party, or (2) the Iraqi National Alliance, which contains the State of the Law party? Unfortunately, the leader of the Iraqi National Alliance has not decided on one consensus candidate for prime minister.

If Maliki is nominated as prime minister, he would have 30 days in which to form a government, and then Parliament would vote on that government. If Parliament votes no, then Iraq will have wasted 30 days, but at least they would be rid of Maliki.

At midnight on 10 Aug, caretaker prime minister Maliki announced he would file a legal complaint against the new president for "a clear constitutional violation", because the president failed to nominate Maliki as the prime minister candidate of the State of Law party by today's deadline. [Associated Press](#), 01:28 GMT, 11 Aug. [Reuters](#) reported the same speech and legal complaint against the president, but added that Shiite militias loyal to Maliki were prominently displayed in Baghdad. See also [Al-Jazeera](#).

In an extraordinary move, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Brett McGurk said on Twitter that he "Fully support President of Iraq Fouad Masoum as guarantor of the Constitution and a (prime minister) nominee who can build a national consensus". [Reuters](#), 00:59 GMT, 11 Aug. The clear implication is that the USA does *not* support Maliki. As documented in my previous essay, Maliki went berserk on 9 July and accused Kurds of harboring ISIL, so Maliki has a history of making unfounded and inflammatory accusations.

At 02:21 GMT on 11 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported that U.S. State Dept. Spokesperson, "Jen Psaki said the U.S. rejects any effort to use coercion or manipulation in the process of choosing a new Iraqi leader." However, I could not find any press release by either Psaki or Harf at the State Dept. website, not even on 23:20 EDT on 11 Aug.

In my opinion: Maliki's midnight speech, criminal complaint against the president, and openly displaying military forces loyal to Maliki — each has the dignity of a food fight in a school cafeteria. This is *not* the way that credible politicians behave in Western Civilization. It is the way that authoritarian tyrants in failed states behave. Maliki is an embarrassment to Iraq.

11 August 2014: Prime Minister Nominated

At 01:57 Baghdad time, [All Iraq News](#) reported that security forces had surrounded the residence of the president in Baghdad.

All Iraqi News reported an attempt to salvage the unconstitutional mess:

The First Deputy Speaker, Haider al-Ebadi, announced extending the constitutional

period allocated for tasking a new Prime Minister till 3 pm Monday [11 Aug].

In a statement posted via Facebook, he said "The Iraqi National Alliance is about to nominate a candidate accepted by all political sides."

"1st Deputy Speaker announces extending period for tasking new PM," [All Iraq News](#) 10:44 Baghdad time, 11 Aug.

My comment is that the first deputy speaker does *not* have the authority to extend constitutional deadlines. There has already been a questionable extension of two days for an Islamic holiday of Eid al Fitr on 29 July. Deadlines become meaningless when repeatedly extended without authority. On the other hand, it would be absurd to forever bar the Iraqi Parliament from establishing a new government because they missed a deadline. It appears that the Iraqi courts will need to resolve the meaning of "largest bloc" in the Iraqi constitution, so we can learn whether Maliki's State of Law or the Iraqi National Alliance nominates the prime minister.

The Iraqi Federal Court "ruled that Maliki's State of Law bloc is the biggest in parliament, obliging the president to ask Maliki to form a new government". [Reuters](#), 11:56 Baghdad time, 11 Aug.

On 11 Aug, Iraq's president nominated the deputy parliament speaker — Haider al-Ibadi, also spelled Ebadi & Abadi — as the prime minister, and asked him to form a new government. In the following list of citations, all times are Baghdad time on 11 Aug.

- [All Iraq News](#), 13:45 ("The Iraqi National Alliance held a meeting at the residence of the INA, Ibrahim al-Jaafary, to officially nominate Ebadi for the PM post after requesting the President Fuad Masoum to request INA to form the next government.")
- [All Iraq News](#), 14:33 ("The head of the INA, Ibrahim al-Jaafry, visited the President Masoum at his office and handed over the nomination letter that assures that Ebadi is its nominee for the PM post.")
- [Reuters](#), 15:38.
- [Associated Press](#), 16:01.
- [Associated Press](#), 20:37.
- "Iraq president asks deputy speaker to be PM," [Al-Jazeera](#), 21:55.
- "Iraqi president nominates Haider Abadi as new PM," [Al-Arabiya](#), 24:16.
- "Entrenched Maliki rejects new Iraqi PM," [Al-Arabiya](#), 25:03.

Haider al-Ebadi was *not* one of the five names suggested in the 30 July 2014 [Iraqi News](#) article about five alleged nominees of the Iraqi National Alliance. I Googled Ebadi to find some biographical information about al-Ebadi:

- lived in England, in self-imposed exile, during reign of Saddam Hussein (1979-2003)
- earned Ph.D. in electrical engineering from University of Manchester in England, 1980
- worked on people movers in London
- returned to Iraq in 2003 and has been continuously active in Iraqi government: appointment as Minister of Communications (Sep 2003 to June 2004), subsequently Member of Parliament from Baghdad (2005-present)
- member of Islamic Dawa Party since 1967, now part of State of Law Coalition. The Dawa Party is historically pro-Iranian.

See [Wikipedia](#); [Washington Post](#); [The Guardian](#). Note that Ebadi has no military experience, which will be a disadvantage in the future battles with ISIL and other insurgents.

To be clear, note that today Ebadi was only nominated — he is *not* yet prime minister. He now has 30 days in which to assemble a group of ministers. Then the Iraqi Parliament will vote to confirm or reject the new government. Given the tribal and sectarian divisions in Parliament, the confirmation of Ebadi's government is *not* assured. So the crisis in Iraqi's government will continue for at least another month.

Note that Ebadi extended the deadline until 15:00 today, and then he was the beneficiary of that extension when he was nominated to be prime minister.

On the morning of 11 Aug, the U.S. Vice President, Biden, called the Iraqi President. Biden "commended [the President] for meeting this key milestone", the nomination of Ebadi. Biden also "express[ed] the United States' full support for [the President's] role as guarantor of the Iraqi Constitution." [White House](#).

The U.S. Government may be happy about both (1) the Iraqis finally nominated a prime minister, and (2) the new nominee is *not* Maliki. But there was excessive delay, the constitution was violated, and there will be more delay in Iraq.

At 14:09 EDT (21:09 Baghdad time), Marie Harf began the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department:

QUESTION: By your statement, do I understand that the United States is recognizing Dr. Abadi as the nominee, or do you think he is going to be the next prime minister?

MS. HARF: Well, he's the prime — prime minister-designate, excuse me. There's a — Prime Minister Maliki is still the prime minister, as of right now. He is still legally the prime minister. I know there's a lot of confusion about this. The President charged the prime minister nominee to form a new cabinet. The nominee now has 30 days to present a new government and national program to parliament for approval that will address the needs and aspirations of all of Iraq's diverse communities. So there's still a process here, but this is an important step in the process, one that we absolutely welcome.

....

QUESTION: Okay. Does the United States believe that the Iraqi National Alliance has the authority to nominate Dr. Abadi even though the Dawa party has not?

MS. HARF: Well, without going too deep in the weeds of Iraqi constitutional politics

QUESTION: But it's so fun.

MS. HARF: Isn't it though? We can leave that up to them to talk about. But in general, look, the Shia bloc nominated Dr. Abadi, a bloc that includes Prime Minister Maliki's party. There was overwhelming support for Dr. Abadi. We think this is part of the process as it has played out under the constitution. I don't have any reason to believe otherwise.

....

QUESTION: What do you consider Prime Minister Maliki now? You say he's still the prime minister, but —

MS. HARF: He's still the prime minister legally under the Iraqi constitution.

QUESTION: But do you consider him a lame duck? Do you consider him on his way out? Do you consider him still a person you would work with?

MS. HARF: Well, certainly we will continue working and engaging with him given that he's still the prime minister of Iraq, absolutely. And Iraq is facing a very dire situation right now. But we've said that in order for Iraq to better confront ISIL going forward, they need an inclusive government in place as soon as possible. There's a process for that government to be in place, and what you saw today was just another step in that process.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 11 Aug 2014.

[Ban Ki-moon](#); Iran ([PressTV](#), [Iran News Agency](#), and [FARS](#)); and [Obama](#) all congratulated Ebadi and all agreed that Ebadi's nomination was in accordance with the Iraqi constitution. [Kerry](#) praised "the successful completion of the third step in Iraq's constitutionally mandated government formation process". In my view, these statements are like a big steamroller that flattens a bump in the road — the bump being Maliki.

Maliki defiantly refuses to accept the validity of Ebadi's nomination to be prime minister. At 00:58 Baghdad time on 12 Aug (21:58 GMT on 11 Aug), [Reuters](#) reports Maliki "refused to go[,] after deploying militias and special forces on the streets, creating a dangerous political showdown in Baghdad." Note that armed militias loyal to one politician, riots, and a military coup d'état, are each *not* a legitimate way to become prime minister.

12 August 2014

On 12 Aug, the U.S. Government sent an additional 130 U.S. Marine and Special Operations personnel to Erbil to assess the scope of the humanitarian situation and plan an evacuation of Yahidi from the mountains near Sinjar. The Associated Press quoted an anonymous official

as saying: "the mission for the 130 troops could last less than one week". [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Pentagon](#).

On the afternoon of 12 Aug, Maliki publicly declared that the Iraqi security forces should stay out of the current political crisis over the next prime minister. [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

[The New York Times](#) reports: "Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's defiant fight to retain power in Iraq appeared to collapse on Tuesday [12 Aug] after his former backers in Iran, the military and his own party all signaled that he could no longer expect their support."

The [Associated Press](#) reported that U.S. Congress is giving "surprisingly broad bipartisan support" for Obama's airstrikes in Iraq, that began on 8 Aug. This support is in contrast to the reluctance of Congress to authorize airstrikes on Syria in Sep 2013.

At night on 12 Aug, I looked at the English-language homepage of Iraqi prime minister Maliki. There are only two items added during 1-12 August 2014: a 6 Aug weekly speech, and a 10 Aug three-sentence press release. Maliki's English-language homepage does *not* include his inflammatory televised speech at midnight on 10 Aug, and has no comment on the nomination of Ebadi on 11 Aug.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, Marie Harf said:

MS. HARF: And so the support for the new prime minister-designate, I think, has been fairly clear.

QUESTION: Right, but that's not stopping Prime Minister Maliki from mounting legal challenges to — I don't believe he's dropped that legal challenge.

MS. HARF: Well, we don't — look, there's always going to be some differences that people have about how these things should play out. But we would reject any effort, legally or otherwise, to achieve outcomes through coercion or manipulation of the constitutional or judicial process. I think I said this on Sunday [10 Aug] night and repeating it today: There's a constitutional process. It is happening, and that is what we support. And we will keep supporting that as the Iraqis go through this process.

QUESTION: But, I mean, you know that in 2010 he did launch a legal challenge. He mounted a legal challenge —

MS. HARF: I'm aware of the history.

QUESTION: — and he was able to maintain another term.

MS. HARF: I'm aware of the history. I think we need to watch what happens day by day here. We need to see what's happening on the ground. We need to make clear our position, which is that we would reject any efforts to achieve outcomes through judicial — through coercion or manipulation of judicial processes. And we'll keep working with them, but they have a process in place. It's moving forward, and let's see how that plays out.

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

13 August 2014

During his weekly televised address on 13 Aug, Maliki said he will not relinquish the prime minister position until the Iraqi federal court has ruled on his complaint about the unconstitutional nomination of Ebadi. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

An English-language translation of Maliki's weekly speech at the prime minister's website says:

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Peace Be Upon You and God's Mercy and Blessings

The constitutional violation that happened in the country which is not designating the candidate of the largest parliamentary bloc, the political process would fall apart, and our insisting to adhere to the designation according to the constitution comes from our national and moral duty to defend the rights of voters and the protection of the state.

The current government will remain in office and will not change until the issuance of the decision of the Federal Court, it is not a simple case, and there is a conspiracy by some countries because we want to build a constitutional state, silent about the constitutional violation means many will breach the Constitution in the future.

It is surprising that major countries have fallen in the mud of constitutional violations and they believe that democracy is tailored just for them. The encouragement by some countries to those who violated the Constitution shows that they have exported democracy to the region, but it is distorted and not real democracy.

America, which is sponsoring democracy, the heads of its administration began to compete in showing their support of this constitutional violation.

Everyone should be committed to the decisions of the Federal Court, which is the last resort when we disagree; it is natural that we disagree but in a civilized fashion we go to the designated place to resolve the disputes.

....

This constitutional violation has no value, its outcomes have no value and cannot proceed in the formation of the government unless we receive the decision of the Federal Court and correct this violation.

Nouri al-Maliki, Weekly Address, [prime minister](#), 13 Aug 2014.

In my opinion, Maliki portrays himself as a true defender of the constitution, when what he

really wants is a third term as prime minister.

With many people hating him, Maliki is understandably paranoid. He speaks of a "conspiracy by some countries", when Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the USA, and the United Nations are *all* supporting Ebadi. Maliki mentions the USA is "showing their support of this constitutional violation", which is just enthusiasm to be rid of Maliki in the quickest possible way.

Later in this speech, he says "I do not want to mention the countries that supported the constitutional violation which in fact caused all the ills of Iraq, and which supported terrorism." This is a hysterical sentence that begins with a technical violation of the constitution, then grandiosely "caused all the ills of Iraq", and finally "supported terrorism".

Iraq could simply fix the constitutional violation by having the State of Law coalition (i.e., "largest parliamentary bloc") nominate Ebadi to be prime minister. Maliki greatly inflates this little problem.

On 13 Aug, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, effectively endorsed Ebadi as the prime minister nominee: "God willing, the deadlock will end with the appointment of Iraq's new prime minister and the government will be formed to start its work and give a good lesson to those who did and do intend to stir chaos and sedition in Iraq." [FARS](#); [Reuters](#); [All Iraq News](#).

At noon on 13 Aug, the White House deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, was blunt about Maliki:

MR. RHODES: But I think our message to Prime Minister Maliki and to all Iraqi leaders is this is the one process that is consistent with the Iraqi constitution that is going to lead to a new government, and [Maliki] needs to respect that process, let it go forward. Because frankly, this is not being imposed on anybody from outside of Iraq. This is what the Iraqis themselves have decided to do, including, importantly, not just the Kurdish President and the Sunni Speaker, but the different Shia political factions that put forward Dr. Abadi as their candidate for Prime Minister.

QUESTION: Will the White House be glad to see Maliki off the world stage?

MR. RHODES: The White House will be very glad to see a new government in place with Prime Minister Abadi the lead of that government. We believe it's necessary, frankly, to bring the country together. What's happened in the course of the last several years is you did not have Iraqis working together across different sectarian and communal lines. You had a Sunni population that became disaffected. That led to a loss of confidence in certain parts of Iraq in the Iraqi security forces.

[White House](#) Press Briefing, 13 Aug 2014.

Reported by: [The Hill](#); [The Guardian](#).

The Iraqi National Alliance bloc nominated Ebadi on 11 Aug. On 13 Aug, the Dawa party — to which both Maliki and Ebadi belong — endorsed Ebadi as the prime minister nominee. [Reuters](#); [Bloomberg](#).

Notice that the United Nations Secretary General, Iran, the USA (citations above for 11 Aug), [Saudi Arabia](#), and [Qatar](#) have *all* endorsed Ebadi — and, more importantly, no nation is endorsing Maliki — which increasingly isolates Maliki. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

14 August 2014

Maliki Will Quit

At 22:24 Baghdad time on 14 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Maliki, after meeting with Dawa party members, "has agreed to step aside and support his nominated replacement in the post." If true, it will end a grotesque crisis since June, in which Maliki insisted on a third-term as prime minister, despite a lack of support for Maliki.

At 22:52 Baghdad time on 14 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) tersely reports that Iraqi state television has announced that Maliki has relinquished the prime minister position to Ebadi.

At 23:36 Baghdad time on 14 Aug, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Maliki publicly "confirmed his support for the nomination of Haider al-Ebadi for the PM post." A few minutes later, [Iraqi News](#) reported that Maliki's speech was broadcast on national television, in which Maliki declared his support for Ebadi, withdrew his litigation against the President, and Maliki declared "I do not want any position in government." The [Voice of America](#) quotes Maliki: "... I do not want any post,"

My comment is that Maliki has now gone from (1) defender of the constitution to (2) quitter. There is now a glimmer of hope for Iraq, but the process of forming a new government has already taken too much time. The election results were certified on 17 June, approximately two months ago, and there is no hint of who will be the defense minister or foreign minister. It might be good to re-appoint the former foreign minister, Hoshyar Zebari, who is a Kurd and who was sacked by Maliki on 11 July. Re-appointing competent former ministers will bring continuity and experience to the new government.

[Rudaw](#), a newspaper in Kurdistan, reported: "According to *Rudaw* sources, leaders of the Dawa Party had held hours of extensive talks with Maliki to persuade him to step down."

On the night of 14 Aug, Kerry issued a four-sentence [press release](#) that began: "We commend the important and honorable decision by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to support Prime Minister-designate Haider Al-Abadi in his efforts to form a new government...."

At 04:06 Baghdad time on 15 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Maliki had relinquished the prime minister position to Ebadi, and Maliki had withdrawn his litigation about constitutional violations. But the AP did *not* mention Maliki withdrawing from government of Iraq.

At 06:38 Baghdad time on 15 Aug, [Al-Jazeera](#) reports that the top Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, had convinced Maliki to relinquish the prime minister position. Al-Jazeera also

reports the withdrawal of Maliki's legal complaint against the president. But Al-Jazeera did *not* mention Maliki withdrawing from government of Iraq.

I looked at the Reuters website several times during the night of 14 Aug, but only found reports of the same facts as described above.

15 August 2014

At midnight EDT on 15 Aug, I looked at the English-language homepage of Iraqi prime minister Maliki, but his resignation speech 32 hours earlier was *not* posted at his website. As I said above on 12 Aug, his website is missing several recent speeches.

Journalists briefly mentioned that Maliki boasted of his accomplishments in his resignation speech yesterday. But Maliki will be remembered for:

1. increasing corruption,
2. worsening dysfunction of the Iraqi government,
3. increasing sectarianism in government,
4. and making the Iraqi army ineffective, which allowed ISIL to capture western and northern Iraq.

These four negatives are why there was so much opposition to Maliki seeking a third-term as prime minister. See, e.g.,

- "Baghdad's Political Rifts Lurk Ahead of Deadline to Select Prime Minister," [WSJ](#), 9 Aug, ("deepening sectarian discord, rampant corruption and institutional failures").
- Editorial, "Iraq Needs a New Prime Minister" [NY Times](#), 11 Aug, (Maliki "bears heavy responsibility for the current crisis by alienating Sunni, Kurdish and other minority groups and undermining the Army and other national institutions through cronyism and corruption.").
- "Can Haidar al-Abadi lead Iraq from disaster as new PM?," [The Telegraph](#), 12 Aug, ("Iraq suffers from rampant corruption, has major shortfalls in basic services such as electricity and clean water, and is sharply divided along religious and ethnic lines.").
- "Iraq Crisis: Nouri al-Maliki Quits," [WSJ](#), 15 Aug, (Maliki leaves "behind a legacy of profound sectarianism, institutional dysfunction and a weak military").
- op-ed by Ali Khedery, "Iraq's Last Chance," [NY Times](#), 15 Aug.

There have been suggestions that Iraq could split into three areas: Shiite, Sunni, and Kurd. (See, e.g.: Joe Biden & Leslie Gelb, "Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq," [NY Times](#), 1 May 2006; Leslie H. Gelb, op-ed, [NY Times](#), 1 July 2014.) This simple solution seems attractive, but Joel Rayburn mentions three problems:

1. There are Sunnis living in Shiite majority areas, and Shiites living in Sunni majority

areas, which would involve relocation of millions of people.

2. There is no agreement on exact borders of Shiite and Sunni areas.
3. Where do smaller minorities (e.g., Turkmen, Christians, and Yazidis) go?

See opinion by Joel Rayburn, "The coming disintegration of Iraq," [Washington Post](#), 15 Aug.

16 August 2014

[Iraqi News](#) reported: "The State of Law Coalition announced on Saturday [16 Aug] that the head of the coalition, Nouri al-Maliki refused to accept any government position in the next term," This is consistent with some reports on the night of 14 Aug.

At midnight EDT on 16 Aug, I looked at the English-language homepage of Iraqi prime minister Maliki, but his resignation speech 56 hours earlier was *not* posted at his website. As I said above on 12 Aug, his website is missing several recent speeches.

17 August 2014

In my reading of news stories, I did not see any significant news on 17 Aug.

18 August 2014

On Monday, 18 Aug, there was a Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department for the first time since 14 Aug. The word "Iraq" appeared 25 times.

QUESTION: As you know, the Syrian regime has been bombing Islamic State's positions in Raqqa for two days. Since you are doing the same thing across the border in Iraq, what would you say —

MS. HARF: I would disagree that we're doing the same thing, but go ahead.

QUESTION: But, I mean, you are bombing Islamic State position in Iraq, so would you say that the U.S. and Syria are on the same page against a common enemy?

MS. HARF: No. No, I would not. And in large part, that's because it's the Assad regime's own actions that helped lead to the rise of ISIS or ISIL or IS or whatever we're going to call it this week. It is the security environment they created. It is them — the Assad regime encouraging the flow of fighters into Iraq that they did, certainly, when we were there and also have done recently. So I would strongly disagree with the notion that we are on the same page here in terms of what we're doing.

QUESTION: Regardless of the cause, you do agree that you share an enemy in common, correct? I mean with ISIS, in particular.

MS. HARF: I don't want — I'm not going to say that we share anything in common with the Syrian regime.

....

QUESTION: Is ISIS in Iraq a different organization than ISIS in Syria, or is it one and the same, to the best of your knowledge?

MS. HARF: They're an organization, it's my understanding, with the same leadership in general. Obviously, there's different parts of it on the ground operating in different places, but under the general same umbrella of this group, yes, it's my understanding.

QUESTION: So if you bomb them in Iraq and the Syrian regime bombs them in Syria, you're bombing the same organization, right?

MS. HARF: Well, the — that's a little too simplistic, Said. The reason that they were able to flourish and grow so strong is because of the Assad regime who enabled them to grow in the security environment and indeed fostered their growth throughout many years. So I think that I — again, I just — I don't concede the point that we're on the same page here in any way.

QUESTION: So the U.S. doesn't welcome what the Syrian regime is doing in Syria against the Islamic State?

MS. HARF: Again, I think I'm probably going to avoid welcoming that. But look, we want — ISIS is a very serious threat.

....

MS. HARF: I don't know what the picture looks like on the ground in terms of capabilities. I don't want to guess at that. What I would say is look, I'm not — yes, it is a good thing — these things can all be true, right? It's a good thing when ISIS fighters are taken off the battlefield, period. I think that's a good thing.

QUESTION: Regardless of who does it?

MS. HARF: I think that's a good thing, yes. However, the Assad regime is the one responsible for their growth in strength, and I also don't want to come out and say that I think the Assad regime bombing people in its own — who knows who they're actually hitting? I can't actually confirm reports about who they hit in Raqqa. So I think it's just a little more complicated than that.

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

Part of the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Dept. for 18 Aug on "mission creep" in Iraq is summarized [below](#).

My Comments: Truth seems to be in short supply in Washington DC on 18 Aug. It is obvious that Assad, Ebadi, and Western Civilization are all joining the battle against ISIL.

Obama, Kerry, and Harf continue the absolute refusal to recognize that the USA has a common interest with Assad in defeating terrorism, not only defeating ISIL, but also defeating Nusra Front and the jihadists in Islamic Front.

Note that Harf continues the U.S. propaganda about how Assad "enabled" ISIL to grow in Syria. Assad was concentrated on defeating insurgents in western Syria, and Assad essentially ignored ISIL and other insurgents in northern Syria and eastern Syria. Assad's concentrating his limited military resources in one area is *not* the same thing as deliberately allowing ISIL to "flourish and grow".

At this time, it would be very difficult for the USA to cooperate with Assad's government, given all of the nasty things that Obama, Hillary Clinton, Kerry, and their press spokespeople have said about Assad since early 2011. Assad surely would suspect a trap in any cooperation that the U.S. proposes to Assad. Without Assad's approval, U.S. airplanes should stay out of Syria, to avoid anti-aircraft fire and Syrian fighter aircraft. The situation is simpler in Iraq, where the Iraqi government *requested* U.S. aircraft, and where neither the Iraqi government nor ISIL have any anti-aircraft capability.

While the logical policy would be cooperation between Assad and Iraq and the USA, it is unlikely that there will be cooperation between Assad and the USA, because of Obama's continuing obsession with deposing Assad.

19 August 2014

The Iraqi Parliament met on Tuesday, 19 Aug, with 217 members (66%) present. [All Iraq News](#). After five hours, Parliament adjourned until 21 Aug. [All Iraq News](#).

An anonymous source says Ebadi will announce the names of his proposed cabinet on Monday, 25 Aug. [All Iraq News](#). I note that the 30 day deadline in the constitution expires on 10 Sep. It would be *unIraqi* to do anything before the deadline.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, Marie Harf said:

QUESTION: Just one more question about Haider Al-Abadi, the prime minister-designate. Do you have any hopes that he might actually be able to form an inclusive government?

MS. HARF: Absolutely.

QUESTION: What is different between him and his predecessor, Maliki? They both belong to the same Dawa party[,] who many people see as a fundamentalist Shia party.

MS. HARF: There are a lot of members of parties, and I don't think we should paint them all with one broad brush. Dr. Al-Abadi has said he is committed to forming an inclusive government. He said he will do so within, I think, 15 days, but that was yesterday, so 14 now. And he's said he recognizes the severity of the threat that ISIL poses to Iraq. We have said that when a new, inclusive government is up and running, we are looking at additional ways to provide additional military, economic, political

support to this new government. And we really believe that once that's in place it will not just be helpful with our support, but will help us bring together other partners throughout the region to really help the Iraqi Government, going forward, fight this very serious threat. And we have every expectation that he will do so.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 19 Aug 2014. (Minor editing by Standler.)

My comment is that diplomats are optimistic. I do *not* see any reason for optimism in Iraq: the Iraqi Parliament continues its occasional meetings with low attendance, and seems to continue its petty sectarian bickering, while ISIL has conquered a significant fraction of Iraq. It seems obvious that Iraq is a failed nation, only slightly better than Somalia or Libya.

20 August 2014

On 9 July, Maliki went berserk and accused the Kurds of harboring ISIL. On 11 July, Maliki sacked his foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, who is Kurdish. (See my [ninth essay](#) on Syria.) But on 20 Aug, the Kurds rejoined Maliki's government. Hoshiyar Zebari is again Iraq's foreign minister. [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 20 Aug, Obama released a statement, part of which is quoted [above](#), about ISIL beheading an American journalist, James Foley, in Syria.

The people of Iraq, who with our support are taking the fight to ISIL, must continue coming together to expel these terrorists from their communities. The people of Syria, whose story Jim Foley told, do not deserve to live under the shadow of a tyrant or terrorists.

Obama, "Statement by the President," [White House](#), 20 Aug 2014.

When Obama condemned ISIL, Obama was careful to keep Syria and Iraq separate, instead of recognizing the same ISIL infests a significant fraction of both Syria and Iraq. In Syria, the people must fight against both Assad (i.e., the tyrant) and ISIL (i.e., the terrorists); while in Iraq the people must fight against ISIL.

As I have said previously, a more logical approach would be to recognize that Assad is much better than ISIL (and Assad is better than either the jihadists or Al-Qaeda), then join Assad in fighting terrorism. But Obama continues his obsession with deposing Assad, which obsession prevents a rational approach to the problem of ISIL. If Obama refuses to help Assad defeat ISIL, then Syria will continue to be a safe haven for ISIL from U.S. airstrikes.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, Marie Harf said:

MS. HARF: Well, there's a couple things at play here, and that is a key part in this statement because we have talked to a number of partners who understand how serious the threat ISIL is, not just to Syria and Iraq, but to their countries as well. And countries in the region are very, very concerned about this. We've worked with them on working to cut off financing, working to cut off the flow of foreign fighters so we can start to deprive ISIL of the oxygen that it's had and has really allowed it to flourish.

But we've also been clear, separate and apart from that, that we will, no matter how

long it takes, find people responsible for hurting Americans and bring them to justice. That's a key part of what the President said and what the Secretary said. I think we've shown — very committed to doing that, and that certainly is the case here.

QUESTION: The statement suggests that you aren't — at the moment, at least, the Administration is not entirely happy, satisfied with all of the governments and peoples of the Middle East, that you believe that there are some peoples and governments that could do more or aren't really behind this effort.

MS. HARF: I think —

QUESTION: Is that correct?

MS. HARF: I think what today and the last 24 hours really underscores is that we all need to be doing more.

....

QUESTION: Okay. Now, is it true — isn't it true that basically, you were looking the other way while the sources of financing were going to ISIL in, let's say, a year or a year and a half ago from Kuwait, from Qatar, from Saudi Arabia, from the Gulf countries by individuals?

MS. HARF: Not at all. We have been very focused on the ISIS threat as it's evolved in Syria, as it's evolved in Iraq over the past weeks and months as well. It's a threat we've been very focused on. And we have worked with our partners in the region to try, as I said, to deprive it of oxygen that it really needs here. We're doing that in a number of ways, but we have been very focused on it for some time.

....

QUESTION: Does it remain the stated policy of this Administration that Assad must go?

MS. HARF: Yes.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 20 Aug 2014.

My comments on the State Dept. Press Briefing:

The situation with James Foley and ISIL did *not* suddenly appear. Foley was kidnapped by insurgents in Syria in Nov 2012. It has been obvious that ISIL is a bad group since 3 Jan 2014, when other insurgents in Syria began fighting against ISIL. ISIL's record of atrocities has worsened during the past eight months.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar funded the insurgency in Syria because those three nations (and the insurgents) are Sunni, while Assad is Shiite — it is a sectarian civil war. The fact that ISIL and some other insurgent groups are committing atrocities did *not* stop the funding by these three nations. And atrocities by Assad's government did *not* stop the funding of Assad by Iran and Russia. Meanwhile, the U.N. Secretary General has repeatedly called, at least

since Dec 2013, for an end to shipments of munitions to Syria. But everyone, including the USA, ignores the call for an end to shipments of munitions to Syria. After robbing banks in Iraq in June 2014, and seizing oil fields and refineries in both Syria and Iraq, ISIL may now be self-supporting. So the U.S. desire to "cut off financing" to ISIL may now be too late, given that ISIL may now be self-supporting.

Finally, the continuing obsession of Obama and Kerry with removal of Assad prevents cooperation with Assad in fighting terrorists (including ISIL) in Syria.

After Maliki announced on 14 Aug that he would relinquish the prime minister position to Ebadi, Maliki disappeared from public view. But, on 20 Aug, Maliki reappeared and gave another weekly address. Iraq is now like a cuckoo clock: every Wednesday the cuckoo appears. <grin>

21 August 2014

On 21 Aug sometime before 09:50 EDT, a new [death toll](#) in Syria was announced by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Most of the news on 21 Aug about Syria was the aftermath of the beheading of [Foley](#), the failed [rescue](#) mission for Foley, and a U.S. Defense Dept. press conference (parts of which are quoted below).

On 21 Aug, 207 members (63%) of the Iraqi Parliament met at about 12:51 Baghdad time [All Iraq News](#). After five hours, they adjourned until 23 Aug. [All Iraq News](#).

On the morning of 21 Aug, Reuters reported on the relation of Syria to solving the ISIL problem:

Syria is wagering that Islamic State's push to reshape the Middle East will eventually force a hostile West to deal with President Bashar al-Assad as the only way to tackle the threat.

....

Officials in the Western governments which have backed the uprising against Assad dismiss the idea of rapprochement.

....

There is no sign of any shift in Washington, whose policy is built on Assad leaving power and last year came close to bombing Syria after accusing him of using chemical weapons. "He's part of the problem," Ben Rhodes, President Barack Obama's deputy national security adviser, said in a broadcast interview.

Assad is not expecting the West to perform a policy U-turn soon, the sources said. But having secured territory seen as vital for his survival, time is on Assad's side as he

takes the long view in the struggle for Syria.

....

The Free Syrian Army, once the West's main hope for a moderate opposition to Assad, is now widely seen as irrelevant.

Tom Perry, "Syria sees Islamist threat bringing detente with West, but not soon," [Reuters](#), 08:46 EDT, 21 Aug 2014.

My comments: Obama continues to cling to the assessment in the year 2011 of moderate rebels in Syria fighting for democracy and against the tyrant, Assad. That assessment became obsolete in 2012, as jihadists and Al-Qaeda entered Syria. By late 2013, the jihadists (e.g., Islamic Front), Al-Qaeda (Nusra Front), and ISIL clearly dominated the insurgency against Assad. As tersely described in my [Conclusion](#) below, the ISIL seizure of Mosul on 10 June 2014 suddenly forced people to change the way they viewed the war in Syria, although the reality had been continuously evolving since 2012. However, Obama continues his simplistic obsession with the removal of Assad. Obama's pig-headed stubbornness delays the defeat of ISIL in both Syria and Iraq.

21 Aug: U.S. Defense Dept. Press Conference

On 21 Aug, Secretary of Defense Hagel and General Dempsey gave a joint press conference at the Pentagon:

HAGEL: We are pursuing a long-term strategy against ISIL because ISIL clearly poses a long-term threat. We should expect ISIL to regroup and stage new offenses.

....

QUESTION: General, do you believe that ISIS can be defeated or destroyed without addressing the cross-border threat from Syria? And is it possible to contain them?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Let me start from where you ended and end up where you started. It is possible to contain them. And I think we've seen that their momentum was disrupted. And that's not to be discounted, by the way, because the — it was the momentum itself that had allowed them to be — to find a way to encourage the Sunni population of western Iraq and Nineveh province to accept their brutal tactics and — and their presence among them.

So you ask — yes, the answer is they can be contained, not in perpetuity. This is an organization that has an apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision and which will eventually have to be defeated. To your question, can they be defeated without addressing that part of their organization which resides in Syria? The answer is no. That will have to be addressed on both sides of what is essentially at this point a nonexistent border.

And that will come when we have a coalition in the region that takes on the task of

defeating ISIS over time. ISIS will only truly be defeated when it's rejected by the 20 million disenfranchised Sunni that happen to reside between Damascus and Baghdad.

....

HAGEL: Well, as to the comment about an imminent threat, I think the evidence is pretty clear. When we look at what they did to Mr. Foley, what they threatened to do to all Americans and Europeans, what they are doing now, the — I don't know any other way to describe it other than barbaric. They have no standard of decency, of responsible human behavior, and I think the record's pretty clear on that. So, yes, they are an imminent threat to every interest we have, whether it's in Iraq or anywhere else.

....

HAGEL: ... ISIL is as sophisticated and well-funded as any group that we have seen. They're beyond just a terrorist group. They marry ideology, a sophistication of strategic and tactical military prowess. They are tremendously well-funded.

Oh, this is beyond anything that we've seen. So we must prepare for everything. And the only way you do that is that you take a cold, steely, hard look at it ... and get ready. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 21 Aug 2014.

The Associated Press summarized that press conference:

Speaking alongside Hagel at a Pentagon news conference, Army Gen. Martin Dempsey said that although the Islamic State group can be contained it cannot be defeated without attacking it in Syria.

....

"[ISIL] can be contained, not in perpetuity," Dempsey said. "This is an organization that has an apocalyptic, end-of-days strategic vision and which will eventually have to be defeated.

"To your question, can they be defeated without addressing that part of their organization which resides in Syria? The answer is no. That will have to be addressed on both sides of what is essentially at this point a nonexistent border.

Robert Burns, "Pentagon: Islamic State Militants Will Regroup," [Associated Press](#), 17:14 EDT, 21 Aug 2014.

My comments: The Hagel-Dempsey press conference seems to be the beginning of a push by military leaders for airstrikes inside Syria to attack ISIL. Such involvement inside Syria would be a *significant* expansion (i.e., huge mission creep) of the U.S. Government involvement.

Personally, I think such an expansion makes sense, but *only* if the U.S. Government has permission from Assad. The expansion makes sense because Assad's military resources are

stretched thin by fighting multiple groups of insurgents, including ISIL. Without the expansion, eastern Syria could become a safe haven for ISIL. We need permission from Assad for reasons expressed in my comments [below](#).

21 Aug: U.S. State Dept. Daily Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, Marie Harf began by reminding journalists of the chemical weapons use in a suburb of Damascus on 21 Aug 2013.

One year ago today, the brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad launched a deadly chemical weapons attack on the suburbs of Damascus, where more than 1,000 people were killed. The Assad regime's unconscionable and indiscriminate attack on August 21st, 2013 used cruel weaponry that has long been internationally condemned, further exposing the regime's total disregard for human life. [¶] [¶] The haunting images of unspeakable human suffering on that day and throughout every other day of this tragic conflict remind the international community that Assad long ago forfeited his legitimacy to lead the Syrian people, of the need to hold the Assad regime accountable for this and other atrocities against the Syrian people perpetrated during this conflict, and of the urgency of addressing all dimensions of the Syrian crisis.

....

QUESTION: Is the U.S. talking with its allies, in the EU in particular, about strengthening the existing sanctions against al-Baghdadi and others in IS in order to basically underscore the need to starve them of funding, if you believe that this is critical to defeating this organization?

MS. HARF: We are. And just a couple of things I got a funding. There were a lot of questions about this yesterday, so I got some facts on this. We did — the State Department did designate al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIL, in October 2011, as well as the spokesman for ISIL just recently. They're designated as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under an executive order. So obviously, this prohibits U.S. persons from engaging in transactions with these officials. And one of them, Said, was the person you asked about who had been arrested in Kuwait. We had seen reports of his release after being arrested. We're seeking more information on those; can't confirm those one way or the other. But he's one of those that the Treasury Department had designated. They designated five additional people as well.

ISIL's funding comes from many sources. It comes from criminal activity in Iraq and Syria; bank heists, as we saw in Mosul; extortion; robberies; smuggling; and kidnapping for ransom, as well as raiding villages and towns. It also controls some petroleum facilities in eastern Syria. It does also receive some money from outside donors, which I think is something folks in here asked about yesterday.

Just two quick points, and then you can follow up. We don't have information that governments have supported them. Private fundraising networks increasingly rely upon social media to solicit donations and communicate with donors and recipient opposition groups or terrorist organizations. It also enables fundraisers to solicit

donations from supporters in countries where otherwise it would be banned, such as Saudi Arabia.

And then finally, fundraisers collect money through events held at private residences, wire transfers, informal financial transfer systems at mosques. We've seen some of this in the past. These tactics aren't new, but that's also one of the ways ISIL raises money.

....

MS. HARF: This is not about ISIL versus the United States. I think I made that clear yesterday. They are killing anyone who gets in their way — Sunni, Shia Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, Iraqis, Syrians — anyone who gets in their way, and now an American. So this is not about what the United States is or isn't doing. This is about ISIL's stated commitment to murder, rape, enslave people who don't agree with their ideology and who get in their way. And I think the more we can say that — because it's true — it's important for people to remember that as they look at the overall picture.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 21 Aug 2014.

My comments: Harf blamed Assad for the chemical weapons attack one year ago, although she gave no reasons for that conclusion. The United Nations Human Rights investigation team was *not* able to identify the perpetrators of any of the chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

Harf is correct that ISIL will kill *anyone* who gets in their way. ISIL is currently fighting against the governments of Syria and Iraq, as well as fighting against people and militias in villages that ISIL is attempting to capture. But when the USA began airstrikes on ISIL on 8 Aug 2014, the USA became directly involved in the war against ISIL. So, Harf is wrong to say "This is not about ISIL versus the United States."

22 August 2014

22 Aug: Sunni political overreaction to attack on mosque

On 22 Aug, there was an attack on a Sunni mosque in Iraq that seems to have derailed Sunni cooperation with the formation of a new, inclusive government in Iraq. See [above](#) for facts about this atrocity.

Not only were at least 70 people killed in this sectarian attack, but also there was an immediate halt to trying to include Sunnis in a new, inclusive Iraqi government. The Associated Press reported:

The blocs affiliated with Parliament Speaker Salim al-Jabouri and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Al-Mutlak demanded that outgoing Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the main Shiite parliamentary bloc hand over the perpetrators within 48 hours and compensate the families of victims "if they want the political process and the new government to see the light of day."

The joint statement blamed the attack on "militias" in an apparent reference to Shiite armed groups allied with the government. Sunni lawmakers could not immediately be reached for further comment.

An army officer and a police officer said the attack on the Musab bin Omair Mosque in Imam Wais village, some 120 kilometers (75 miles) northeast of Baghdad, began with a suicide bombing near the entrance, after which gunmen poured in and opened fire on the worshippers.

....

The officials said Islamic State fighters have been trying to convince two prominent Sunni tribes in the area — the Oal-Waisi and al-Jabour — to join them, but that they have thus far refused.

Virtually all suicide bombings in Iraq are believed to have been carried out by Sunni militants, but Shiite fighters used the tactic in Lebanon during that country's civil war. In the chaotic aftermath of a major attack it is often not immediately clear how it was carried out or who was responsible.

Sinan Salaheddin, "Sunnis Pull Out Of Iraq Talks After Mosque Attack," [Associated Press](#), 17:21 GMT, 22 Aug 2014.

My comments: The reaction of Sunnis in the Iraqi Parliament is excessively emotional, even hysterical. *Before* the facts are determined about *who* was responsible for the attack on the mosque, the Sunni politicians have already assumed that Shiite militias perpetrated the attack, and then irrationally refused to work with *any* Shiite. Even if Shiite militias did perpetrate the attack, Ebadi is innocent, and there is no rational reason for Sunnis to refuse to work with Ebadi to form an inclusive government. By halting negotiations, the Sunnis show they are an unreliable partner in government, because they are hysterical and irrational.

There are two distinctly separate issues: (1) the attack on the mosque by criminals and (2) the formation of a new, inclusive government. The Sunni overreaction made a bad situation worse, by halting the formation of an urgently needed new, inclusive government.

If an investigation shows that ISIL attacked the mosque, then there is absolutely no reason from Sunnis in Parliament to halt negotiations on forming a new government. ISIL was formed from Sunni Muslims, and so an attack by ISIL on a Sunni mosque is a terrorist attack, *not* a sectarian attack.

If an investigation shows that Shiite militias attacked the mosque, then those attackers and their leaders should be punished. But the urgent formation of a new, inclusive government should *not* be further delayed over a sectarian attack. Indeed, an inclusive government in which there is a consensus of religious toleration might *prevent* future sectarian attacks.

22 Aug: U.K. refuses to cooperate with Assad

On 22 Aug, the United Kingdom Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, refused to cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). This is unfortunate, because Obama will take comfort in Hammond's simplistic view that Assad is Evil, and Obama will probably continue his obsession with deposing Assad.

22 Aug: statement by Ben Rhodes

On 19 Aug, ISIL released a video of their beheading of an American journalist, [James Foley](#). On 22 Aug, President Obama's deputy national security advisor, Ben Rhodes, suggested that the U.S. Military might conduct airstrikes against ISIL inside Syria without the permission of Assad, the lawful president of Syria. The Associated Press reported:

A senior White House official raised the possibility Friday of a broader American military campaign that targets an Islamic extremist group's bases in Syria, saying the U.S. would take whatever action is necessary to protect national security. [¶] "We're not going to be restricted by borders," said Ben Rhodes, President Barack Obama's deputy national security adviser.

....

Foley's killing, [Ben Rhodes] added, was "an attack on our country."
Robert Burns, "US Won't Let Borders Hamper Fight vs. Extremists," [Associated Press](#), 20:23 EDT, 22 Aug 2014.
Earlier version at [Washington Post](#)(AP), 19:07 EDT, 22 Aug.

Reuters reported:

The United States is considering taking the fight against Islamic State militants into Syria after days of airstrikes against the group in Iraq and the beheading of an American journalist, the White House signaled on Friday [22 Aug].

....

But Rhodes made clear that going after Islamic State forces based in Syria is an option after the release of a video this week showing one of the group's fighters beheading American journalist James Foley and threatening to kill a second American, Steve Sotloff.

"We will do what's necessary to protect Americans and see that justice is done for what we saw with the barbaric killing of Jim Foley. So we're actively considering what's going to be necessary to deal with that threat, and we're not going to be restricted by borders," he said.

Steve Holland, "U.S. considering taking fight against Islamic State into Syria," [Reuters](#), 20:47 EDT, 22 Aug.

I interpret "not ... restricted by borders", together with Obama's refusal to recognize Assad as the lawful ruler of Syria, as meaning that the U.S. military *may* conduct airstrikes inside Syria without the permission of Assad. As explained below, such a violation of Syria's sovereignty

alarms me.

I assumed that the original Rhodes' statement was part of a press briefing or statement at the White House, but even at 21:40 EDT on 24 Aug, Rhodes' statement was still *not* posted at the White House website. Then I searched Google News and learned that the original Rhodes' statement was during an interview on National Public Radio (NPR) on the morning of 21 Aug. Here are two quotations from the NPR transcript of that interview.

When asked about airstrikes in Syria against ISIL, Rhodes replied:

Well, we have launched a focused military mission in Iraq that is protecting our people in Baghdad and Erbil. And it has stopped the advance of ISIL inside of Iraq. And it has helped the Iraqi security forces begin to regain some territory that was claimed by ISIL. We've also launched a humanitarian mission to save many dozens of people who are trapped in Mount Sinjar. At the same time, we don't rule anything out when it comes to the protection of Americans and the disruption of terrorist plotting against the United States. So **we would not restrict ourselves by geographic boundaries** [emphasis added by Standler] when it comes to the core mission of U.S. foreign policy which is the protection of our people. We haven't made decisions to take additional actions at this time. But we certainly don't rule out additional action against ISIL if it becomes warranted.

Kelly McEvers, "Other Hostages Are In Danger, White House Official Says," [NPR](#), 05:07 EDT, 21 Aug 2014.

When asked if the U.S. Government was considering whether "the U.S. should work with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to combat these Islamic State militants", Rhodes replied:

We basically think that the reason that ISIL was able to get the safe haven that they establish in parts of Syria is because of Assad's policies. His barbarism against his own people created an enormous vacuum. That type of environment of violent conflict and sectarian conflict also attracts people who are drawn into ISIL. So he's part of the problem — Assad. We believe the long-term strategy for defeating ISIL and shrinking steadily the space where they operate is to strengthen the Iraqi security forces on the Iraq side of the border so that they are able to dislodge ISIL from their communities and to strengthen moderate Syrian opposition forces so that they, too, are able to fight against ISIL. That moderate opposition is the same alternative that we have supported to Assad, as well.

Ibid.

See also [NPR](#) interview with Emile Hokayem, of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, about whether Syria could a partner with the USA in the war against ISIL. On the morning of 22 Aug, Hokayem said: "I don't think this is likely in the short or medium-term."

On Monday, 25 Aug, the White House finally posted a transcript of a press briefing by Ben Rhodes on the afternoon of 22 Aug:

QUESTION: On Islamic State, yesterday General Dempsey said that Islamic State can only be defeated if the fight is taken to them in Syria. I wondered, is that — does the President agree with that? And if so, how does he intend to undertake it? And would it mean a significant change in the mission against Islamic State?

MR. RHODES: Well, we certainly agree that any strategy to deal with the ISIL organization has to deal with both sides of the border, Iraq and Syria. The strategy that we are already undertaking does address that in the sense that we are providing training and equipping and assistance to the Iraqi security forces and Kurdish security forces who are fighting them on the ground in Iraq. We are also providing support and military assistance to the moderate Syrian opposition. What we would like to see is those efforts squeeze the space where ISIL operates.

But there are other elements to our strategy. One is to enlist the support of partners in the region and the international community, because this poses a significant threat not just to the United States and to the Iraqi and Syrian people, but to the entire region. And there are things that we can do with partners to mobilize communities in places like Iraq to work to expel ISIL.

Then there's the question of U.S. military action. And the President has already authorized U.S. military action on the very specific missions of protecting our people and personnel and our facilities in Baghdad and Erbil. He's also authorized military action to deal with the humanitarian crisis on Mount Sinjar. Again, as we look ahead and look forward, we are going to do what is necessary to protect Americans. And so if we see plotting against Americans, we see a threat to the United States emanating from anywhere, we stand ready to take action against that threat.

We've made very clear time and again that if you come after Americans, we're going to come after you wherever you are. And that's what's going to guide our planning in the days to come.

QUESTION: Has the President signed off on airstrikes against ISIL in Syria?

MR. RHODES: Well, again, I don't want to get ahead of decisions the President hasn't been presented with, specific military options outside of those carrying out the current missions in Iraq. But we would certainly look at what is necessary in the long term to make sure we're protecting Americans. Again, the long-term strategy is going to have to involve people on the ground taking the fight to ISIL, and that is Iraqi and Kurdish forces; that is Syrians who we are supporting on the ground. But if we have a need to protect Americans and to take action when we see plotting against the United States and our interests, we'll reserve the right to do so. But I'm not going to get ahead of those decisions.

QUESTION: So you are — it's fair to say you're actively considering airstrikes against ISIL targets in Syria?

MR. RHODES: Well, again, you heard the President say we will be relentless against ISIL, and we will do what's necessary to protect Americans and see that justice is done for what we saw with the barbaric killing of Jim Foley. So we're actively considering what's going to be necessary to deal with that threat, and **we're not going to be restricted by borders.** [emphasis added by Standler] We've shown time and again that if

there's a counterterrorism threat we'll take direct action against that threat if necessary.

....

QUESTION: Ben, thanks. Former CIA Deputy Director Mike Morell said of James Foley's death, "This is ISIS's first terrorist attack against the United States." Do you agree with that assessment? Was that a terrorist attack against the United States?

MR. RHODES: Well, absolutely when you see somebody killed in such a horrific way that represents a terrorist attack; that represents a terrorist attack against our country and against an American citizen. And I think all of us have the Foley family in our thoughts and prayers.

The fact of the matter is that we've actually seen ISIL seek to advance too close to our facilities certainly for our own comfort. And so the President's decision to take military action a number of weeks ago was out of direct concern that if they were able to get into Erbil, that they could pose a threat to our personnel and our consulate there. So we have seen them pose a threat to our interests in the region, to our personnel and facilities in the region. And clearly, the brutal execution of Jim Foley represented an affront, an attack not just on him, but he is an American, and we see that as an attack on our country when one of our own is killed like that.

....

QUESTION [by Major Garrett, Fox News]: At the White House, the President said the goal was to contain ISIL. The Secretary of State two days later said the goal was to destroy ISIL. Which is it? And how far and how long are we prepared to carry out whichever campaign it is?

MR. RHODES: Well, Major, I think the President has spoken to the fact that our military objectives in Iraq right now are limited to protecting our personnel and facilities and addressing this humanitarian crisis.

We have to be clear that this is a deeply rooted organization. They have been there for 10 years, when you go back to AQI. It is going to take time, a long time, to fully evict them from the communities where they operate. We can do things, though, in the immediate term to address the threat to the United States and our people and to push them back, and to give space for these security forces who are taking the fight to them. We can create a coalition that can support Iraqis and the moderate Syrian opposition in their efforts to squeeze ISIL. And that's what we're doing.

But it's going to take time. When you talk about an objective like the ultimate defeat of ISIL, it's going to take time to dislodge a group that has been operating in this part of the world for the better part of a decade in an insurgency. But what we can do is address the threat to the United States, give these security forces the space that they need, go on the offense, push them out of the communities that they're in, and then work towards that ultimate goal of defeating ISIL.

"Press Briefing by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz and Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, 8/22/2014" [White House](#), 13:58 EDT, 22 Aug 2014.

My comments: I interpret "not ... restricted by borders", together with Obama's refusal to recognize Assad as the lawful ruler of Syria, as meaning that the U.S. military *may* conduct airstrikes inside Syria without the permission of Assad. **I am appalled.** The *only* way we should have airstrikes inside Syria is with the advance approval of Assad, for the following three reasons:

1. Syria is a sovereign nation. It would be an act of war for U.S. airplanes to attack inside Syria without prior approval of Assad.
2. Unapproved sorties inside Syria run the risk that Syrian anti-aircraft batteries on the ground, or Syrian Air Force aircraft, might engage U.S. airplanes — leading to an unnecessary loss of life to both Syrian and U.S. militaries. It is ISIL that we are trying to kill, *not* the Syrian military, and certainly *not* the U.S. Military.
3. Moreover, Assad has good intelligence on the ground in Syria, while the USA has excellent reconnaissance aircraft and satellites. Sharing this information, and cooperating on planning airstrikes, will make the airstrikes more effective. We can also hope that such cooperation will minimize accidental loss of civilian lives in Syria.

Any one of these three reasons is good enough, but all three reasons together make a compelling and logical case for either (1) cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL in Syria, or (2) keeping the U.S. Military out of Syria.

U.S. leaders (e.g., Rhodes) have been saying that the beheading of James Foley was an "attack" on the USA. But the beheading of Foley was *not* an attack on the USA. It was an attack on *one* U.S. citizen who was a journalist covering a civil war in Syria. Foley personally chose to go to Syria, and his decision cost him his life. To be clear: the U.S. State Department advised Americans *not* to travel to Syria.

Do *not* morph Foley into a symbol for the entire USA. Let's not use avenging Foley's death as an excuse to engage in an unlawful and expensive military campaign in Syria that kills more Americans.

The USA needs to be *very careful* that rhetoric does not become a justification for an attack on Syria. The enemy here is Islamic extremists, e.g., ISIL, *not* Syria. An American desire for revenge, retaliation, Justice, accountability — or whatever — should *not* lead to U.S. Military action inside Syria, unless we have the prior permission of Assad.

In the NPR interview on 21 Aug, when asked about the possibility of the U.S. Government cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL, Rhodes explained the Obama's government's view: "We believe the long-term strategy for defeating ISIL and shrinking steadily the space where they operate is to strengthen the Iraqi security forces on the Iraq side of the border so that they are able to dislodge ISIL from their communities and to strengthen moderate Syrian opposition forces so that they, too, are able to fight against ISIL." But the

"moderate Syrian opposition forces" — e.g., Free Syrian Army (FSA) — are the *weakest* of the insurgent groups in Syria. They will need a huge amount of "strengthening" if they are to win battles against ISIL. It would be much easier — and more certain of victory — to cooperate with Assad's military, which is better equipped and better trained than the moderate opposition. It is stupid to partner with the weakest team (i.e., FSA) when we could be partnering with a much stronger team (i.e., Assad's military) to defeat a common enemy (i.e., ISIL). Obama has chosen the FSA, *not* because the FSA has a reasonable hope of victory, but because the FSA is the *only* group in Syria that is morally acceptable to Obama.

In his press briefing, Rhodes reiterated the goal of "providing support and military assistance to the moderate Syrian opposition." But, in his press briefing, Rhodes seemed to hint that any U.S. airstrikes in Syria against ISIL would be in response to specific attacks on Americans by ISIL, such as taking American(s) hostage.

In summary, I support cooperation with Assad in fighting terrorism in Syria, including sharing intelligence, and including — but *only* with prior permission of Assad's government — U.S. airstrikes on ISIL inside Syria. The U.S. Government needs to respect Assad as the lawful ruler of Syria, conduct U.S. operations inside Syria *only* with the prior approval of Assad's government, and stop calling for regime change in Syria.

23 August 2014

On 23 Aug, 242 members (74%) of the Iraqi Parliament met at about 14:00 Baghdad time. [All Iraq News](#). After less than five hours, they adjourned until 25 Aug. The only item on the agenda was referred to two committees of Parliament. [All Iraq News](#).

24 August 2014

"Friends of Syria" meeting

On 24 August there was a Friends of Syria meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. [Middle East Monitor](#), 24 Aug; [Asharq Al-Awsat](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP). Today's meeting was restricted only to foreign ministers of the Arab nations (i.e., Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE) who are members of the London-11 group of nations. I could not find any final Communiqué from this meeting.

25 August 2014

On 25 Aug, 190 members (58%) of the Iraqi Parliament met at about noon Baghdad time. [All Iraq News](#). After less than seven hours, they adjourned until 2 Sep. (!) [All Iraq News](#). The chairmen of the parliamentary committees have not yet been determined. [All Iraq News](#).

U.S. Vice-President, Joe Biden, called [Ebadi](#), who assured Biden that "Iraq's political progress to date has already brought about greater regional and international support and that efforts to form a new government are an integral component of Iraq's broader fight against

ISIL. Dr. Abadi underscored to the Vice President his intent to quickly form a new government that is inclusive of all segments of Iraqi society and that is prepared to take concrete steps to address the concerns of all of Iraq's communities." Biden also called the Iraqi Parliament Speaker, [Jabouri](#). In both calls, Biden urged the Iraqis "to form a new government as soon as possible" or "agreed on the importance of rapidly forming a new government". [Associated Press](#); [All Iraq News](#). My comment is that Iraqi politicians are surely now immune to encouragement from the USA. Iraqi politicians *talk* about urgency, but do nothing to quickly form a new government. This is an indication that Iraq is a failed nation.

On the night of 25 Aug, Obama approved U.S. surveillance flights over Syria. However, Obama has *not* made a decision about any airstrikes on ISIL in Syria, although surveillance flights could be a preliminary step that would enable future airstrikes. See [below](#).

25 Aug: Syrian offer of cooperation

On 25 August, the Syrian government's news agency reported on a press conference by the Syrian Foreign Minister:

Caretaker Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign and Expatriates Minister Walid al-Moallem, said that Syria is prepared to cooperate and coordinate on the regional and international levels to combat terrorism as per Security Council resolution no. 2170 within the framework of respecting Syria's sovereignty and independence.

In a press conference on Monday [25 Aug], al-Moallem said that cooperation should be carried out through the Syrian government which is a symbol of national sovereignty, and this complies with the first article in the resolution which does not authorize anyone to act alone against any country, asserting the Syrian government's readiness for regional and international cooperation either via an international or regional coalition or bilateral cooperation with those who want, as long as this cooperation is approached in a serious manner without double standards, because it makes no sense for there to be tireless efforts to weaken Syria, besiege it economically, and besiege its army which is confronting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist organization on Syrian soil at the same time when others claim to be combating terrorism, asserting that **any breach of Syrian sovereignty by any side constitutes an act of aggression**. [emphasis added by Standler]

He stressed that air raids alone will not eliminate ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra, and that before that the sources of terrorism must be dried up and neighboring countries must commit to controlling their borders, exchange security information with the Syrian government, and stop arming and funding terrorists.

"Being serious in combating terrorism isn't achieved by transgressing against others' sovereignty; it is achieved through serious political work to dry up its sources and cooperating with the Syrian government, because we know better than anyone else what is happening on our land, then comes international joint action to combat terrorism," al-Moallem said.

The Minister said that Syria welcomes resolution no. 2170 and is committed to it, despite the fact that this decision came late, noting that the consensus at the Security Council on combating terrorism is in line with Syria's calls for drying up the sources of terrorism and for stopping the funding, training, arming, harboring, and smuggling of terrorists through borders with neighboring countries.

....

Regarding Syria's position in the international coalition for combating terrorism, al-Moallem said that it's natural in terms of geography, practicality, and operations for Syria to be the center of this coalition, adding "or will they fight ISIS with telescopes? They must come to Syria to coordinate with it to combat ISIS and al-Nusra if they're serious about doing so."

"Syria proposed coordination and cooperation with everyone, and the goal of this is to prevent any aggression or misunderstanding, because Syria has air defense systems, and if there's no coordination, we may reach the point of using them," the Minister explained.

On the claims that there's a secret coordination between Syria, the U.S., and Britain for covert military operations carried out on Syrian soil, al-Moallem said that all those claims are mere media reports, reiterating that Syria is prepared for cooperation and coordination to combat terrorism within the framework of the Security Council resolution, adding "if the media information about a U.S. military operation on Syrian soil were true, then this would mean that the operation was carried out and that it failed. However, had there been prior cooperation, the likelihood of such an operation failing would be slim."

Walid al-Moallem, "Al-Moallem: Syria prepared to cooperate and coordinate to combat terrorism as per resolution no. 2170," [SANA](#), 25 Aug 2014.

My comments: United Nations Security Council Resolution 2170 was passed on 15 August, as described [above](#). I suspect that Moallem's real concern was the hint by Ben Rhodes on 22 Aug that the U.S. might have airstrikes in Syria without the permission of Assad, or today's beginning of U.S. surveillance of ISIL in Syria. Moallem is correct airstrikes without permission of Assad would be aggression against the sovereignty of Syria. History will show that Syria offered to cooperate with the USA in the fight against ISIL, but the USA ignored the offer of cooperation and continued Obama's obsession with deposing Assad. The refusal of Obama to cooperate with Assad has multiple disadvantages for the USA:

1. any U.S. airstrikes in Syria would be an illegal aggression against Syria
 2. unnecessary risks to U.S. pilots from Syrian anti-aircraft fire or Syrian fighter jets
 3. U.S. airstrikes will be less effective without Syrian intelligence on the ground
 4. the airstrikes need to be coordinated with army action on the ground, and Assad has the best army in Syria (with the possible exception of ISIL)
 5. helps keep Assad in power, which is good, because Assad is the strongest leader and best able to defeat terrorists.
-

25 Aug: Russian Reaction

An Associated Press news story supplies one quote from Lavrov:

In Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also said Western nations that long refused to condemn Assad's enemies were now coming to realize the threat posed by the Islamic State group.

The West, he said, will "have to choose what is more important: to change the regime and satisfy personal antipathies with the risk that the situation will crumble, or find pragmatic ways to join efforts against the common threat, which is the same for all of us — terrorism."

Ryan Lucas, "Syria Warns US: No Unilateral Strikes On Militants," [Associated Press](#), 02:20 GMT, 26 Aug 2014.

Reuters reported the same news:

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Monday [25 Aug] urged Western and Arab governments to overcome their distaste for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and engage with him to fight Islamic State insurgents.

In comments likely to irritate Washington, Lavrov said the United States had made the same mistake with Islamic State as it had with al Qaeda, which emerged in the 1980s when U.S.-backed Islamist insurgents were fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

"I think Western politicians are already realizing the growing and fast-spreading threat of terrorism," Lavrov said, referring to Islamic State advances in Syria and Iraq.

"And they will soon have to choose what is more important: a (Syrian) regime change to satisfy personal antipathies, risking deterioration of the situation beyond any control, or finding pragmatic ways to unite efforts against the common threat."

....

"At the start the Americans and some Europeans rather welcomed (Islamic State) on the basis it was fighting against Bashar al-Assad. They welcomed it as they welcomed the mujahideen who later created al Qaeda, and then al Qaeda struck like a boomerang on September 11, 2001," Lavrov said.

Katya Golubkova, "Russia sees West changing tack on Syria, urges engagement with Assad," [Reuters](#), 00:52 GMT, 26 Aug 2014.

I looked at the websites of RIA-Novosti in Russia, but did not find the statement by Lavrov. TASS in Russia mentioned different quotations from Lavrov:

"But when we fight terrorism, we need to do that on the basis of international law, including respect for the sovereignty of relevant states," Lavrov said.

"There were reports that US drones' strikes on IS positions are carried out with consent of the Iraqi government. If there are plans to fight terrorists in Syria and other states,

then it is necessary to do that in cooperation with their legitimate governments. Otherwise, we will sow chaos," he said.

"Lavrov: Global antiterrorist effort should be based on international law," [TASS](#), 25 Aug.

My comments: It is true that Lavrov was many month ahead of commentators and politicians in Europe and the USA in identifying terrorism as the real enemy in Syria. But that is not because Lavrov is more brilliant than the Western politicians. Back in the year 2011, the Western politicians were supporting democracy in Syria, and opposing the brutal overreaction of Assad. The Western politicians were noble, idealistic, and wanted to support an idyllic notion of democracy in Syria. The Western politicians never publicly recognized that the situation in Syria has evolved since 2011, so that the fighters for democracy (e.g., the Free Syrian Army) are now the weakest group of insurgents and have no hope of victory. At the same time, the insurgents who might possibly defeat Assad in battle are *all* Islamic extremists, of which ISIL is the most repugnant. The Western politicians who championed the Syrian National Coalition never publicly recognized that the expatriates in the Coalition were incompetent to operate the Syrian government and defeat terrorism.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend doctrine is *not* a moral doctrine, but a practical way to win big wars. The doctrine worked reasonably well in World War II, where the allies cooperated with Stalin to defeat Hitler. The doctrine was undesirable during 1945-1990 when Stalin captured Eastern Europe and made them a buffer zone to protect the USSR, oppressing two generations of people in Eastern Europe.

In my early essays on Syria, I frequently quoted Russian news sources, because Lavrov and Kerry were working together to create United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 on the removal of chemical weapons from Syria. But, beginning in February 2014, Russia was focused on its crisis in the Ukraine, and Russian news media ignored Syria.

I don't see Assad as an intrinsically evil person. He was educated in England as an ophthalmologist. Assad and his wife wear European clothing, unlike many other Arab rulers. On 27 Mar 2011, Hillary Clinton famously called Assad a "reformer", and there is some evidence for her opinion. (See, e.g., [Washington Post](#).) We need to judge rulers in the Middle East, *not* by comparison with politicians in the USA, but by comparison with rulers in the Middle East. All of the Arab nations lack U.S. concepts of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, equality for women, etc.

25 Aug: U.S. State Dept. Daily Press Briefing

On 25 Aug, at the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were only five mentions of "Iraq", but 40 mentions of "Syria".

QUESTION: On Syria, today Syrian Foreign Minister Muallim gave a press briefing and said that Syrian Government is open to work with countries such as U.S., Britain, Saudis, against ISIS. Do you have any response to that?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I would say first that we obviously have taken the threat of ISIL very seriously, as evidenced by the President's actions and the actions of the U.S. over the last several weeks. But while the Syrian regime may now be bombing ISIL

and taking other step with the right hand, it's helping ISIL's recruiting with the left hand by refusing to deal with the Syrian people's legitimate grievances, or to accept any willingness or openness for a real political solution. So I think Marie spoke to this a little bit last week, but in our view, there are multiple challenges and issues on the ground in Syria, and certainly just because the Syrian regime may be taking on ISIL or saying — speaking publicly about that, and certainly the United States is, that certainly doesn't mean we're on the same side of the coin here.

QUESTION: Does the United States have permission to act unilaterally? One of the things that the Syrian foreign minister said is that outside of coordination with his country, quote, "anything outside of this is considered aggression." Will the United States act unilaterally to strike inside Syria?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I'm not going to get ahead of, obviously, the President's decision-making, Lucas. But I think when American lives are at stake, when we're talking about defending our own interests, we're not looking for the approval of the Syrian regime.

....

QUESTION: Jen, do you have any updates on support to the moderate Syrian opposition that may or may not have been expedited by the United States Government in light of this threat? Marie talked about the FSA as a partner to the U.S. I'm wondering how we're helping out our partner.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think beyond what we've announced over the course of the last several months, we're waiting for Congress to take action. Obviously, they're adjourned at this point in time. I can see if there are any other updates beyond that and beyond the announcements that you know we have made.

....

QUESTION: Given the fact that the U.S. and Syria have still diplomatic relationship, do you have recently — did you have any contact with the Syrian regime, and is the Secretary prepared to talk to his Syrian counterpart?

MS. PSAKI: We've long had that ability and have been in contact in the past, as you know. I don't have anything to read out for you or predict for you. I can check along with Margaret's question and see if there's anything to add on that front, but not that I'm aware of.

And I think it's important that — to note here that this — the shared concern about ISIL does not indicate a change in our view and concerns about the Assad regime and the horrific acts that they have done against their own people.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 25 Aug 2014.

26 August 2014

The [Pentagon](#) announced that seven nations — Albania, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom — have agreed to supply weapons to the Kurds in Iraq. This may also be the beginning of a coalition to fight against ISIL.

The White House Press Secretary mentioned the U.S. Government would *not* coordinate with Assad any possible U.S. airstrikes inside Syria.

QUESTION: The Assad regime has said that any act over its territory would be considered a hostile act if they did not — if they weren't notified. Can you categorically say the U.S. will not notify or consult or coordinate with the Assad regime on any action?

MR. EARNEST: As a matter of U.S. policy, we have not recognized the Assad regime as the leader of Syria. And there are no plans to change that policy, and there are no plans to coordinate with the Assad regime as we consider this terror threat.

"Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Josh Earnest en route Charlotte, NC, 8/26/2014," [White House](#), 10:44 EDT, 26 Aug.

Beginning with Obama's reaction on 20 Aug to the beheading of James Foley, and especially with Ben Rhodes' suggestion on 22 Aug, the U.S. Government appears to be sliding toward airstrikes on Syria, without the permission of the Syrian government.

There is a glimmer of hope: Qatar arranged for al-Nusra Front to release one kidnapped American journalist, Peter Theo Curtis. On 24 Aug 2014, Curtis was delivered to U.N. peacekeepers in the Golan Heights, on the Syrian-Israeli border. Curtis was kidnapped in Oct 2012. [Al-Jazeera](#), 05:09 GMT; [Reuters](#), 05:42 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 22:12 GMT, all on 25 Aug.

Qatar is working to free four American hostages in Syria. [Reuters](#), 14:58 GMT, 26 Aug. Qatar may be feeling guilty about having funded Islamic insurgents in Syria, and Qatar may be trying to avoid U.S. airstrikes in Syria.

26 Aug: U.S. State Dept. Daily Press Briefing

Agence France-Presse reported:

The United States has begun reconnaissance flights over Syria and is sharing intelligence about jihadist deployments with Damascus through Iraqi and Russian channels, sources told AFP Tuesday [26 Aug].

"The cooperation has already begun and the United States is giving Damascus information via Baghdad and Moscow," one source close to the issue said on condition of anonymity.

"US gives Syria intelligence on jihadists: sources," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 11:15 EDT, 26 Aug.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, Jen Psaki denied the above-quoted AFP report.

QUESTION: So we have a story from Beirut saying that not only the U.S. and Syria are cooperating in the fight against ISIS, but that the U.S. is providing intelligence to Damascus — or is there something true in that?

MS. PSAKI: There is not. It's not an accurate report. We're not coordinating with the regime, including through a third party.

....

QUESTION: If you — yeah, one more. If you plan to take action in Syria, would it be possible to take action without any kind of cooperation with the Syrian regime?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I spoke to this a little bit yesterday, but one of the considerations is certainly the safety and security of the American people, and our view of threats facing our homeland and Western interests. And if it — when it comes to the interests of the American people, the interests of the United States, we're not going to ask for permission from the Syrian regime. However, there isn't a decision that's been made, and certainly that would be one that would be in the President's hands.

....

QUESTION: So when the President authorize aerial strike in Iraq, he cited two reasons: number one, to protect American personnel, embassies and consulate; and the other one was to protect the Yezidis because of a potential genocide.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Now, if you're going to Syria, while I believe the second reason is not going to apply because you're already 190,000 dead and you're not moving on that. But what American interest specifically that you have in Syria apart from one American journalist that's held by ISIS? What interest do you have there?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think one of the interests and the factors we're certainly looking at is the safety and security of the American people, of our homeland.

QUESTION: No, but in Syria in particular now, what's the —

MS. PSAKI: I understand. The threat of ISIL that is coming from Syria, we're certainly aware of the presence of ISIL across the region. That's why, of course, we're talking about it. And as we — we need to evaluate which of these groups and how ISIL and other groups pose a threat to the United States and what we can do to address it. So we know they've gained capacity — I've talked about that a little bit today — over the last several months in Syria. That's given them a safe haven — many of them — as they — and they've advanced across Iraq, as you know. And we're looking at that. The President is looking at that, and that's why there are a range of options.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 26 Aug 2014.

27 August 2014

As reported [above](#), the mosque in Diyala province was bombed on Friday, 22 Aug. On 23 Aug, the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Salim al-Jabouri, promised to release results of an investigation within two days (i.e., on 25 Aug). But at the end of the day on 27 Aug there were still no public results of an investigation. The delay in releasing results of the investigation will *not* be reassuring to the Sunnis. And the delay is another indication that the Iraqi government is incompetent.

27 Aug: U.S. State Dept. Daily Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department on 27 Aug, there were 23 mentions of "Iraq" and 19 mentions of "Syria":

QUESTION: Yeah. On ISIL in Syria, you have said that you will not coordinate with the Assad Government because it has allowed a vacuum that has fostered ISIL. That's still correct?

MS. PSAKI: Yes.

QUESTION: Now with the Iranian Government, they have fostered sectarianism in Baghdad, which you said contributed — is a political problem that's possibly greater than the military problem. They have funded, they have armed, they have trained the Assad Government. And yet, the Secretary has said explicitly we're open to them playing a constructive role numerous times. Is that a —

MS. PSAKI: But I think we've also said, clearly — and I think the context of his remarks are important — that there's many ways you can play a constructive role, and certainly supporting a unified Iraqi Government — which I think is what his reference was to at the time — and one that takes into account the views of all parties, is one that many countries can play a productive role in. And if Iran was able to play a productive role in moving that process forward when that statement was made months ago or weeks ago, then that's something we would certainly support.

We've also talked about our concern about certain kinds of outside intervention in Iraq as well.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 27 Aug 2014.

28 August 2014

Early on the morning of 28 Aug, Reuters reported:

The United States is intensifying its push to build an international campaign against Islamic State jihadist fighters in Iraq and Syria, including recruiting partners for potential joint military action, Obama administration officials said on Wednesday [27 Aug].

Britain and Australia are potential candidates, U.S. officials said. Germany said on Wednesday it was in talks with the United States and other international partners about possible military action against Islamic State but made clear it would not participate.

"We are working with our partners and asking how they might be able to contribute. There are a range of ways to contribute: humanitarian, military, intelligence, diplomatic," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters.

It's unclear how many nations will sign up. Some such as trusted ally Britain harbor bitter memories of joining the U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" in the 2003 invasion of Iraq that included troops from 38 nations. Others such as France refused to join the action. The claims of the existence of weapons of mass destruction which spurred the coalition to act were found to be false.

....

Among America's possibly reluctant allies is France, which was left on a limb when U.S. President Barack Obama backed down from the threat of strikes on Syria following a major chemical attack a year ago. [9] "It was embarrassing for us," a senior French diplomat said. "After what happened last year, now when the Americans decide to do something we will need some very strong guarantees before committing to anything."

More broadly, American officials appear to be accelerating efforts to build a wide coalition of countries that can sap Islamic State's strength in both Iraq and Syria.

Those talks include a large group of countries, many of whom are eager to weaken Islamic State but are unwilling to take part in military action. That list includes Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan, Britain, France, Australia and Germany, two officials said on condition of anonymity.

Lesley Wroughton & Missy Ryan, "U.S. seeks coalition against Islamic State, but military partners no sure bet," [Reuters](#), 03:21 EDT, 28 Aug 2014. Copy at [NY Times](#).

My comment is that a coalition in Iraq would help share the costs of attacking ISIL in Iraq. But a coalition would be really useful in Syria, where apparently nations will refuse to ask Assad for permission to conduct airstrikes inside Syria. A coalition would show widespread contempt for Assad, and make it more difficult for Assad to defend Syria's sovereignty. However, it is still legally wrong — and an act of aggression against Syria — to conduct airstrikes inside Syria without permission of the lawful ruler of Syria, no matter how many nations join the coalition against ISIL. The analogy that comes to my mind is that a gang of criminals is more formidable than just one criminal.

Americans had great relief in Dec 2011, when all U.S. Military personnel were withdrawn from Iraq. It is ironic that now, less than three years later, Obama has authorized U.S. airstrikes in Iraq, and Obama is contemplating expanding the U.S. Military role in Iraq. While I support the U.S. airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq, I feel that there should be a better way than the continuation of the long war.

As Reuters reminds us, the French agreed to join U.S. airstrikes against Assad on 31 Aug 2013, but Obama cancelled those airstrikes just nine hours before the airstrikes were

scheduled to begin. (See my [first essay](#) on Syria.)

Reuters also reported on the difficulties that airstrikes in Syria:

American forces face formidable challenges as President Barack Obama considers an air assault on Islamist fighters in Syria, including intelligence gaps on potential targets, concerns about Syria's air defenses and fears that the militants may have anti-aircraft weapons, current and former U.S. officials say.

....

"There are all kinds of downsides and risks that suggest air strikes in Syria are probably not a great idea," said Aaron David Miller, a former Middle East adviser under both Republican and Democratic administrations. "But that doesn't mean they won't happen anyway."

Efforts to hit the right targets in Syria will be more difficult than in Iraq, hindered by a shortage of reliable on-the-ground intelligence, in contrast to northern Iraq where Iraqi and Kurdish forces provided intelligence.

U.S.-backed moderate rebels who could provide intelligence in Syria have yet to coalesce into a potent fighting force. It is unclear, for instance, if they can provide forward spotters needed to help guide any air strikes in territory held by Islamic State. Matt Spetalnick & Phil Stewart, "U.S. air strikes on Syria would face formidable obstacles," [Reuters](#), 01:11 EDT, 28 Aug 2014.

My comment is that two of these three "formidable challenges" could be easily eliminated by cooperating with Assad.

Reuters reports that French President Hollande joined the chorus of Western leaders who refuse to cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL:

French President Francois Hollande said on Thursday [28 Aug] opposition forces fighting Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq should get more Western support but ruled out seeing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as an ally.

Calling Assad an ally of the jihadists, he said: "There is no choice to be made between two barbarisms."

"A large alliance is needed, but let's be clear. Assad is not a partner in the struggle against terrorism," Hollande said in a speech to an annual conference of French ambassadors.

John Irish, "France's Hollande says Assad no ally in fight against Islamic State," [Reuters](#), 14:44 GMT, 28 Aug 2014.

See also [Associated Press](#), 12:29 GMT, 28 Aug.

My comment is that Hollande engages in propaganda when he asserts that Assad is "an ally of the jihadists". The Truth is that Assad has been fighting against jihadists, who seek to depose Assad and establish their own government in Syria. Hollande would have been on

stronger ground if he had mentioned atrocities committed by Assad, but then Ban's Reports on Resolution 2139 make clear that *all* of the parties in Syria have been engaging in atrocities. As mentioned above, on 22 Aug, the United Kingdom Foreign Secretary, refused to cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL.

28 Aug: U.S. State Dept. Daily Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, beginning at 13:40 EDT on 28 Aug, there were 8 mentions of "Iraq" and 25 mentions of "Syria". The big topics were the Ukraine, Nusra Front kidnapped 43 soldiers from the U.N. peacekeeping force in the Golan Heights, financial support of terrorism, Gaza/Israel,

QUESTION: Okay. And also yesterday, it was confirmed that some upwards of 150 Syrian soldiers were actually executed by ISIS. Does that add some sort of an urgency to perhaps U.S. interference in the area, or does it sort of discourage you from doing so?

MS. PSAKI: Well, there's been no lack of evidence of the brutality of ISIL over the past several weeks and months. So with each incident, certainly it adds to the deck of brutality that they have put together. But it's not — it doesn't change our approach. We have had this ongoing approach that's going to continue to increase over the coming days and weeks.

QUESTION: So conversely, is it possible that an alliance of some sort, whether implicit or explicit, between Syria and the United States could take shape in fighting ISIS?

MS. PSAKI: Nothing has changed, Said, since I answered this question yesterday or every day this week.

....

QUESTION: As you're aware, another part of the U.S. Government said that the United States, as a matter of policy, does not recognize Assad as the leader of Syria. And I just want to make sure that we're clear on one thing, which is that it was my understanding that the United States and Russia helped broker the agreement under which the Government of Syria signed on to the Chemical Weapons Convention and then subsequently, working with OPCW, gave up its declared stocks of chemical weapons. And I just want to make sure that, as a matter of policy, the U.S. Government does indeed believe that there is a Government of Syria and that, in fact, the representatives of President Assad were indeed the ones who signed on to the Chemical Weapons Convention and then worked with OPCW to meet their obligations under that.

MS. PSAKI: Yes, that is correct, your version. And we've said since — as you know, because you've been covering this closely — since August 2011 that President Assad has lost all legitimacy, and we certainly didn't recognize the legitimacy of the election.

But that doesn't change the current government's international obligations; it doesn't change the recognition of the Assad regime as the Government of Syria.
Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 28 Aug 2014.

28 Aug: Press Conference by Obama

At a press conference beginning at 16:09 EDT on 28 Aug, Obama admitted that he did *not* have a strategy for defeating ISIL in Syria.

OBAMA: Now, ISIL poses an immediate threat to the people of Iraq and to people throughout the region. And that's why our military action in Iraq has to be part of a broader, comprehensive strategy to protect our people and to support our partners who are taking the fight to ISIL. And that starts with Iraq's leaders building on the progress that they've made so far and forming an inclusive government that will unite their country and strengthen their security forces to confront ISIL.

Any successful strategy, though, also needs strong regional partners. I'm encouraged so far that countries in the region — countries that don't always agree on many things — increasingly recognize the primacy of the threat that ISIL poses to all of them. And I've asked Secretary Kerry to travel to the region to continue to build the coalition that's needed to meet this threat. As I've said, rooting out a cancer like ISIL will not be quick or easy, but I'm confident that we can — and we will — working closely with our allies and our partners.

For our part, I've directed Secretary Hagel and our Joint Chiefs of Staff to prepare a range of options. I'll be meeting with my National Security Council again this evening as we continue to develop that strategy. And I've been consulting with members of Congress and I'll continue to do so in the days ahead.

....

QUESTION [by Chuck Todd]: Let me start with Syria. The decision that you have to make between — first of all, is it a “if” or “when” situation about going after ISIL in Syria? Can you defeat ISIL or ISIS without going after them in Syria? And then how do you prioritize? You have said that Assad has lost legitimacy to lead. Defeating ISIS could help Assad keep power. Talk about how you prioritize those two pieces of your foreign policy.

OBAMA: Well, first of all, I want to make sure everybody is clear on what we're doing now, because it is limited. Our focus right now is to protect American personnel on the ground in Iraq; to protect our embassy, to protect our consulates, to make sure that critical infrastructure that could adversely affect our personnel is protected.

....

What is true, though, is that the violence that's been taking place in Syria has obviously given ISIL a safe haven there in ungoverned spaces. And in order for us to degrade

ISIL over the long term, we're going to have to build a regional strategy. Now, we're not going to do that alone. We're going to have to do that with other partners, and particularly Sunni partners, because part of the goal here is to make sure that Sunnis both in Syria and in Iraq feel as if they've got an investment in a government that actually functions, a government that can protect them, a government that makes sure that their families are safe from the barbaric acts that we've seen in ISIL. And right now, those structures are not in place.

And that's why the issue with respect to Syria is not simply a military issue, it's also a political issue. It's also an issue that involves all the Sunni states in the region and Sunni leadership recognizing that this cancer that has developed is one that they have to be just as invested in defeating as we are.

....

Now, the last point with respect to Assad, it's not just my opinion — I think it would be international opinion — that Assad has lost legitimacy in terms of dropping barrel bombs on innocent families and killing tens of thousands of people. And right now, what we're seeing is the areas that ISIL is occupying are not controlled by Assad anyway. And, frankly, Assad doesn't seem to have the capability or reach to get into those areas. So I don't think this is a situation where we have to choose between Assad or the kinds of people who carry on the incredible violence that we've been seeing there. We will continue to support a moderate opposition inside of Syria, in part because we have to give people inside of Syria a choice other than ISIL or Assad.

And I don't see any scenario in which Assad somehow is able to bring peace and stability to a region that is majority Sunni and has not so far shown any willingness to share power with them or in any kind of significant way deal with the longstanding grievances that they have there.

QUESTION: Do you need Congress's approval to go into Syria?

OBAMA: I have consulted with Congress throughout this process. I am confident that as Commander-in-Chief I have the authorities to engage in the acts that we are conducting currently. As our strategy develops, we will continue to consult with Congress. And I do think that it will be important for Congress to weigh in, or that our consultations with Congress continue to develop so that the American people are part of the debate.

But I don't want to put the cart before the horse. **We don't have a strategy yet.** [Emphasis added by Standler.] I think what I've seen in some of the news reports suggests that folks are getting a little further ahead of where we're at than we currently are. And I think that's not just my assessment, but the assessment of our military as well. We need to make sure that we've got clear plans, that we're developing them. At that point, I will consult with Congress and make sure that their voices are heard. But there's no point in me asking for action on the part of Congress before I know exactly what it is that is going to be required for us to get the job done.

QUESTION:

. . . .

OBAMA: And it is my intention that Congress has to have some buy-in as representatives of the American people. And, by the way, the American people need to hear what that strategy is. But as I said to Chuck, I don't want to put the cart before the horse. And in some of the media reports the suggestion seems to have been that we're about to go full scale on an elaborate strategy for defeating ISIL, and the suggestion, I guess, has been that we'll start moving forward imminently and somehow Congress — still out of town — is going to be left in the dark. That's not what's going to happen.

We are going to continue to focus on protecting the American people. We're going to continue, where we can, to engage in the sort of humanitarian acts that saved so many folks who were trapped on a mountain. We are going to work politically and diplomatically with folks in the region. And we're going to cobble together the kind of coalition that we need for a long-term strategy as soon as we are able to fit together the military, political and economic components of that strategy. There will be a military aspect to that, and it's going to be important for Congress to know what that is, in part because it may cost some money.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. Do you regret not moving on ISIS earlier? There are some reports indicating that most of the weapons, the U.S. weapons that they have, they got it or they acquired it after the fall of Mosul. And also, the Iraqi President said today that the Iraqi forces are in no position to stand up to ISIS. What makes you think that forming a new government will change the situation?

OBAMA: Well, once ISIL got into Mosul that posed a big problem, because there's no doubt that they were able to capture some weapons and resources that they then used to finance additional operations.

And at that stage, we immediately contacted the Iraqi government. Keep in mind we had been in communications with the Iraqi government for more than a year indicating that we saw significant problems in the Sunni areas. Prime Minister Maliki was not as responsive perhaps as we would have liked to some of the underlying political grievances that existed at the time.

There is no doubt that in order for Iraq security forces to be successful, they're going to need help. They're going to need help from us. They're going to need help from our international partners. They're going to need additional training. They're going to need additional equipment. And we are going to be prepared to offer that support.

There may be a role for an international coalition providing additional air support for their operations. But the reason it's so important that an Iraqi government be in place is this is not simply a military problem. The problem we have had consistently is a Sunni population that feels alienated from Baghdad and does not feel invested in what's

happening, and does not feel as if anybody is looking out for them.

If we can get a government in place that provides Sunnis some hope that a national government serves their interest, if they can regain some confidence and trust that it will follow through on commitments that were made way back in 2006 and 2007 and 2008 and earlier about how you arrive at, for example, de-Baathification laws and give people opportunities so they're not locked out of government positions — if those things are followed through on, and we are able to combine it with a sound military strategy, then I think we can be successful. If we can't, then the idea that the United States or any outside power would perpetually defeat ISIS I think is unrealistic.

As I've said before — I think I said in the previous press conference — our military is the best in the world. We can route [sic] ISIS on the ground and keep a lid on things temporarily. But then as soon as we leave, the same problems come back again. So we've got to make sure that Iraqis understand in the end they're going to be responsible for their own security. And part of that is going to be the capacity for them to make compromises.

It also means that states in the region stop being ambivalent about these extremist groups. The truth is that we've had state actors who at times have thought that the way to advance their interests is, well, financing some of these groups as proxies is not such a bad strategy. And part of our message to the entire region is this should be a wake-up call to Sunni, to Shia — to everybody — that a group like ISIS is beyond the pale; that they have no vision or ideology beyond violence and chaos and the slaughter of innocent people. And as a consequence, we've got to all join together — even if we have differences on a range of political issues — to make sure that they're rooted out. "Statement by the President," [White House](#), 28 Aug 2014.

My comments: At the beginning of his statement, Obama mentioning building a coalition to defeat ISIL in Iraq. But a coalition would be really useful in Syria, where apparently nations will refuse to ask Assad for permission to conduct airstrikes inside Syria. However, it is still legally wrong — and an act of aggression against Syria — to conduct airstrikes inside Syria without permission of the lawful ruler of Syria, no matter how many nations join the coalition against ISIL. The analogy that comes to my mind is that a gang of criminals is more formidable than just one criminal.

Obama now includes in his criteria for airstrikes in Iraq: "critical infrastructure that could adversely affect our personnel is protected." The protection of critical infrastructure was omitted from the original criteria, and then it appeared to be mission creep when airstrikes targeted ISIL near the Mosul Dam.

Obama's admission "we don't have a strategy yet" for defeating ISIL in Syria was seized by opposition politicians:

- "Obama says does not yet have military strategy for Islamic State," [Reuters](#)
- "Obama's 'strategy' misfire," [Politico](#),
- "'We don't have a strategy yet'," [The Hill](#)
- "Why Obama's 'we don't have a strategy' gaffe stings," [Washington Post](#) blog

- "Obama under fire for admitting no 'strategy yet' for ISIS in Syria," [Fox News](#)
- "Obama's no 'strategy yet' comment on ISIS in Syria sparks a political uproar," [CNN](#)

It is unusual for an experienced politician like Obama to publicly admit a gross shortcoming. But it seems to be true that Obama is clueless. Aside from lack of proper planning, it is poor leadership to admit to opponents of the USA that the U.S. Government is clueless. But Obama's admission of no strategy did end speculation about imminent airstrikes in Syria.

The New York Times published an insightful article:

When President Obama said on Thursday [28 Aug] that he had no strategy yet for dealing with lethal Sunni militants in Syria, he seemed out of sync with his top military advisers and aides, who only days earlier had taken a more aggressive tone about military action.

That should not come as a surprise: Mr. Obama did the same thing a year ago this weekend. On the Friday before Labor Day, after Secretary of State John Kerry had condemned chemical weapons attacks by President Bashar al-Assad of Syria on his own people as a “moral obscenity” and warned of a harsh response, and after he himself had laid out a forceful case for military action, Mr. Obama stunned his staff by saying he was calling off a missile strike.

Now, as then, the president harbors profound doubts that American military action in Syria will do more good than harm. At every moment when it has appeared that he might be willing to shrug off his reluctance to act militarily in Syria, he has drawn back.

That reality is more important than whether Mr. Obama committed a gaffe at his news conference by saying that “we don’t have a strategy yet” in Syria. Despite White House attempts to clarify the statement after the fact, the criticism showed no signs of abating on Friday. Lawmakers and television commentators expressed bewilderment and alarm that Mr. Obama had no plan for dealing with a militant group in a war-torn country where the death toll is nearing 200,000.

But it is unlikely that a merciless drubbing from the news media and other critics is going to sway Mr. Obama. His decision to seek the approval of Congress for a strike on Syria, after saying that it had crossed his “red line” on the use of chemical weapons, also drew withering criticism — setting in place a narrative of feckless leadership that has dogged him for the last year.

Mark Landler, "Obama Again Tips the Scales Toward Caution on Syria," [NY Times](#), 29 Aug 2014.

Given that Obama will *not* cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL, I think it is best that Obama *not* involve the U.S. Military in Syria. But with eastern Syria a safe haven for ISIL, any program to annihilate ISIL in Iraq will likely push ISIL temporarily from Iraq into Syria.

During the 2008 elections in the USA, Obama touted his experience as a "community organizer" in Chicago during the 1980s. Amongst other things, a community organizer builds

coalitions of people. Both Presidents Bush established a coalition of nations to support U.S. Military action against Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War in 1990-91 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003. So it is predictable that Obama wants to build a coalition of nations to defeat ISIL.

ISIL has been in Syria since May 2013, with an increasing number of atrocities committed by ISIL. ISIL began to invade Iraq in Jan 2014. Obama ignored the ISIL problem in both Syria and Iraq. But, on 7 Aug 2014, Obama decided to help defeat ISIL in Iraq, by ordering airstrikes in Iraq, as described [below](#). But eastern Syria is now a safe haven for ISIL, so Obama realized sometime around 21 Aug (see the Hagel-Dempsey press conference, [above](#)) that ISIL would *also* need to be defeated in Syria. As I have said several times above, the logical policy would be to cooperate with Assad in defeating ISIL in Syria. But Obama continues his pig-headed stubborn obsession with removing Assad from power, *and* now Obama also wants to defeat ISIL in Syria. One could have nightmares about Obama involving the U.S. in the civil war against Assad, which would not only be expensive for the USA, but also destabilize the Assad government. Destabilizing the Assad government would enable jihadists and terrorists in Syria. I am exasperated, because the obvious and logical solution to the Syria problem is for Obama to cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL.

Obama failed to answer the question "Do you regret not moving on ISIS earlier?" But Obama did admit that ISIL captured U.S.-supplied military equipment from the fleeing Iraqi army in Mosul, and ISIL robbed banks in Mosul that made ISIL wealthy.

Obama wants to include Sunnis in the new, inclusive Iraqi government. But Obama ignores the fact that the Sunnis walked out of discussions about forming the new government when a Sunni mosque was attacked, as described [above](#). How does one work with a partner who hysterically flees every time there is a minor setback?

29-31 August 2014

On 29 Aug, *The New York Times* published an op-ed by Kerry on the need for a coalition of nations to defeat ISIL.

[¶1] In a polarized region and a complicated world, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria presents a unifying threat to a broad array of countries, including the United States. What's needed to confront its nihilistic vision and genocidal agenda is a global coalition using political, humanitarian, economic, law enforcement and intelligence tools to support military force.

[¶2] In addition to its beheadings, crucifixions and other acts of sheer evil, which have killed thousands of innocents in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, including Sunni Muslims whose faith it purports to represent, ISIS (which the United States government calls ISIL, or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) poses a threat well beyond the region.

[¶3] ISIS has its origins in what was once known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, which has over a decade of experience in extremist violence. The group has amassed a hardened fighting force of committed jihadists with global ambitions, exploiting the conflict in Syria and sectarian tensions in Iraq. Its leaders have repeatedly threatened the United

States, and in May an ISIS-associated terrorist shot and killed three people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. (A fourth victim died 13 days later.) ISIS' cadre of foreign fighters are a rising threat not just in the region, but anywhere they could manage to travel undetected — including to America.

[¶4] There is evidence that these extremists, if left unchecked, will not be satisfied at stopping with Syria and Iraq. They are larger and better funded in this new incarnation, using pirated oil, kidnapping and extortion to finance operations in Syria and Iraq. They are equipped with sophisticated heavy weapons looted from the battlefield. They have already demonstrated the ability to seize and hold more territory than any other terrorist organization, in a strategic region that borders Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey and is perilously close to Israel.

[¶5] ISIS fighters have exhibited repulsive savagery and cruelty. Even as they butcher Shiite Muslims and Christians in their effort to touch off a broader ethnic and sectarian conflict, they pursue a calculated strategy of killing fellow Sunni Muslims to gain and hold territory. The beheading of an American journalist, James Foley, has shocked the conscience of the world.

[¶6] With a united response led by the United States and the broadest possible coalition of nations, the cancer of ISIS will not be allowed to spread to other countries. The world can confront this scourge, and ultimately defeat it. ISIS is odious, but not omnipotent. We have proof already in northern Iraq, where United States airstrikes have shifted the momentum of the fight, providing space for Iraqi and Kurdish forces to go on the offensive. With our support, Iraqi leaders are coming together to form a new, inclusive government that is essential to isolating ISIS and securing the support of all of Iraq's communities.

[¶7] Airstrikes alone won't defeat this enemy. A much fuller response is demanded from the world. We need to support Iraqi forces and the moderate Syrian opposition, who are facing ISIS on the front lines. We need to disrupt and degrade ISIS' capabilities and counter its extremist message in the media. And we need to strengthen our own defenses and cooperation in protecting our people.

....

[¶11] Already our efforts have brought dozens of nations to this cause. Certainly there are different interests at play. But no decent country can support the horrors perpetrated by ISIS, and no civilized country should shirk its responsibility to help stamp out this disease.

[¶12] ISIS' abhorrent tactics are uniting and rallying neighbors with traditionally conflicting interests to support Iraq's new government. And over time, this coalition can begin to address the underlying factors that fuel ISIS and other terrorist organizations with like-minded agendas.

[¶13] Coalition building is hard work, but it is the best way to tackle a common

enemy. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, the first President George Bush and Secretary of State James A. Baker III did not act alone or in haste. They methodically assembled a coalition of countries whose concerted action brought a quick victory.

[¶14] Extremists are defeated only when responsible nations and their peoples unite to oppose them.

John Kerry, "To Defeat Terror, We Need the World's Help," [NY Times](#), 29 Aug 2014. (links in article omitted) Copy at [State Dept.](#).

My comments: In ¶1 Kerry wants a coalition to provide "political, humanitarian, economic, law enforcement and intelligence tools to support military force." That seems like a comprehensive response. But I think Kerry omits a tool that could be very important. Al-Qaeda and ISIL appeals to young, disaffected Muslim men. If Islamic leaders — clerics and politicians alike — were to repeatedly explain why terrorism and genocide are forbidden in Islam, they might erode the philosophical foundation for Al-Qaeda and ISIL. We are partly fighting an *idea*, so it makes sense to show why the idea is wrong.

In ¶4 Kerry fails to mention ISIL robbed banks in Mosul, which provided US\$ 425 million to ISIL. Kerry says ISIL has weapons "looted from the battlefield". The Truth is there was no battlefield. The cowardly Iraqi army simply fled in Mosul in mid-June, abandoning their weapons and supplies, which ISIL effortlessly collected.

As examples of why ISIL is bad, Kerry cites the deaths of four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels [¶3] and the beheading of James Foley [¶5]. Kerry omits the slaughter of many hundreds of captured soldiers in Syria and Iraq. Kerry omits the crucifixions and beheadings of many people in Syria. Kerry omits the threatened genocide of Christians and Yazidis by ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Kerry omits that ISIL has blocked delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria.

Kerry appoints the USA as the international leader of this coalition: "With a united response led by the United States...." [¶6] and "Already our efforts...." [¶11]. Obama and Kerry seem to have volunteered the U.S. taxpayers to contribute the lion's share of money to defeating ISIL.

Kerry says: "With our support, Iraqi leaders are coming together to form a new, inclusive government that is essential to isolating ISIS and securing the support of all of Iraq's communities." [¶6] Kerry does *not* mention that the Iraqi government allowed ISIL to capture about 1/3 of Iraq during Jan-June 2014. Kerry does *not* mention that, in the middle of an existential crisis in Iraq, the Iraqi Parliament has been unable to form a new government, two months after its first meeting.

Kerry says: "We need to support ... the moderate Syrian opposition, who are facing ISIS on the front lines." [¶7] The moderate Syrian opposition — as well as jihadists and Al-Qaeda — have been fighting against ISIL in Syria since 3 Jan 2014. The moderate Syrian opposition has complained for more than eight months about inadequate support from the USA. A promised expansion of support for the moderate Syrian opposition is waiting for the U.S. Congress to act months from now.

Kerry touts the coalition building by the USA in 1990, which resulted in "a quick victory." [J13] But no one is forecasting "a quick victory" against ISIL — this fight against ISIL is going to take *many years*. Kerry does *not* mention the coalition in 2003, which led to the deaths of 4486 U.S. military personnel and 179 from the United Kingdom. Was this 2003-2011 war in Iraq beneficial to the USA or Western Europe? NO! We can avoid a repeat of the sacrifice of soldiers from the USA and Western Europe by letting the Syrians and Iraqis (and neighboring nations) do *all* of the fighting on the ground. So far, the Iraqis have shown no willingness to engage in bloody building-to-building fighting against ISIL, to expel ISIL from Fallujah, Tikrit, Mosul, and other captured cities. Kerry also does *not* mention that Obama put together a little coalition of the USA, UK, and France to have airstrikes on Assad on 31 Aug 2013, but the UK backed out when the House of Commons objected on 29 Aug 2013, and Obama backed out nine hours before the scheduled airstrikes. Kerry needs to go back 24 years to find a good example of a coalition built by the USA.

Deposing Saddam Hussein allowed terrorism to become routine in Iraq, and allowed the creation of ISIL (originally Al-Qaeda in Iraq). We are not learning from our mistakes. Since 2011, the U.S. Government is advocating deposing Assad in Syria. Terrorism is already common in Syria, but it will become worse after Assad is deposed, leaving a weak or nonexistent government like Libya. Kerry will *not* invite Assad to become a member of the coalition, although Assad has intelligence about ISIL and Assad has a strong army in Syria. Assad's army is much better trained and better equipped than the moderate Syrian opposition that Kerry favors. And fighting ISIL inside Syria without the permission of the lawful government of Assad will be intervening in the Syrian civil war.

Bradley Klapper at the [Associated Press](#) wrote an article that describes what the U.S. Government is probably asking of eleven nations plus Europe.

**U.S. Airstrikes in Iraq (began 8 Aug),
Airdrops of Humanitarian Supplies (7-13 Aug),
U.S. Surveillance in Syria (began 26 Aug),
U.S. Military Policy in Iraq**

7 Aug 2014: U.S. Politics

On the morning of 7 August, Obama convened his national security team.

On 7 August at 13:02 EDT, the White House Press Spokesman, Josh Earnest, said:

QUESTION: Thanks, Josh. As you know, in Iraq, there is some national concern about some religious minorities that may be trapped there. Is the White House or the U.S. considering any urgent action to help those trapped minorities?

MR. EARNEST: Josh, the United States strongly condemns ISIL's assault on Sinjar and surrounding areas of northern Iraq. These actions have exacerbated an already dire humanitarian crisis, and the situation is nearing a humanitarian catastrophe. Tens of

thousands of innocent civilians are reported to have been displaced, fleeing persecution. And we are gravely concerned for their health and safety, including the vulnerable ethnic and religious minority communities who have been specifically targeted by ISIL.

The cold and calculated manner in which ISIL has targeted defenseless Iraqis like the Yazidis and Christians solely because of their ethnic and religious identity demonstrates a callous disregard for human rights, and it is deeply disturbing. In particular, we're concerned about the welfare of the large community of Iraqi Yazidis who are stranded on Mount Sinjar without food, water or shelter, and the Iraqi Christians who have been forced to flee from their villages in the region. We're deeply concerned about reports that ISIL has abducted as many as several hundred girls from these vulnerable communities.

We're working intensively with the government of Iraq, the Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish authorities in the immediate area to support their efforts to address the humanitarian situation in Sinjar.

QUESTION: And in terms of what the U.S. might be able to do to stop this, is the President considering things along the lines of humanitarian aid? Might he consider going as far as airstrikes against ISIL to address this?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Josh, first and foremost, as I mentioned, Iraqi authorities and Kurdish authorities are focused on this very specific threat to the nation of Iraq and to the vulnerable populations that live in these areas. So the United States government as well as the United States military is supporting the ongoing efforts of the Iraqi officials and Kurdish officials to address this urgent humanitarian crisis that exists. It is a situation that we are deeply concerned about and closely monitoring.

QUESTION: And has the President been meeting with people about this recently? Can you give us a little bit of detail about how he's addressing it and whether we may expect to hear anything more from him about it?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the President, as he often does, met with his national security team — or members of his national security team this morning [7 Aug]. I don't have a specific readout of that meeting, but American officials in Iraq and American officials here in the U.S. are closely monitoring this situation.

....

QUESTION: Just to get a really straight answer, is the U.S. considering airstrikes among these options to make sure that humanitarian assistance is provided to those oppressed minority populations in northern Iraq? Are airstrikes on the table?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Jim, I'm not in a position to rule things on the table or off the table in this context. What I can tell you is to reiterate a principle that the President himself has articulated a couple of times. There are many problems in Iraq. This one

that we're talking about right now has a particularly — is a particularly acute one in that the stakes are very high. We're seeing innocent populations be persecuted just because of their religious or ethnic identity. The humanitarian situation is deeply disturbing there and it's one that we are following closely.

That said, it's important for everyone to understand — and the President has made this clear — that there are no American military solutions to the problems in Iraq. We can't solve these problems for them. These problems can only be solved with Iraq political solutions. That is the core of our thinking as we confront these kinds of situations.

... The President has also made clear that American military action in Iraq would not include combat boots on the ground. That is a principle that the President laid out at the beginning and that continues to be true today.

White House Press [Briefing](#), 7 Aug 2014.

The White House was being extraordinarily uninformative, perhaps to preserve secrecy of anticipated military action, or perhaps because Obama had not yet decided.

On 7 August at 13:50 EDT, Marie Harf gave a Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department. (Psaki was in godforsaken Afghanistan with Kerry.) There were 35 occurrences of the word "Iraq" during this Briefing.

QUESTION: ISIL seized this dam up in Mosul and I was wondering if you all could put that in perspective in terms of developments there. Also, what can you tell us about the Administration's thoughts about how to help these trapped Iraqi civilians, these religious minorities that are kind of in trouble? There's some discussion right now about humanitarian aid and whether or not that might include airstrikes or — what can you tell us about that?

MS. HARF: Well, I'll start with the dam and then let's go to the broader question. Obviously, the situation on the ground remains fluid, but the latest information is that ISIL has advanced on Mosul Dam and taken control of it. We are extremely concerned by this development. The dam is a vital part of Iraq's infrastructure, as it controls water levels on the Tigris River. It is also a key source of water and electricity generation for the Iraqi people. So we're closely coordinating with the Iraqis — with Iraqi officials in both Baghdad and Erbil to counter this development. But also writ large, I'd just say a few points. I know there's a lot of interest out there on this today, a lot of questions and information floating around.

We are actively considering what we could do in support of Iraqi efforts — what more we could do — and particularly to provide additional support for the Yezidis, also the Christian communities we've talked about. Look, this is a huge humanitarian crisis. You have thousands and thousands of people at risk of death from starvation. We're reviewing what more we can do. Obviously, we've talked a lot about this over the past few weeks. We're working politically with the Iraqis on the government formation process. We've seen some progress, and hopefully we'll see more. But we are right now actively considering what else we can do given the extremely grave humanitarian situation that we see on the ground. You've heard my colleague at the White House

who I think just talked about this as well, so we're looking at options.

....

QUESTION: You mentioned it's a humanitarian crisis. How soon might we know what kind of decision you all are going to make?

MS. HARF: Well, look, we know this is a very urgent one. I think the President does and the Secretary does. So I would expect to see — I don't have anything to preview, but I think we all understand the urgency and would expect to see some decisions about what we might do coming soon, but I don't have anything to preview for you.

....

QUESTION: So about Kurdistan. The region — this is the gravest crisis they're facing, and recently it was reported by The Washington Post that ISIL has just now controlled even a town that's like less than 30 kilometers away from Erbil. I was just talk to friends and people in Erbil. They were really panicking. People are leaving Erbil. So people are asking Kurdistan whether America is going to really act to protect its — Kurdistan has been one of the most pro-American allies in the region. Honestly, there are thousands of posts I read on social media. Everybody is saying is really America going to help us, or is it going to save us? Because Kurdistan just — I heard the Kurdish leader talking on Amanpour's show, saying that the reason we are defeated because we are having outdated Russian weapons and ISIL has advanced American weapons. Is there anything more than statements —

MS. HARF: Well, I don't think ISIL has advanced American weapons. But setting that aside, I can guarantee you that we are — we are already assisting the Kurdish people and the Iraqi people — all of them — in their fight against ISIL.

....

MS. HARF: Well, I'm not going to outline any specific options or to take on or off the table any specific option. I think you've heard the President in the past speak about the fact that anything we do — first of all, anything we do has to be accompanied by political moves in Iraq; we've seen some moves toward government formation, but we need to see a prime minister named as soon as possible — that there's no American military solution here.

Obviously, also talked about the principle of no combat troops on the ground. He's outlined those in a variety of ways throughout the past few weeks. So those are sort of, I think, part of how decisions are made. But obviously, no decisions to talk about yet.

QUESTION: Call me stupid, but why does it matter whether there's a new PM or whether Maliki is still in power?

MS. HARF: Well, we've said that a new government needs — because there's been an

election, first of all, and there needs to be a new government in place. And so we have a COR speaker, we have a president, and the next step in that process is a prime minister. We have said one needs to be appointed as soon as possible and to govern in an inclusive way. So there are consequences to elections, and we want to see them carried out here.

QUESTION: But ISIL could continue its advance. It could turn on the Yezidis; it could turn on the Christian minority.

MS. HARF: It already has.

QUESTION: It — yeah. Well, it could step it up.

MS. HARF: That's true.

Daily Press Briefing, U.S. [State Dept.](#), 7 Aug 2014.

My comment is that ISIL clearly has weapons — artillery, mortars, tanks, armored personnel carriers — that ISIL stole from the fleeing Iraqi army in June. These weapons may not be "advanced", but they are superior to the AK-47 assault rifles on which the Kurdish peshmerga rely.

Harf repeats the slogan that "there's no American military solution here." There certainly *could* be a use of U.S. bombers to annihilate ISIL convoys. That would *not* be a solution to *all* of Iraq's problems, but it could decimate the ISIL terrorists and give the Iraqi people some relief from continuing advances of ISIL. The fact that the government of Iraq is unworthy of assistance is a separate issue from the suffering of the Iraqi people at the hands of the barbaric ISIL terrorists. For example, if we annihilate ISIL, the people of Iraq can return to what remains of their homes, partly solving the refugee problem.

At 15:10 EDT, *The Washington Post* reported:

President Obama may move within hours to authorize a U.S. military airdrop of humanitarian supplies to minorities fleeing Islamist militants in northern Iraq, as he separately weighs airstrikes against Islamist forces, according to a senior administration official.

Obama is "considering imminent activity to supply humanitarian assistance for displaced Iraqis. It could come very soon," the official said.

The likelihood of military strikes is less certain but is under active consideration and was discussed at a meeting among Obama and his senior national security advisers Thursday [7 Aug] morning.

"U.S. airstrikes are an imminent consideration given the humanitarian crisis and the targeting of religiously significant" areas and sites, said a second U.S. official.

....

Reports of the humanitarian crisis developed quickly this week, and discussion of U.S. intervention has “advanced considerably over the last 24 hours” as Islamic State extremists punctured defense lines that had been held by Kurdish forces in northern Iraq, said the administration official, who was not authorized to discuss the rapid planning.

....

Iraq requested support from the United States in carrying out airdrops after aid was damaged when it was dropped from planes that were not properly equipped, said Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Moussawi.

Those stranded in the mountains have said that some of the government deliveries of water and milk had smashed on impact. As children began to die of thirst, humanitarian workers had called for a longer term solution.

Karen DeYoung, "U.S. may authorize ‘imminent’ humanitarian airdrop in Iraq," [Washington Post](#), 15:10 EDT, 7 Aug 2014.

Note that ISIL "punctured defense lines" on 3 Aug, and the White House reacted *four days later*. I hope if there is a fire in the White House kitchen, they will *not* wait four days to call the fire department.

7 Aug: Obama & Kerry

At 21:30 EDT on 7 August, Obama made a televised speech announcing that U.S. military action in Iraq had begun.

Good evening. Today I authorized two operations in Iraq — targeted airstrikes to protect our American personnel, and a humanitarian effort to help save thousands of Iraqi civilians who are trapped on a mountain without food and water and facing almost certain death. Let me explain the actions we’re taking and why.

First, I said in June — as the terrorist group ISIL began an advance across Iraq — that the United States would be prepared to take targeted military action in Iraq if and when we determined that the situation required it. In recent days, these terrorists have continued to move across Iraq, and have neared the city of Erbil, where American diplomats and civilians serve at our consulate and American military personnel advise Iraqi forces.

To stop the advance on Erbil, I’ve directed our military to take targeted strikes against ISIL terrorist convoys should they move toward the city. We intend to stay vigilant, and take action if these terrorist forces threaten our personnel or facilities anywhere in Iraq, including our consulate in Erbil and our embassy in Baghdad. We’re also providing urgent assistance to Iraqi government and Kurdish forces so they can more effectively wage the fight against ISIL.

Second, at the request of the Iraqi government — we’ve begun operations to help save

Iraqi civilians stranded on the mountain. As ISIL has marched across Iraq, it has waged a ruthless campaign against innocent Iraqis. And these terrorists have been especially barbaric towards religious minorities, including Christian and Yezidis, a small and ancient religious sect. Countless Iraqis have been displaced. And chilling reports describe ISIL militants rounding up families, conducting mass executions, and enslaving Yezidi women.

In recent days, Yezidi women, men and children from the area of Sinjar have fled for their lives. And thousands — perhaps tens of thousands — are now hiding high up on the mountain, with little but the clothes on their backs. They're without food, they're without water. People are starving. And children are dying of thirst. Meanwhile, ISIL forces below have called for the systematic destruction of the entire Yezidi people, which would constitute genocide. So these innocent families are faced with a horrible choice: descend the mountain and be slaughtered, or stay and slowly die of thirst and hunger.

I've said before, the United States cannot and should not intervene every time there's a crisis in the world. So let me be clear about why we must act, and act now. When we face a situation like we do on that mountain — with innocent people facing the prospect of violence on a horrific scale, when we have a mandate to help — in this case, a request from the Iraqi government — and when we have the unique capabilities to help avert a massacre, then I believe the United States of America cannot turn a blind eye. We can act, carefully and responsibly, to prevent a potential act of genocide. That's what we're doing on that mountain.

I've, therefore, authorized targeted airstrikes, if necessary, to help forces in Iraq as they fight to break the siege of Mount Sinjar and protect the civilians trapped there. Already, American aircraft have begun conducting humanitarian airdrops of food and water to help these desperate men, women and children survive. Earlier this week, one Iraqi in the area cried to the world, "There is no one coming to help." Well today, America is coming to help. We're also consulting with other countries — and the United Nations — who have called for action to address this humanitarian crisis.

I know that many of you are rightly concerned about any American military action in Iraq, even limited strikes like these. I understand that. I ran for this office in part to end our war in Iraq and welcome our troops home, and that's what we've done. As Commander-in-Chief, I will not allow the United States to be dragged into fighting another war in Iraq. And so even as we support Iraqis as they take the fight to these terrorists, American combat troops will not be returning to fight in Iraq, because there's no American military solution to the larger crisis in Iraq. The only lasting solution is reconciliation among Iraqi communities and stronger Iraqi security forces.

However, we can and should support moderate forces who can bring stability to Iraq. So even as we carry out these two missions, we will continue to pursue a broader strategy that empowers Iraqis to confront this crisis. Iraqi leaders need to come together and forge a new government that represents the legitimate interests of all Iraqis, and that can fight back against the threats like ISIL. Iraqis have named a new

President, a new Speaker of Parliament, and are seeking consensus on a new Prime Minister. This is the progress that needs to continue in order to reverse the momentum of the terrorists who prey on Iraq's divisions.

....

Barack Obama, "Statement by the President," [White House](#), 7 Aug 2014.

Then Kerry issued his statement:

President Obama has acted expeditiously and appropriately in authorizing targeted military action and providing significant humanitarian assistance to the people of Iraq at this very difficult moment when it is vitally needed.

The stakes for Iraq's future could not be clearer, and today's crisis underscores the stakes profoundly. ISIL's campaign of terror against the innocent, including Yezedi and Christian minorities, and its grotesque and targeted acts of violence bear all the warning signs and hallmarks of genocide. For anyone who needed a wake-up call, this is it. ISIL is not fighting on behalf of Sunnis. ISIL is not fighting for a stronger Iraq. ISIL is fighting to divide and destroy Iraq — and ISIL is offering nothing to anyone except chaos, nihilism, and ruthless thuggery. With a gut-wrenching humanitarian crisis unfolding, and the rolls of the starving and sick growing daily, there's not a minute to waste. The United States is acting and leading, and the world cannot sit by and watch innocents die. We will continue to coordinate with our allies in the region and the international community to assist Iraqis to confront ISIL's brutal ideology which poses a severe threat to Iraq, the region, and the United States.

President Obama has been unequivocal that he will do what is necessary and what is in our national interest to confront ISIL and its threat to the security of the region and to our own long-term security. He has been equally clear, as I have on my visit to Iraq and in all my conversations with Iraqi and regional leaders, that the only durable way to stop ISIL is for Iraq's real leaders to unite and form an inclusive government as rapidly as possible within their own constitutional framework, including the selection of a prime minister. Iraq's leaders must confront the growing humanitarian and security crisis with the urgency that it demands. They must do so knowing that ISIL finds an inadvertent, unwitting ally in any delay in the political process inside Iraq. Only ISIL wins if Iraqi political leaders avoid making tough choices rapidly to tip the balance in favor of inclusive and effective governance.

The safety and security of our men and women serving overseas is fundamental. Every day we wrestle with difficult choices to keep our people safe. I will remain closely engaged with Ambassador Beecroft, Deputy Assistant Secretary McGurk, and our team on the ground as we work to ensure that our personnel in Erbil, Baghdad, and across Iraq are secure.

John Kerry, "Statement on Iraq," [State Dept.](#), 7 Aug 2014.

My comments: *If Obama had authorized airstrikes on ISIL convoys in Iraq in January 2014, we might have avoided the sweeping ISIL victories in dozens of towns across northern and western Iraq. We might have avoided the ISIL conquest of Mosul. We might have*

avoided ISIL stealing U.S.-supplied weapons from the Iraqi army in June 2014, which made ISIL better equipped than other armed groups in Syria and Iraq. We might have avoided ISIL robbing banks in Mosul in June 2014 to finance ISIL operations. We might have avoided ISIL's persecution of Christians in Mosul and other towns. And the Iraqi security forces would not need to expel ISIL in future house-to-house fighting in cities, with enormous casualties and destruction of buildings.

So Obama is seven months late. But, as the americans say, better late than never.

Obama's speech on 7 August must be seen as an admission that Obama's 19 June policy (i.e., wait for the Iraqi Parliament to appoint a new, inclusive government *before* beginning any U.S. military action) was a mistake. It was a mistake for two reasons. First, the Iraqi Parliament is taking longer than Obama expected to elect the new government. Second, ISIL continued to capture towns and assets, while the Iraqi security forces were ineffective in opposing ISIL. The second reason was no surprise, because the Iraqi security forces had been ineffective since Jan 2014, and an emboldened and well-equipped ISIL would surely continue to expand their caliphate.

Obviously, Obama felt sorry for the Yazidis who were trapped on that mountain, because Obama mentioned the word "mountain" seven times. Obama was probably not overjoyed to be correcting his earlier mistakes of refusing to order airstrikes and failing to get involved in fighting against ISIL.

In June 2014, Obama's policy delayed any U.S. airstrikes until *after* the Iraqi Parliament had formed a new, inclusive government. The formation of an inclusive government *supposedly* would give the Iraqi people, and the Iraqi army, a unified nation that would replace past sectarian bickering and tribal loyalties. However, Obama never clearly explained exactly how this magic was to occur. Experience shows that it can take tens of years for prejudices and memories of discrimination to abate, but the Iraqis need a unified nation now.

Obama was right about one aspect of his June 2014 policy: if the U.S. Military is doing all (or most) of the airstrikes, the Iraqis have nothing invested in the process, and the Iraqis can leisurely watch the U.S. airplanes blast ISIL. To his credit, Obama wanted the Iraqis to be heavily invested in annihilating ISIL, including *all* of the fighting on the ground, *before* the U.S. began airstrikes. However, it is still not clear that the Iraqi army has the will and courage to engage ISIL in house-to-house fighting and other battles with high numbers of casualties. For example, the Iraqi army has been unable to expel ISIL from Tikrit, or from any of the other large cities that ISIL has captured since Jan 2014.

There are acts that the U.S. military can do — the execution of Osama bin Laden comes to mind — that would be impossible to accomplish with diplomacy or propaganda. While Obama may be personally antiwar, there can be no doubt that there are *moral* uses of force, e.g., stopping a criminal from harming an innocent victim. Police do this moral act routinely. NATO military used force to stop genocide in Bosnia during 1994-1995. Stopping ISIL from massacring unarmed people certainly qualifies as a moral act.

Let me comment on Obama's statement: "American combat troops will not be returning to

fight in Iraq, because there's no American military solution to the larger crisis in Iraq." This is circular logic. First, Obama decides "American combat troops will not be returning to fight in Iraq". Then he justifies that decision by saying "there's no American military solution to the ... crisis in Iraq." But there is no American military solution, because Obama has already decided no boots on the ground. This is circular reasoning, in that the conclusion pretends to justify itself.

There is a good reason for Obama to assure Americans that Obama is not repeating George W. Bush's colossal waste of a trillion dollars and killing 4400 American military personnel for something of no value to the USA. By repeatedly making this assurance of no boots on the ground, Obama gets nearly unanimous support from Americans for Obama's limited military engagement in Iraq. While such assurances of *limited* U.S. military engagement may now make ISIL happy, ISIL will soon recognize that being splatted by airstrikes degrades ISIL's expansion of their caliphate.

Obama has repeatedly talked about the criteria for using U.S. Military force in foreign nations, especially since the use of chemical weapons in Syria in August 2013. However, Obama's words are vague and give him great personal discretion in when to strike and when to ignore a provocation. That great discretion is nice for the office of the U.S. Presidency, but it does *not* permit rational decision making by foreign governments and terrorist organizations. Indeed, observers may conclude that the USA acts randomly and unpredictably in deciding when to strike. The ability of foreigners to predict when the USA will strike is important for deterring misconduct by rational foreigners.

For example, looking at history, we can conclude:

- Genocide of Muslims in Bosnia during 1994-1995 caused the USA to use military strikes, but genocide in Darfur (Africa) since 2003 was *not* a good reason to use military force.
- The use of chemical weapons in Syria was *not* a good reason to use military force, according to Obama, although such use of chemical weapons crossed Obama's own declared "red line" that would cause a military strike. (See my [first essay](#) on Syria.)
- The invasion of Iraq by ISIL in January 2014 was *not* a good reason to use military force, although the Iraqi government requested airstrikes, and the U.S. Government considers Iraq an ally.
- The persecution of Christians in Mosul by ISIL on 19 July 2014 was *not* a good reason to use military force, but the persecution of Yazidis by ISIL on 3 Aug 2014 resulted in military strikes against ISIL.

My conclusion is that decisions of U.S. presidents on military strikes lack consistency and predictability.

8 Aug 2014

Early on 8 Aug, the Associated Press reported on the U.S. humanitarian aid delivery: [Obama] announced the airdrops only after the three American military cargo aircraft, escorted by fighter planes, had safely left the drop site. The planes delivered 5,300 gallons (20,060 liters) of fresh drinking water and 8,000 pre-packaged meals.

Officials said the U.S. was prepared to undertake additional humanitarian airdrops if necessary.

Sameer N. Yacoub & Vivian Salama, "US Airdrops Supplies To Thousands Besieged In Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 03:28 GMT, 8 Aug 2014.

[The Washington Post](#) reported that of 72 pallets of supplies dropped from one C-17 and two C-130 cargo airplanes, 63 pallets (87%) reached their target.

The Pentagon issued a press release that said:

At about 6:45 a.m. EDT, two F/A-18 aircraft dropped 500-pound laser-guided bombs on a mobile artillery piece near Irbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdistan region, [the Pentagon Press Secretary, Admiral] Kirby said, adding that ISIL was using this artillery to shell Kurdish forces defending the city, where U.S. personnel are located.

"U.S. Aircraft Conduct Targeted Airstrike in Northern Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 8 Aug 2014.

See also [Central Command](#), 8 Aug.

The [Associated Press](#) reported this first set of airstrikes at 09:00 EDT (13:00 GMT) on 8 Aug. The time is useful because the Pentagon does *not* put the time on their press releases.

Later, the Pentagon issued a second press release:

Shortly after 10 a.m. EDT, remotely piloted aircraft struck a terrorist mortar position, Kirby said in a statement. When ISIL fighters returned to the site moments later, he added, the terrorists were attacked again and were killed.

At about 11:20 a.m. EDT, four F/A-18 aircraft successfully struck a stationary ISIL convoy of seven vehicles and a mortar position near Irbil.

"The aircraft executed two planned passes," Kirby said. "On both runs, each aircraft dropped one laser guided bomb making a total of eight bombs dropped on target, neutralizing the mortar and convoy."

"U.S. Military Conducts More Airstrikes on ISIL Targets," [Pentagon](#), 8 Aug 2014.

The [Associated Press](#) reported this second set of airstrikes at 15:42 EDT (19:42 GMT) on 8 Aug.

At 16:42 EDT, the [Washington Post](#) said: "The airstrikes also presented the first significant challenge yet to months of unchecked expansion by the al-Qaeda offshoot, which has swept through much of Iraq and neighboring Syria over the past year, annihilating its opponents, capturing valuable resources and declaring the creation of an Islamic caliphate in a nation-size chunk of territory."

The Associated Press explained that Obama's current goal is to *contain* ISIL, *not* to destroy ISIL.

President Barack Obama's new military strategy in Iraq amounts to trying to contain —

not destroy — the Islamic militant group that now controls much of the country's northern region. That leaves open the questions of how deeply the U.S. will be drawn into the sectarian conflict, and whether airstrikes alone can stop the militants' momentum.

....

U.S. military jets dropped food and water to imperiled refugees in northwestern Iraq and launched several airstrikes Friday [8 Aug] on isolated targets, including two mortar positions and a vehicle convoy in northeastern Iraq, near the country's Kurdish capital of Irbil. Additional airdrops and targeted strikes were thought likely. The next move may be up to the Islamic State group, the al-Qaida inspired extremists who have chewed up Iraqi opposition so far.

....

Will there be further airstrikes? State Department deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf said the Islamic State group must at least halt its advance on Irbil to prevent further strikes.

....

Beyond airstrikes, the administration has been asked to provide arms directly to the Kurdish forces defending Irbil. Until now, the U.S. has been willing to do that only through the central government in Baghdad, which has long feuded with the semi-autonomous Kurdish government in Iraq's north.

Michael Barbero, a retired Army general who ran the U.S. training mission in Iraq from 2009 to 2011, said Baghdad never delivered about \$200 million worth of American weapons that were designated for the Kurds. Pentagon officials maintain they can provide arms only to the Iraqi government, although Harf said Friday the Kurdish forces play a critical role in the crisis.

Robert Burns & Lara Jakes, "Obama's Iraq Aim: Contain, Not Destroy, Extremists," [Associated Press](#), 18:24 EDT, 8 Aug 2014.

For the second consecutive night, the U.S. Air Force delivered humanitarian supplies to people trapped in the Sinjar mountains. The Pentagon said:

Tonight, the U.S. military conducted another successful airdrop of food and water for thousands of Iraqi citizens threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant on Mount Sinjar, Iraq, according to a Defense Department news release.

This airdrop was conducted from multiple airbases within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and as with last night, included one C-17 and two C-130 cargo aircraft that together dropped a total of 72 bundles of supplies. The cargo aircraft were escorted by two F/A-18s from the USS George H.W. Bush, the release said.

The C-17 dropped some 40 container delivery system bundles of meals ready to eat

and was complemented by a C-130 loaded with an additional 16 bundles totaling 28,224 meals, according to the release. In addition, one C-130 dropped 16 bundles totaling 1,522 gallons of fresh drinking water.

To date, in coordination with the government of Iraq, U.S. military aircraft have delivered 36,224 meals and 6,822 gallons [25,800 liters] of fresh drinking water, providing much-needed aid to Iraqis who urgently require emergency assistance, the release said.

"U.S. Conducts Another Humanitarian Airdrop in Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 8 Aug 2014.

The [Associated Press](#) reported this second airdrop at 22:46 EDT on 8 Aug (02:46 GMT on 9 Aug).

[Reuters](#) reports that the Iraqi military delivered ammunition directly to Erbil in Kurdistan. This is apparently an act of unprecedented cooperation between the Iraqi government in Baghdad and the government in Kurdistan.

9 Aug 2014: Obama

Saturday morning, 9 Aug, the White House released a transcript of the President's weekly radio address. Obama's brief speech was mostly a summary of what he had said on 7 Aug, and seemed intended for people who had been living in caves, unaware of what was happening in Iraq.

The United States cannot and should not intervene every time there's a crisis in the world. But when there's a situation like the one on this mountain — when countless innocent people are facing a massacre, and when we have the ability to help prevent it — the United States can't just look away. That's not who we are. We're Americans. We act. We lead. And that's what we're going to do on that mountain. As one American who wrote to me yesterday said, "it is the right thing to do."

As Commander-in-Chief, I will not allow the United States to be dragged into fighting another war in Iraq. American combat troops will not be returning to fight in Iraq, because there's no American military solution to the larger crisis there.

What we will do is continue our broader strategy in Iraq. We will protect our citizens. We will work with the international community to address this humanitarian crisis. We'll help prevent these terrorists from having a permanent safe haven from which to attack America. And we'll continue to urge Iraqi communities to reconcile, come together and fight back against these terrorists so the people of Iraq have the opportunity for a better future — the opportunity for which so many Americans gave their lives in Iraq in a long and hard war.

Obama, "Weekly Address: American Operations in Iraq," [White House](#), 9 Aug 2014.

My comments: Well the USA did "just look away" for four days, as dehydrated Yahidis died on that mountain. They fled there on 3 Aug and Obama ordered airdrops of food and water at night on 7 Aug. With that record of delay, Obama should stop boasting. And *if*

Obama had ordered airstrikes against ISIL anytime during January 2014 to July 2014, Obama might have *prevented* atrocities against the Yahidis. Preventing those atrocities would have been much better than delivering humanitarian aid after the atrocities occurred.

In his next paragraph, Obama again uses the circular reasoning that I criticized above, in my comments on his 7 Aug speech.

I think Obama is too focused on protecting American lives in the U.S. Consulate in Erbil. We want to avoid repeating what happened to the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya on 11 Sep 2012, when Islamic terrorists assassinated the U.S. Ambassador to Libya. But if all we want to do is protect American lives, it would be less expensive to simply close the U.S. Consulate in Erbil. A better reason for airstrikes on ISIL is to annihilate these barbaric terrorists, who have infested Iraq and continue to expand their caliphate.

Finally, Obama comes perilously close to saying that the USA gave the Iraqi people the gift of freedom from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, but the Iraqis squandered that gift, through corruption, incompetence, and petty bickering. So we let the Iraqis wallow in their incompetence for seven months, while ISIL seized much of the so-called Iraqi nation. The U.S. will *again* help the Iraqis, but this time the Iraqi security forces will do *all* of the bloody fighting on the ground to expel ISIL. While this may be a truthful view of U.S. policy in Iraq, in international relations too much Truth can cause resentment in weak, incompetent nations like Iraq.

On Saturday, 9 Aug, Obama departed from the White House for a two-week vacation. Just before Obama departed, he made a speech at 10:30 EDT. I quote only a few paragraphs of his speech:

Now, even as we deal with these immediate situations, we continue to pursue a broader strategy in Iraq. We will protect our American citizens in Iraq, whether they're diplomats, civilians or military. If these terrorists threaten our facilities or our personnel, we will take action to protect our people.

We will continue to provide military assistance and advice to the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces as they battle these terrorists, so that the terrorists cannot establish a permanent safe haven.

....

Finally, we continue to call on Iraqis to come together and form the inclusive government that Iraq needs right now. Vice President Biden has been speaking to Iraqi leaders, and our team in Baghdad is in close touch with the Iraqi government. All Iraqi communities are ultimately threatened by these barbaric terrorists and all Iraqi communities need to unite to defend their country.

Just as we are focused on the situation in the north affecting Kurds and Iraqi minorities, Sunnis and Shia in different parts of Iraq have suffered mightily at the hands of ISIL. Once an inclusive government is in place, I'm confident it will be easier to mobilize all Iraqis against ISIL, and to mobilize greater support from our friends and allies.

Ultimately, only Iraqis can ensure the security and stability of Iraq. The United States can't do it for them, but we can and will be partners in that effort.

....

Just to give people a sense, though, of a timetable — that the most important timetable that I'm focused on right now is the Iraqi government getting formed and finalized. Because in the absence of an Iraqi government, it is very hard to get a unified effort by Iraqis against ISIL. We can conduct airstrikes, but ultimately there's not going to be an American military solution to this problem. There's going to have to be an Iraqi solution that America and other countries and allies support. And that can't happen effectively until you have a legitimate Iraqi government.

So right now we have a president, we have a speaker. What we don't yet have is a prime minister and a cabinet that is formed that can go ahead and move forward, and then start reaching out to all the various groups and factions inside of Iraq, and can give confidence to populations in the Sunni areas that ISIL is not the only game in town. It also then allows us to take those Iraqi security forces that are able and functional, and they understand who they're reporting to and what they're fighting for, and what the chain of command is. And it provides a structure in which better cooperation is taking place between the Kurdish region and Baghdad.

So we're going to be pushing very hard to encourage Iraqis to get their government together. Until we do that, it is going to be hard to get the unity of effort that allows us to not just play defense, but also engage in some offense.

....

QUESTION: You just expressed confidence that the Iraqi government can eventually prevent a safe haven. But you've also just described the complications with the Iraqi government and the sophistication of ISIL. So is it possible that what you've described and your ambitions there could take years, not months?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think we're going to solve this problem in weeks, if that's what you mean. I think this is going to take some time. But this is going to be a long-term project.

Obama, "Statement by the President on Iraq," [White House](#), 9 Aug 2014.

My comments: Obama blasted the failure of Iraqi Parliament to form a new government: "And that can't happen effectively until you have a legitimate Iraqi government. What we don't yet have is a prime minister and a cabinet that is formed that can go ahead and move forward,...." The clear implication is that Maliki heads an "illegitimate" government, the same term that Obama has used for Assad in Syria. There is also a clear implication that Maliki is unable to "go ahead and move forward, and then start reaching out to all the various groups and factions inside of Iraq,"

Earlier in his speech, Obama said: "... we continue to call on Iraqis to come together and form the inclusive government that Iraq needs right now." Again, this indicates that Maliki is

not inclusive, and Maliki should resign.

Another thing: Obama failed to mention Maliki's name in the speech. Obama routinely mentions names of foreign leaders with whom he or Vice-President Biden have spoken. Indeed, Obama's speech twice mentions the names of the UK prime minister and the French president. So the omission of Maliki's name is significant.

I think these undiplomatic words indicate that Obama is frustrated with Maliki, but Obama does not know how to get rid of Maliki. Five days later, on 14 Aug, Maliki finally ended his campaign for a third-term as prime minister. Also on 14 Aug, Maliki indicated his support for Ebadi, who on 11 Aug had been nominated as the next prime minister.

Journalists prominently quoted Obama's remarks that expelling ISIL from Iraq was a "long-term project" that would take more than weeks. ISIL has been entrenched in Fallujah since Jan 2014, and entrenched for two months in Mosul, and will be very difficult to expel, even with a competent army. The Iraqi army has been ineffective in fighting against ISIL and there is no indication that the Iraqi army will improve its dismal performance. So journalists — and U.S. taxpayers — should expect a long process, probably years. I say years, because that is what was required for the U.S. military to put down the Sunni revolt in Iraq during 2003-2007.

9 Aug 2014: airstrikes and more

The Associated Press reported a third set of airstrikes on Saturday, 9 Aug:

The U.S. military says American jet fighters and drones have conducted four more airstrikes on Islamic militants in Iraq, taking out armored carriers and a truck that were firing on civilians.

U.S. Central Command says the Islamic State militants were firing on Yazidi civilians taking shelter in the Sinjar mountains. In a statement, the military says the militants were firing on civilians indiscriminately.

Central Command says the strikes near Sinjar were spread out, with three before noon Eastern Daylight Time on Saturday and one about 3 p.m.

The military says indications suggest that the strikes were successful in destroying the armored vehicles.

anonymous, "US Launches 4 Airstrikes Against Iraqi Militants," [Associated Press](#) 19:30 EDT (23:30 GMT) on 9 Aug.

At approximately 22:00 EDT, U.S. Central Command posted the following press release at their website:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq today, successfully conducting four airstrikes to defend Yazidi civilians being indiscriminately attacked by ISIL near Sinjar.

At approximately 11:20 a.m. EDT, a mix of U.S. fighters and remotely piloted aircraft

struck one of two ISIL armored personnel carriers [APC] firing on Yazidi civilians near Sinjar, destroying the APC. After the strike, U.S. forces monitored movement of the second ISIL APC from the vicinity, and subsequently located two ISIL APCs and an armed truck nearby.

At approximately 11:40 a.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft struck the two ISIL APCs and armed truck. All indications are that the strikes were successful in destroying their intended targets.

At approximately 3:00 p.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft located and struck another APC in the area of Sinjar. All indications are that this strike was also successful in destroying the APC. All aircraft safely exited the area.

"U.S. military conducts airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq," [Central Command](#), 9 Aug 2014.

U.S. Central Command also posted a press release about a third delivery of humanitarian aid: Tonight, the U.S. military conducted a third airdrop of food and water for thousands of Iraqi citizens threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on Mount Sinjar, Iraq.

This airdrop was conducted from multiple airbases within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and included one C-17 and two C-130 cargo aircraft that together dropped a total of 72 bundles of supplies. U.S. fighter aircraft in the area supported the mission.

The C-17 dropped 40 container delivery system bundles of fresh drinking water totaling 3,804 gallons. In addition, the two C-130s dropped 32 bundles totaling 16,128 meals ready to eat.

To date, in coordination with the government of Iraq, U.S. military aircraft have delivered more than 52,000 meals and more than 10,600 gallons of fresh drinking water, providing much-needed aid to the displaced Yazidis, who urgently require emergency assistance.

"Update on Humanitarian Assistance Operations Near Sinjar, Iraq," [Central Command](#), 9 Aug 2014.

The [Associated Press](#) reported this third airdrop at 21:34 EDT on 9 Aug.

10 Aug 2014: airstrikes and more

U.S. Central Command posted a press release on 10 Aug:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq today [10 Aug], successfully conducting multiple airstrikes from a mix of fighters and remotely piloted vehicles to defend Kurdish forces near Irbil, where U.S. personnel and citizens are located.

At approximately 2:15 a.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL armed truck that was firing on Kurdish forces located in the approaches to Irbil. After the

strike, U.S. force monitored the movement of a second ISIL armed truck away from the vicinity of the strike, subsequently striking and destroying it at approximately 2:45 a.m. EDT.

At approximately 3:40 a.m. EDT, U.S aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, destroying it and damaging a nearby ISIL armed truck.

Following that, at approximately 5:45 a.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL armed truck.

U.S. aircraft conducted another strike on an ISIL armed vehicle at approximately 7:25 a.m. EDT, damaging the vehicle.

All aircraft exited the strikes areas safely.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near Irbil," [Central Command](#), 10 Aug 2014. The [Associated Press](#) reported this story at 10:53 EDT on 10 Aug.

The Associated Press reported that Kurdish peshmerga retook control of two towns from ISIL, in a significant advance:

Reinvigorated by American airstrikes, Kurdish forces retook two towns from Sunni militants Sunday, achieving one of their first victories after weeks of retreating, a senior Kurdish military official said.

Kurdish peshmerga fighters were able to push the militants of the Islamic State group out of the villages of Makhmour and al-Gweir, some 45 kilometers from Irbil, Brig. Gen. Shirko Fatih said.

Sameer N. Yacoub & Vivian Salama, "Kurdish Forces Retake 2 Towns From Sunni Militants," [Associated Press](#), 19:03 GMT, 10 August 2014.

On 10 Aug, the Kurdish newspaper [Rudaw](#) said: "US air strikes authorized by President Barack Obama on Thursday [7 Aug] have boosted the morale of the Kurdish forces, giving them a chance to regroup and focus after almost two months of daily confrontations with IS armies across a 1,050-kilometer southern border."

My comment: Although the main purpose of the airstrikes should be to begin the annihilation of ISIL, note that an immediate collateral benefit was to "reinvigorate" the Kurdish peshmerga and "boost the morale". This may be the first time since June 2014 that ISIL had been forced to abandon a town in Iraq that ISIL had captured.

At night, Central Command reported on the fourth airdrop of humanitarian supplies: Tonight [10 Aug], the U.S. military conducted a fourth airdrop of food and water for thousands of Iraqi citizens threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on Mount Sinjar, Iraq.

This airdrop was conducted from multiple airbases within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and included one C-17 and three C-130 cargo aircraft that together dropped a total of 88 bundles of supplies. U.S. fighter aircraft in the area

supported the mission.

The C-17 dropped 40 container delivery system bundles of fresh drinking water totaling 3,804 gallons. In addition, the three C-130s dropped 48 bundles totaling 22,488 meals ready to eat and 590 gallons of fresh drinking water.

To date, in coordination with the government of Iraq, U.S. military aircraft have delivered more than 74,000 meals and more than 15,000 gallons of fresh drinking water, providing much-needed aid to the displaced Yazidis, who urgently require emergency assistance.

"Update on Humanitarian Assistance Operations Near Sinjar, Iraq," [Central Command](#), 10 Aug 2014.

11 Aug 2014: airstrikes and more

On Monday morning, 11 Aug, U.S. Central Command issued a press release about airstrikes near Erbil at 16:00 EDT (23:00 Iraq time) on Sunday, 10 Aug.

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq late Sunday, successfully conducting an airstrike to defend Kurdish forces near Irbil, where U.S. personnel and citizens are located.

At approximately 4 p.m. EDT, multiple U.S. fighter aircraft struck and destroyed several vehicles that were part of an ISIL convoy moving to attack Peshmerga [sic] forces defending Irbil.

All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Irbil (11 Aug 14)," [Central Command](#), 11 Aug.

At 10:21 EDT on 11 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

The Pentagon press release offered more detail about these airstrikes:

Meanwhile, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq yesterday [10 Aug], successfully conducting multiple airstrikes from a mix of fighters and remotely piloted vehicles to defend Kurdish forces near Erbil, where U.S. personnel and citizens are located:

- U.S. aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL armed truck that was firing on Kurdish forces in the approaches to Erbil. After the strike, U.S. forces monitored the movement of a second ISIL armed truck moving away from the vicinity of the strike, subsequently striking and destroying it.
- U.S. aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, destroying it and damaging a nearby ISIL armed truck and later destroyed an ISIL armed truck.
- In another strike, U.S. aircraft damaged another armed ISIL vehicle.

All aircraft left the strike areas safely, officials said.

"U.S. Aircraft Drop Food, Water to Iraqi Civilians," [Pentagon](#), 11 Aug 2014.

The [Associated Press](#) tersely reports that the U.S. Government is now supplying munitions directly to Kurdistan, without going through the Iraqi government in Baghdad. This is a highly irregular procedure, but it will surely aid the peshmerga in their fight against ISIL.

Agence France-Presse reported that aircraft from the U.K. made one drop of humanitarian supplies on Saturday (9 Aug) night but aborted a drop this morning (11 Aug) because of concerns about hitting refugees:

Two transport planes left Britain Saturday (9 Aug) and the first drop was made that night, including 1,200 water containers providing 6,000 liters of water, and 240 solar lanterns that double as phone chargers.

A spokesman for the Royal Air Force said: "The safety of the Yazidi community is paramount. With a number of people at the drop sites this morning, the crew made the responsible decision not to carry out the air drop to ensure that the lives of those in the area would not be put at risk. We plan to deliver the next drop as soon as possible."

"Britain aborts second Iraq aid drop over safety fears," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 12:46 GMT, 11 Aug.

At a press briefing at the Pentagon, Lt. Gen. William Mayville summarized:

Additionally, the president also authorized targeted airstrikes to facilitate a resolution to the humanitarian crisis on Sinjar Mountain and to protect citizens, facilities, and forces in the northern city of Erbil. To date, U.S. Air Force and Navy aircraft, to include F-15Es, F-16s, F/A-18s, and MQ-1s have executed 15 targeted airstrikes. These airstrikes have helped check the advance of ISIL forces around Sinjar and in the area west of Erbil.

Now, over 60 intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft are supporting our coalition efforts in Iraq. U.S. airstrikes are also providing the Kurdish security forces with time to fortify their defensive positions with the supplies they're receiving from the central government of Baghdad.

As a result, the Kurdish security forces are holding territory in the vicinity of Erbil, and it has been reported in the media they retook key communities near Erbil itself.

We assess that U.S. airstrikes in northern Iraq have slowed ISIL's operational tempo and temporarily disrupted their advances toward the province of Erbil. However, these strikes are unlikely to affect ISIL's overall capabilities or its operations in other areas of Iraq and Syria.

ISIL remains focused on securing and gaining additional territory throughout Iraq and will sustain its attacks against Iraqi and Kurdish security forces and their positions, as well as target Yazidis, Christians, and other minorities.

Our current operations are limited in scope to protect U.S. citizens and facilities, to protect U.S. aircraft supporting humanitarian assistance, and to assist in the breakup of ISIL forces that have laid siege to the Sinjar Mountain.

....

... in the immediate areas where we have focused our strikes, we've had a very temporary effect. And ... we may have blunted some tactical decisions to move in those directions and move further east to Erbil. What I expect the ISIL to do is to look for other things to do, to pick up and move elsewhere. So I in no way want to suggest that we have effectively contained or that we are somehow breaking the momentum of the threat posed by ISIL.

....

Yeah, I'm very concerned about the threat posed by ISIL in Iraq and in the region. They're very well-organized. They are very well-equipped. They coordinate their operations. And they have thus far shown the ability to attack on multiple axes. This is not insignificant.

Lt. Gen. William Mayville, [Pentagon](#), 11 Aug 2014.

My comment is that the U.S. military has saved the lives of a few tens of thousands of Yazidis, and prevented ISIL from moving toward Erbil. That is a good result from limited airstrikes over four days. This is just a beginning. Journalists apparently expect the military to have a magic wand that makes ISIL disappear.

On Monday night, 11 Aug, U.S. Central Command issued a press release:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq today [11 Aug], successfully conducting airstrikes on four ISIL checkpoints and multiple ISIL vehicles near Sinjar Mountain in defense of internally displaced Yazidi civilians in the area.

At approximately 1:10 p.m. EDT, U.S. fighter aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint southwest of Sinjar Mountain. At the same location, U.S. fighter aircraft struck an armed personnel carrier and an armed truck, destroying both.

At approximately 2:05 p.m. EDT, U.S. fighter aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint south of the city of Sinjar. At the same location, U.S. aircraft struck an armed truck and a High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle, destroying both.

At approximately 3:30 p.m. EDT, U.S. fighter aircraft struck another ISIL checkpoint southeast of the city of Sinjar and damaged it.

At approximately 4:30 p.m. EDT, U.S. fighter aircraft struck another ISIL checkpoint east of the Sinjar Mountain and destroyed it and an adjacent ISIL truck.

All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Sinjar," [Central Command](#), 11 Aug 2014.

At 18:10 EDT on 11 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

The U.S. Central Command reported on the fifth humanitarian airdrop:

Tonight [11 Aug], the U.S. military conducted a fifth airdrop of food and water for thousands of Iraqi citizens threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant on Mount Sinjar, Iraq.

This airdrop was conducted from multiple airbases within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and included one C-17 and three C-130 cargo aircraft that together dropped a total of 76 bundles of supplies.

U.S. fighter aircraft in the area supported the mission.

The C-17 dropped 40 container delivery system bundles of fresh drinking water totaling 3,804 gallons. In addition, the three C-130s dropped 36 bundles totaling 11,088 meals ready to eat and 1,331 gallons of fresh drinking water.

To date, in coordination with the government of Iraq, U.S. military aircraft have delivered more than 85,000 meals and more than 20,000 gallons of fresh drinking water, providing much-needed aid to the displaced Yazidis, who urgently require emergency assistance.

"Update on Humanitarian Assistance Operations Near Sinjar, Iraq," [Central Command](#), 11 Aug 2014.

At 21:48 EDT on 11 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

12 Aug 2014: airstrikes and more

On Tuesday, 12 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq today, successfully conducting an airstrike on an ISIL mortar position north of Sinjar.

At approximately 7:55 a.m. EDT, U.S. remotely piloted aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL mortar position that was firing on Kurdish forces defending internally displaced Yazidi civilians who were attempting to evacuate.

All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

"Aug. 12: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrike Against ISIL North of Sinjar," [Central Command](#), 12 Aug 2014.

At 10:41 EDT on 12 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

The U.S. Central Command reported on the sixth humanitarian airdrop:

Tonight, the U.S. military conducted a sixth airdrop of food and water for thousands of Iraqi citizens threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on Mount Sinjar, Iraq.

This airdrop was conducted from multiple airbases within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and included two C-17 and two C-130 cargo aircraft that together dropped a total of 108 bundles of supplies. U.S. fighter aircraft in the area supported

the mission.

The two C-17s dropped 80 container delivery system bundles of fresh drinking water totaling 7,608 gallons. In addition, the two C-130s dropped 28 bundles totaling 14,112 meals ready to eat.

To date, in coordination with the government of Iraq, U.S. military aircraft have delivered up to 100,000 meals and more than 27,000 gallons of fresh drinking water, providing much-needed aid to the displaced Yazidis, who urgently require emergency assistance.

"Aug. 12: Update on Humanitarian Assistance Operations Near Sinjar, Iraq," [Central Command](#), 12 Aug 2014.

13 Aug 2014: airstrikes and more

On Wednesday, 13 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to engage ISIL terrorists in Iraq today, successfully conducting an airstrike on an ISIL armed truck west of the village of Sinjar.

At approximately 12:20 p.m. EDT, U.S. remotely piloted aircraft struck and destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle west of the village of Sinjar, located in the vicinity of an ISIL checkpoint.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrike against ISIL west of Sinjar," [Central Command](#), 13 Aug 2014.

At 16:34 EDT, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

The U.S. Central Command reported on the seventh humanitarian airdrop: Tonight, the U.S. military conducted a seventh airdrop of food and water for the remaining Iraqi citizens threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on Mount Sinjar, Iraq.

This airdrop was conducted from multiple airbases within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility and included two C-17 and two C-130 cargo aircraft that together dropped a total of 108 bundles of supplies. U.S. fighter aircraft in the area supported the mission.

The two C-17s dropped 80 container delivery system bundles of fresh drinking water totaling 7,608 gallons. In addition, the two C-130s dropped 28 bundles totaling 14,112 meals ready to eat.

To date, in coordination with the government of Iraq, U.S. military aircraft have delivered more than 114,000 meals and more than 35,000 gallons of fresh drinking water, providing much-needed aid to the displaced Yazidis.

"Aug. 13: Update on Humanitarian Assistance Operations Near Sinjar, Iraq," [Central Command](#), 13 Aug 2014.

At 22:23 EDT, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

14 Aug 2014: airstrikes and more

On 13 Aug, U.S. Military personnel arrived in the mountains near Sinjar and discovered that there were then only "several thousand" refugees there. Apparently, tens of thousands of refugees had fled to Syria, Turkey, or Kurdistan. [Associated Press](#), 20:31 EDT, 13 Aug; [NY Times](#), 13 Aug; [Al-Jazeera](#), 06:41 GMT, 14 Aug; [Pentagon](#), 14 Aug. [Al-Arabiya](#) cites two anonymous U.S. officials: "roughly 4,500 people remain atop northern Iraq's Sinjar Mountain, and nearly half are herders who lived there before the siege and have no interest in being evacuated." The facts in this Al-Arabiya story seem to come from an Associated Press [story](#) that is no longer available at the AP website, but see [AP](#): Admiral "Kirby said they estimated that 4,000-5,000 Iraqis remained atop Sinjar, of which as many as 2,000 are locals who don't want to leave." And that comes from a [Pentagon](#) Press Briefing on 14 Aug, where Admiral Kirby actually said: "On the estimate of refugees on Mount Sinjar, it's difficult to provide an exact figure, but we think it's somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000. I'd also add that a number of them, perhaps up to 2,000 or so — and, again, this is an estimate — reside there and may not want to leave. It's home to many of them."

At 12:49 EDT on 14 Aug, Obama gave a short speech:

Yesterday [13 Aug], a small team of Americans — military and civilian — completed their review of the conditions on the mountain. They found that food and water have been reaching those in need, and that thousands of people have been evacuating safely each and every night. The civilians who remain continue to leave, aided by Kurdish forces and Yezidis who are helping to facilitate the safe passage of their families. So the bottom line is, is that the situation on the mountain has greatly improved and Americans should be very proud of our efforts.

Because of the skill and professionalism of our military — and the generosity of our people — we broke the ISIL siege of Mount Sinjar; we helped vulnerable people reach safety; and we helped save many innocent lives. Because of these efforts, we do not expect there to be an additional operation to evacuate people off the mountain, and it's unlikely that we're going to need to continue humanitarian air drops on the mountain. The majority of the military personnel who conducted the assessment will be leaving Iraq in the coming days. And I just want to say that as Commander-in-Chief, I could not be prouder of the men and women of our military who carried out this humanitarian operation almost flawlessly. I'm very grateful to them and I know that those who were trapped on that mountain are extraordinarily grateful as well.

....

We will continue air strikes to protect our people and facilities in Iraq. We have increased the delivery of military assistance to Iraqi and Kurdish forces fighting ISIL on the front lines.

Obama, [White House](#), 14 Aug 2014.

My comments: The humanitarian airdrops to Yazidi on the mountains near Sinjar have ended. The limited airstrikes to protect U.S. citizens in Erbil (and presumably Baghdad if the

need arises) continue. But, basically, the U.S. Government has returned to Obama's 19 June policy of waiting for Iraq to form an inclusive government, *before* the USA will support the annihilation of ISIL. (See Kerry's [press release](#) on the night of 14 Aug: "... the United States stands ready to partner with a new and inclusive government to counter this threat [from ISIL]....")

On Thursday, 14 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq today [14 Aug], with a mix of fighter and remotely piloted aircraft successfully conducting airstrikes on two ISIL-armed vehicles and an ISIL-operated mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicle northeast of Irbil.

At approximately 11:05 a.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft struck and destroyed the first of two armed vehicles, after following them from a position where they had been firing on nearby Kurdish forces. At 11:07 a.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft struck and destroyed the second armed vehicle.

At approximately 11:40 a.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft struck an MRAP, located near the site of the previous strikes against the two armed vehicles. After initial assessment, U.S. aircraft returned at approximately 12:55 p.m. EDT and destroyed the MRAP.

All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrike Against ISIL Northeast of Irbil," [Central Command](#), 14 Aug 2014.

15 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On 15 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq today, with remotely piloted aircraft successfully conducting airstrikes on two armed vehicles south of the village of Sinjar.

After receiving reports from Kurdish forces that ISIL terrorists were attacking civilians in the village of Kawju, located south of the village of Sinjar, U.S. aircraft identified and followed an ISIL armed vehicle to a roadside area south of Sinjar. At approximately 10:10 a.m. EDT, U.S. aircraft struck and destroyed two vehicles in the area.

All aircraft exited the area safely.

"Aug. 15: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Sinjar," [Central Command](#), 15 Aug 2014.

16 Aug 2014: airstrikes near Mosul Dam

Sometime during 3-7 Aug, ISIL seized control of the Mosul Dam, the largest dam in Iraq. The date is uncertain, because of conflicting reports and propaganda from both the Iraqi government and ISIL. On 16 Aug, Kurdish peshmerga, aided by U.S. airstrikes, began an assault on the Dam to expel ISIL. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Al-Jazeera](#).

On Saturday, 16 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq Saturday (Iraq time), with a mix of fighter and remotely piloted aircraft successfully conducting airstrikes near Irbil and the Mosul Dam.

U.S. Central Command conducted these strikes under authority to support humanitarian efforts in Iraq, as well as to protect U.S. personnel and facilities.

The nine airstrikes conducted thus far destroyed or damaged four armored personnel carriers, seven armed vehicles, two Humvees and an armored vehicle.

All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Irbil, the Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 16 Aug 2014.

At 18:16 EDT, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

My comments: I fully support this use of U.S. airpower to attack and dislodge ISIL anywhere in Iraq. However, it seems to me that it is a stretch to take Obama's limited authorization (i.e., either humanitarian relief or protection of U.S. citizens) and apply that to dislodging ISIL from an Iraqi asset, such as the Mosul Dam.

17 Aug 2014: airstrikes at Mosul Dam

On Sunday, 17 Aug, the Associated Press reported:

Aided by U.S. and Iraqi airstrikes, Kurdish forces Sunday 17 Aug] wrested back part of Iraq's largest dam from Islamic militants who had captured it less than two weeks ago, security officials said.

....

Recapturing the entire Mosul Dam and the territory surrounding its reservoir would be a significant victory against the Islamic State group, which has seized swaths of northern and western Iraq and northeastern Syria. The dam on the Tigris supplies electricity and water to a large part of the country.

The Kurdish forces, known as peshmerga, launched the operation early Sunday to retake the Mosul Dam, said Gen. Tawfik Desty, a Kurdish commander, after a day of U.S. and Iraqi airstrikes pushed back Islamic State fighters.

A spokesman for the peshmerga said the clashes were moving eastward.

"The west is in control of peshmerga. But there are some battles taking place in the (east) right now," said Halgurd Hekmat, peshmerga spokesman.

....

The advance of Kurdish forces was hindered by roadside bombs and buildings rigged with explosives, planted by retreating Islamic State fighters, he said.

"They have reached inside the dam. There is no fighting, just the (roadside) bombs, and the abandoned buildings are all rigged with explosives," he said. "We will continue to advance and advance until we are given further instruction."

Diaa Hadid, "Kurdish Forces Retake Parts Of Iraq's Largest Dam," [Associated Press](#), 19:29 GMT, 17 Aug 2014.

On Sunday, 17 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq Sunday, using a mix of fighter, bomber, attack and remotely piloted aircraft to successfully conduct airstrikes near the Mosul Dam.

U.S. Central Command conducted these strikes under authority to support humanitarian efforts in Iraq, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support Iraqi security forces and Kurdish defense forces, who are working together to combat ISIL.

The 14 strikes conducted on Sunday in Iraq damaged or destroyed ten ISIL armed vehicles, seven ISIL Humvees, two ISIL armored personnel carriers, and one ISIL checkpoint.

"Aug. 17: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near the Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 17 Aug 2014.

At 12:42 EDT, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story.

Note that "protect critical infrastructure" has been added to the two previous indications — humanitarian efforts and protection of U.S. citizens — for use of U.S. airstrikes.

A later U.S. Central Command press release reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq Sunday [17 Aug], using fighter and attack aircraft to successfully conduct airstrikes near Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed three ISIL armed vehicles, an ISIL vehicle-mounted anti-aircraft artillery gun, an ISIL checkpoint and an IED emplacement.

All strike aircraft exited the strike area safely.

"Aug. 17: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near the Mosul Dam," [same title as previous press release] [Central Command](#), 17 Aug 2014.

Obama sent a letter to the U.S. Congress announcing his decision to support the peshmerga in retaking the Mosul Dam from ISIL:

On August 14, 2014, I authorized the U.S. Armed Forces to conduct targeted air strikes to support operations by Iraqi forces to recapture the Mosul Dam. These military operations will be limited in their scope and duration as necessary to support the Iraqi forces in their efforts to retake and establish control of this critical infrastructure site, as part of their ongoing campaign against the terrorist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The failure of the Mosul Dam could threaten the lives of large numbers of civilians, endanger U.S. personnel and facilities, including the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, and prevent the Iraqi government from providing critical services to the Iraqi populace. Pursuant to this authorization, on the evening of August 15, 2014, U.S. military forces commenced targeted airstrike operations in Iraq.

I have directed these actions, which are in the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States, pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive. These actions are being undertaken in coordination with the Iraqi government.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148). I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action.

Obama, "Letter from the President — War Powers Resolution Regarding Iraq," [White House](#), 17 Aug 2014.

The White House attempted to explain Obama's decision to authorize airstrikes near Mosul Dam:

Today, consistent with the War Powers Resolution (WPR), the President transmitted to the Congress a report notifying the Congress that he had authorized U.S. Armed Forces to conduct targeted airstrikes in Iraq to support Iraqi Security Force operations to retake and establish control over the Mosul Dam, a critical infrastructure site, as part of their ongoing campaign against ISIL.

This mission is consistent with President Obama's directive that the U.S. military protect U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq, since the failure of the Mosul Dam could threaten the lives of large numbers of civilians, threaten U.S. personnel and facilities — including the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad — and prevent the Iraqi government from providing critical services to the Iraqi populace.

These operations are limited in their nature, duration, and scope and are being undertaken in coordination with and at the request of the Government of Iraq.

The Administration will continue to consult with the Congress on the way forward in Iraq and our efforts against ISIL, and we will continue to provide appropriate reports to the Congress consistent with the War Powers Resolution.

Caitlin Hayden, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Caitlin Hayden on the President's Authorization of Operations in Iraq," [White House](#), 17 Aug.

My comments: I am *not* convinced. While I personally support airstrikes on ISIL anywhere in Iraq, it seems to me that such airstrikes are outside of Obama's very limited criteria. I think

it is fair to say that these airstrikes are what Obama's critics call "mission creep" — a slow expansion of the scope of the mission.

The Washington Post reported:

Islamic State fighters were on the run in northern Iraq on Sunday [17 Aug] after Iraqi and Kurdish forces, backed by U.S. airstrikes, closed in on a strategically vital dam in the most significant attempt yet to reverse the militants' blitz through Iraq.

....

It was the biggest offensive since the latest U.S. intervention in Iraq was announced 10 days ago, and it signaled an expansion of what was originally defined as a narrowly focused mission to protect American personnel in Iraq and help fleeing Yazidi villagers trapped on a mountain.

In a letter released Sunday notifying Congress of the action, President Obama said the militants' control of the dam posed a threat to the U.S. Embassy 200 miles away in Baghdad, which could be inundated if the dam were breached.

....

On Sunday, two U.S. officials said that the Obama administration had agreed to requests from the Iraqi government to help its forces retake control of the dam because of its strategic importance.

If breached, the dam would unleash catastrophic flooding across a vast swath of territory as far south as Baghdad. But Kurdish and U.S. officials said fears that the militants would blow it up have been overstated. Among other things, it would be difficult to assemble enough explosives to do so.

Moreover, said Brig. Gen. Azad Hawezi, a senior Kurdish commander, "they would flood themselves first, because the first place that would disappear would be Mosul," the biggest city controlled by the Islamic State immediately south of the dam.

....

The [U.S. Central Command] statement did not identify the type of bombers involved, but the Air Force has B-1 bombers based in the Persian Gulf at al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. It is thought to be the first time that bomber aircraft have been involved in the Iraqi air campaign. Fighter jets involved in the attacks have largely come from the USS George H.W. Bush, an aircraft carrier deployed to the gulf.

Liz Sly, Craig Whitlock, & Loveday Morris, "Iraqi forces, aided by U.S. jets, claim swift gains in push to retake dam from militants," [Washington Post](#), 20:29 EDT, 17 Aug 2014.

My comments: Obama's argument about the threat of ISIL destroying the Mosul dam, and thereby flooding Baghdad and harming U.S. citizens in Baghdad is a stretch. Destroying the dam would do more damage to Mosul, which is the ISIL headquarters since 10 June, than to

Baghdad. On the other hand, if ISIL is pushed out of Mosul, then ISIL might want to destroy the dam and flood cities downstream in a barbaric act. *The Post* is correct to recognize the "expansion" of Obama's military intervention in Iraq.

17 Aug 2014: some Iraqis already ungrateful for U.S. help

An English-language website of an Iraqi news organization reported the objection of the ungrateful and petulant Iraqi government:

The office of the Commanding General of the Iraqi Armed Forces announced that "The Iraqi Government did not give permission for any military plane to violate the Iraqi space," in a sign to the US airstrikes targeting the shelters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant near Erbil and Mosul.

A statement by the office received by [All Iraq News] cited "During the last few days, we noticed violation of some military air-jets for Iraqi space and handing over of military equipment without permission of the Iraqi Government," which is a sign for providing the Kurdish peshmerga with western weapons.

The statement added "We welcome the supportive stances of the international community for Iraq in its war against terrorism but we assert the necessity of respecting the sovereignty of Iraq."

"Iraqi government objects US airstrikes, arming peshmerga without permission,"

[All Iraq News](#), 23:29 Baghdad time, 17 Aug. Also published at [Iraqi News](#).

In the early morning Iraqi time on 18 Aug, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan published a similar story.

My comments: The Iraqi government has its knickers in a twist because of alleged disrespect of the sovereignty of Iraq. Note that the peshmerga and U.S. Military are fighting to expel ISIL from Iraqi territory captured by ISIL. Remember that ISIL captured this territory because the cowardly and incompetent Iraqi army fled, instead of fighting against ISIL. Not only did the Iraqi army *fail* to defend "the sovereignty of Iraq", but also much of northern Iraq is currently under ISIL control and no longer part of a sovereign Iraq. So any complaints about alleged violations of a sovereign Iraq should be delivered to the Iraqi army, *not* to the courageous peshmerga, and *not* to the U.S. military who came to help the incompetent and cowardly Iraqi military.

Notice that Obama said that these airstrikes were undertaken "in coordination with the Iraqi government", and *The Washington Post* reported that the "Obama administration had agreed to requests from the Iraqi government", so it is strange that the Iraqi government now makes accusations of violation of their sovereignty.

I suggest that the person(s) in the Iraqi government who are responsible for this press release about "sovereignty" should be severely punished. The Iraqi government needs to learn to say "thank you", and be *sincerely grateful* for assistance from the USA.

18 Aug 2014: Mosul Dam captured

At 08:35 GMT on Monday, 18 Aug, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iraqi state television "says Iraqi forces, Kurdish troops have retaken Mosul dam from Islamic militants."

At 15:55 Baghdad time (12:55 GMT) on Monday, 18 Aug, [All Iraq News](#) reported: "The spokesperson of the General Commander of the Armed Forces, Qasim Atta, announced 'The Counter-Terrorism Department and the Peshmerga forces completely liberated Mosul Dam from the ISIL terrorists.' "

[The New York Times](#) reported that peshmerga and Iraqi military had liberated Mosul Dam from ISIL.

However, journalists disputed that ISIL had fled from the Mosul Dam. [Reuters](#) reported: "A dam employee contested the government's version of events. 'Islamic State fighters are still in full control over the dam's facilities and most of them are taking shelter near the sensitive places of the dam to avoid air strikes,' the employee told Reuters. The employee gave no further details."

On Monday, 18 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:
U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq Monday [18 Aug], using a mix of fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft to successfully conduct 15 airstrikes near the Mosul Dam.

The strikes damaged or destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions; an ISIL checkpoint; six ISIL armed vehicles; an ISIL light armored vehicle; an ISIL vehicle-mounted anti-aircraft artillery gun, and an IED emplacement belt.

All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

Since Aug. 8, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 68 airstrikes in Iraq. Of those 68 strikes, 35 have been in support of Iraqi forces near the Mosul Dam. These strikes were conducted under authority to support Iraqi security forces and Kurdish defense forces as they work together to combat ISIL, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

"Aug. 18: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near the Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 18 Aug 2014.

Note that "protect critical infrastructure" was added yesterday to the two previous indications for use of U.S. airstrikes.

On Tuesday, 19 Aug, U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in near Mosul Dam:
U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq in the last 24 hours, with fighter aircraft conducting two airstrikes near the Mosul Dam.

One of the airstrikes successfully destroyed an ISIL checkpoint. The other airstrike was not successful.

All strike aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

These airstrikes were conducted under authority to support Iraqi security forces and Kurdish defense forces as they work together to combat ISIL, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

The Department of Defense confirmed yesterday [18 Aug] that Iraqi forces have cleared the Mosul Dam, and that Iraqi security forces and Kurdish defense forces are working together to further expand control of the area.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 19 Aug 2014.

[Reuters](#) reports on shoddy construction of the Mosul Dam: it was constructed on a foundation of gypsum, so it requires continuous (i.e., daily) grouting to prevent cracks in the concrete. It is a monument to someone's stupidity in the early 1980s, when it was constructed. ISIL was smart to abandon what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers called "the most dangerous dam in the world", before ISIL was blamed for the failure of this dam. The dam does *not* need explosives to fail, instead the dam will eventually self-destruct. Daily repairs can delay the self-destruction. See also [Wall Street Journal](#), 11 Aug.

18-19 Aug 2014: U.S. justification and mission creep

On the afternoon of 18 Aug, Marie Harf and Obama himself vigorously asserted that the U.S. airstrikes near the Mosul Dam were consistent with protecting U.S. citizens, and were *not* an expansion of the U.S. military engagement in Iraq.

At 13:16 EDT on 18 Aug, the deputy spokesperson for the U.S. State Department said during her Daily Press Briefing:

QUESTION: Is the U.S. engaging in mission creep?

MS. HARF: No, and I will be very explicit about why we are not. First, just an update for folks: Over the weekend and today, the U.S. armed forces conducted targeted airstrikes to support operations by Iraqi forces; to retake and establish control over the Mosul Dam, which is a critical infrastructure site. The failure of the Mosul Dam — and this is getting at your question, Roz — could threaten the lives of large numbers of civilians; endanger U.S. personnel and facilities, including the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad; and prevent the Iraqi Government from providing critical services to the Iraqi populace.

When an Administration official was asked the first night [7 Aug] the President announced military action, "Could you consider taking operations around the Mosul Dam?" this person said very clearly yes. We've been very upfront that anything that threatens our people or our facilities is fair game under the goals the President outlined and we judged that we don't know if ISIS can either run the dam or if they would do something nefarious to breach it. That would very much threaten our people in Baghdad, so we've been clear about that from the beginning and took actions in accordance with that goal over the weekend.

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

Obama interrupted his two-week vacation to spend 18-19 Aug, in the White House. At 16:27 EDT on 18 Aug, Obama spoke to journalists about the situation in Iraq. I quote Obama's entire initial remarks on Iraq and Obama's entire response to one question on Iraq:

With respect to Iraq, we continue to see important progress across different parts of our strategy to support the Iraqi government and combat the threat from the terrorist group, ISIL. First, our military operations are effectively protecting our personnel and facilities in Iraq. Over the last 11 days, American airstrikes have stopped the ISIL advance around the city of Erbil and pushed back the terrorists. Meanwhile, we have urgently provided additional arms and assistance to Iraqi forces, including Kurdish and Iraqi security forces who are fighting on the front lines.

Today, with our support, Iraqi and Kurdish forces took a major step forward by recapturing the largest dam in Iraq near the city of Mosul. The Mosul Dam fell under terrorist control earlier this month and is directly tied to our objective of protecting Americans in Iraq. If that dam was breached, it could have proven catastrophic, with floods that would have threatened the lives of thousands of civilians and endangered our embassy compound in Baghdad. Iraqi and Kurdish forces took the lead on the ground and performed with courage and determination. So this operation demonstrates that Iraqi and Kurdish forces are capable of working together in taking the fight to ISIL. If they continue to do so, they will have the strong support of the United States of America.

Second, we're building an international coalition to address the humanitarian crisis in northern Iraq. Even as we've worked to help many thousands of Yazidis escape the siege of Mount Sinjar, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been displaced by ISIL's violence and many more are still at risk. Going forward, the United States will work with the Iraqi government, as well as partners like the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Italy and Australia, to get food and water to people in need and to bring long-term relief to people who have been driven from their homes.

Third, we will continue to pursue a long-term strategy to turn the tide against ISIL by supporting the new Iraqi government and working with key partners in the region and beyond. Over the last week, we saw historic progress as Iraqis named a new Prime Minister-Designate Haider al-Abadi, and Iraq's outgoing Prime Minister Maliki agreed to step down. This peaceful transition of power will mark a major milestone in Iraq's political development, but as I think we're all aware, the work is not yet done.

Over the next few weeks, Dr. Abadi needs to complete the work of forming a new, broad-based, inclusive Iraqi government, one that develops a national program to address the interests of all Iraqis. Without that progress, extremists like ISIL can continue to prey upon Iraq's divisions. With that new government in place, Iraqis will be able to unite the country against the threat from ISIL, and they will be able to look forward to increased support not just from the United States but from other countries in the region and around the world.

Let's remember ISIL poses a threat to all Iraqis and to the entire region. They claim to represent Sunni grievances, but they slaughter Sunni men, women and children. They claim to oppose foreign forces, but they actively recruit foreign fighters to advance their hateful ideology.

So the Iraqi people need to reject them and unite to begin to push them out of the lands that they've occupied, as we're seeing at Mosul Dam. And this is going to take time. There are going to be many challenges ahead. But meanwhile, there should be no doubt that the United States military will continue to carry out the limited missions that I've authorized — protecting our personnel and facilities in Iraq in both Erbil and Baghdad, and providing humanitarian support, as we did on Mount Sinjar.

My administration has consulted closely with Congress about our strategy in Iraq and we are going to continue to do so in the weeks to come, because when it comes to the security of our people and our efforts against a terror group like ISIL, we need to be united in our resolve.

....

QUESTION [by Steve Holland, Reuters]: Thank you. How do you avoid mission creep in Iraq? ...

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I have been firm from the start that we are not reintroducing thousands of U.S. troops back on the ground to engage in combat. We're not the Iraqi military. We're not even the Iraqi air force. I am the Commander-in-Chief of the United States armed forces, and Iraq is going to have to ultimately provide for its own security.

On the other hand, we've got a national security interest in making sure our people are protected and in making sure that a savage group that seems willing to slaughter people for no rhyme or reason other than they have not kowtowed to them — that a group like that is contained, because ultimately they can pose a threat to us.

So my goal is, number one, to make sure we've got a viable partner. And that's why we have so consistently emphasized the need for a government formation process that is inclusive, that is credible, that is legitimate, and that can appeal to Sunnis as well as Shias and Kurds. We've made significant progress on that front, but we're not there yet. And I told my national security team today and I will say publicly that we want to continue to communicate to politicians of all stripes in Iraq, don't think that because we have engaged in airstrikes to protect our people that now is the time to let the foot off the gas and return to the same kind of dysfunction that has so weakened the country generally.

Dr. Abadi has said the right things. I was impressed in my conversation with him about his vision for an inclusive government. But they've got to get this done, because the wolf is at the door and in order for them to be credible with the Iraqi people they're going to have to put behind some of the old practices and actually create a credible,

united government.

When we see a credible Iraqi government, we are then in a position to engage when planning not just with the Iraqi government but also with regional actors and folks beyond the Middle East so that we can craft the kind of joint strategy — joint counterterrorism strategy that I discussed at West Point and I discussed several years ago to the National Defense College University. Our goal is to have effective partners on the ground. And if we have effective partners on the ground, mission creep is much less likely.

Typically what happens with mission creep is when we start deciding that we're the ones who have to do it all ourselves. And because of the excellence of our military, that can work for a time — we learned that in Iraq — but it's not sustainable. It's not lasting. And so I've been very firm about this precisely because our goal here has to be to be able to build up a structure not just in Iraq, but regionally, that can be maintained, and that is not involving us effectively trying to govern or impose our military will on a country that is hostile to us.

Barack Obama, Statement by the President, [White House](#), 18 Aug 2014.

At a Press Briefing at the Pentagon on 19 Aug, Admiral Kirby also spoke about alleged mission creep:

Q: Where do the missions — the airstrikes for Mosul, where do they fit into the two — the missions the president delineated, protecting humanitarian issues and then protecting U.S. personnel? Because this seems like a classic softening up the opposition, close-air support for invading — a counter-invading force. Where do — where do the missions fit? And wasn't that — this an example of mission creep, albeit maybe accidental?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Well, let's take the second part first. Mission creep — you know, this is a phrase that gets bandied about quite a bit, but let's just kind of talk about it for a second. Mission creep refers to the growth or expansion of the goals and objectives of a military operation, that the goals and objectives change, morph into something bigger than they were at the outset.

It doesn't talk about — mission creep doesn't refer to numbers of sorties, numbers of troops, numbers of anything. It doesn't refer to timelines. It doesn't even refer to intensity. It's about the mission itself. Nothing has changed about the mission, missions that we're conducting inside Iraq. As I said before, airstrikes are authorized under two mission areas — humanitarian assistance and the protection of U.S. personnel and facilities.

The airstrikes that we conducted in and around Mosul dam over the last 72 hours or so fit into both those categories, both helping prevent what could be a huge humanitarian problem should the dam be blown or the gates — they're just allowed to flood, and also to protect U.S. personnel and facilities. So there's been no — well, I'm not going to — I'm not going to say a negative. What I'll just tell you is, the missions are clear. The operations that we're conducting are inside the authorizations for those missions. And

we're going to continue to be vigilant going forward. And if there is a need for more airstrikes in conjunction with either of those two mission areas, those two authorizations, we'll conduct them.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 19 Aug 2014.

My comments: Obama's initial statement is almost silent on the expansion of his military engagement. His first paragraph asserts: "First, our military operations are effectively protecting our personnel and facilities in Iraq." But the airstrikes around the Mosul Dam were really to dislodge ISIL from an asset that they had captured. Obama's second paragraph asserts: "The Mosul Dam ... is directly tied to our objective of protecting Americans in Iraq. If that dam was breached, it could have proven catastrophic, with floods that would have threatened the lives of thousands of civilians and endangered our embassy compound in Baghdad." While it may be true that lives of U.S. citizens in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad were threatened by the collapse of the Mosul Dam, the death toll could be in the millions of Iraqis. Submerging Mosul and Baghdad is mostly an attack on Iraqi civilians, and only incidentally an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

I believe that Obama is correct to insist that the Iraqi military must annihilate ISIL in Iraq, without having the U.S. Army involved in the fighting. This is not a one-time project to defeat ISIL. The predecessor of ISIL was already defeated in Iraq when the U.S. withdrew all of its military in 2011, but the Iraqi incompetence and cowardice allowed ISIL to return in 2014. After their second defeat, ISIL and similar Islamic extremist groups will likely continue to threaten Iraq and other nations in the region.

Airstrikes on ISIL who were attacking Yazidis on the mountain was definitely humanitarian aid, in stopping actual attacks on unarmed civilians. In contrast, the concern with ISIL using the Mosul Dam to flood Baghdad was a potential threat that was speculative. Going from repelling an actual attack to preventing a future attack was mission creep.

Note the inconsistency: Obama says the airstrikes near the Mosul Dam were to protect the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, while Harf and Kirby justified those airstrikes under both of the early criteria (i.e., humanitarian relief and protection of U.S. citizens). It was a weak justification when the U.S. Government justified the airstrikes near the Mosul Dam as protecting the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, *not* the saving of millions of Iraqi civilians in Mosul and Baghdad.

The U.S. Central Command was honest on 17 Aug when they added a new justification: "to protect critical infrastructure".

19 Aug 2014: assault on Tikrit begins and stalls

It appears that the Iraqi government has decided that their next project will be to eject ISIL from Tikrit. ISIL captured Tikrit on 11 June. In my previous essay, I tersely summarized a previous attempt to liberate Tikrit:

Iraq seems to have made an effort to expel ISIL from Tikrit, beginning on 28 June, but fighting continues on 15 July in Tikrit. On 15 July, the Iraqi army and Shiite militias

began a large assault on Tikrit. But on the evening of 15 July, the Iraqi army retreated from Tikrit.

Standler, [ninth essay](#) on Syria, under heading "Grim Reality that Iraqi Parliament is a Failure", (citations to three news articles omitted here).

Reuters reports on failure on 19 Aug to retake Tikrit:

Iraqi forces came under heavy machinegun and mortar fire south of Tikrit, while to the west landmines and snipers undermined efforts to get closer to a town they have tried to retake several times, said the officers.

Resident of central Tikrit said by telephone Islamic State fighters were firmly in control of their positions and were running patrols along main streets.

"Iraqi forces fail to recapture Tikrit from militants again," [Reuters](#), 12:09 GMT, 19 Aug.

The Associated Press reported:

The clashes in Tikrit, some 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of Baghdad, began on the militant-held city's southwestern outskirts when a military convoy was traveling along the main highway that links Baghdad with the northern provinces, they said. The Iraqi military shelled militant positions inside and outside the city.

....

The Iraqi military launched an operation in late June to try to wrest back control of Tikrit, but that quickly stalled after making little headway. Sporadic clashes have been reported around the city and surrounding areas since then, but efforts by Iraqi government forces and allied Sunni tribal militiamen have failed to push out the militants.

"Iraqi Military Clashes With Militants In Tikrit" [Associated Press](#) 16:21 GMT, 19 Aug.

The Washington Post reported:

Initial reports suggested, however, that the offensive [in Tikrit] had stalled in the face of stiff resistance from the militant fighters,

....

Tikrit is a Sunni-dominant town, regarded as a stronghold of the militants, and two previous attempts by the Iraqi army to recapture it failed dismally.

An Iraqi army spokesman, Lt. Gen. Qassim al-Moussawi, told reporters in Baghdad that he expected this latest push to be "slow and gradual."

"There are still a lot of challenges and difficulties ahead of us," he said at a briefing broadcast on state TV.

"The war needs time, but we are determined to annihilate the Islamic State [militants] and to liberate all the areas they occupy — even if we suffer heavy casualties, because we have no other choice," he said.

Liz Sly, "Iraqi effort to recapture Tikrit said to stall," [Washington Post](#). 19 Aug 2014.

At 18:57 GMT, [All Iraq News](#) reported that "The spokesperson of the General Commander of the Armed Forces, Qasim Atta, announced the escape of all the ISIL leaders from Tikrit".

[The Daily Star](#) in Lebanon also used the word "stalled" to describe the efforts to push ISIL out of Tikrit.

Reuters sarcastically reports that the U.S. Air Force is now spending U.S. taxpayers' money to destroy military equipment that U.S. gave to Iraq, but then the incompetent and cowardly Iraqi army let ISIL capture.

And Islamic State's captured an enormous amount of U.S. weaponry, originally intended for the rebuilt Iraqi Army. You know — the one that collapsed in terror in front of the Islamic State, back when they were just ISIL? The ones who dropped their uniforms, and rifles and ran away?

They left behind the bigger equipment, too, including M1 Abrams tanks (about \$6 million each), 52 M198 Howitzer cannons (\$527,337), and MRAPs (about \$1 million), [irrelevant remark deleted].

Now, U.S. warplanes are flying sorties, at a cost somewhere between \$22,000 to 30,000 per hour for the F-16s, to drop bombs that cost at least \$20,000 each, to destroy this captured equipment.

That means if an F-16 were to take off from Incirlik Air Force Base in Turkey and fly two hours to Erbil, Iraq, and successfully drop both of its bombs on one target each, it costs the United States somewhere between \$84,000 to \$104,000 for the sortie and destroys a minimum of \$1 million and a maximum of \$12 million in U.S.-made equipment.

Jason Fields, opinion, "In Iraq, U.S. is spending millions to blow up captured American war machines," [Reuters](#), 19 Aug 2014.

20 Aug 2014: airstrikes

There was little mention of the assault on Tikrit by news media on 20 Aug.

On Wednesday, 20 Aug, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using fighter, remotely piloted and attack aircraft to conduct 14 airstrikes in the vicinity of the Mosul Dam, according to a U.S. Central Command news release issued today [20 Aug].

The strikes destroyed or damaged six ISIL Humvees, three IED emplacements, one mortar tube, and two armed trucks, the release said. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

These strikes were conducted under in support of Iraqi security forces and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and humanitarian efforts, according to the release.

The Department of Defense confirmed Aug. 18 that Iraqi forces have cleared and now hold Mosul Dam, and that Iraqi security forces and Kurdish forces are working together to further expand their control of the area, the release said.

Since Aug. 8, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 84 airstrikes across Iraq, the release said, and of those 84 strikes, 51 have been in support of Iraqi forces near the Mosul Dam.

"U.S. Continues Airstrikes Against ISIL in Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 20 Aug 2014.

At 19:25 EDT, the [Associated Press](#) reported this story. At midnight EDT on 20 Aug, U.S. Central Command website had not reported these airstrikes. Later, a copy of the above press release was posted at the [CentCom](#) website.

21 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 21 Aug, The U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi Security Force operations, using fighter and attack aircraft to conduct six airstrikes in the vicinity of the Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed or damaged three ISIL Humvees, one ISIL vehicle, and multiple IED emplacements. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

These strikes were conducted under authority to support Iraqi security forces and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

Since Aug. 8, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 90 airstrikes across Iraq. Of those 90 strikes, 57 have been in support of Iraqi forces near the Mosul Dam.

"Aug. 21: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 21 Aug 2014.

22 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On Friday, 22 Aug, The U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi Security Force operations, using fighter and attack aircraft to conduct three airstrikes in the vicinity of the Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles and a machine gun emplacement that was firing on Iraqi forces. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

"Aug. 22: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near Mosul Dam,"

[Central Command](#), 22 Aug 2014.

23 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On Saturday, 23 Aug, The U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using fighter aircraft to conduct an airstrike in the vicinity of Mosul Dam.

The strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and all aircraft exited the strike area safely.

This strike was conducted under authority to support Iraqi security force and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

Since Aug. 8, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 94 airstrikes across Iraq. Of those, 61 have been in support of Iraqi forces near the Mosul Dam.

"Aug. 23: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrike Against ISIL Near Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 23 Aug 2014.

24 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On Sunday, 24 Aug, The U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using attack and remotely-piloted aircraft to conduct two airstrikes in the vicinity of Irbil and Mosul Dam.

One strike destroyed an ISIL humvee near the Mosul Dam and the other strike destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle near Irbil. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

These strikes were conducted under authority to support Iraqi security force and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

Since Aug. 8, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 96 airstrikes across Iraq. Of those, 62 have been in support of Iraqi forces near the Mosul Dam.

"Aug. 24: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Irbil and Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 24 Aug 2014.

25-26 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On 25 Aug, there was no announcement of any U.S. airstrikes in Iraq. This was the first day with no airstrikes since they began on 8 Aug.

On Tuesday, 26 Aug, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using attack aircraft to conduct two airstrikes in the vicinity of Irbil.

The two strikes destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles and damaged another near Irbil. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

This strike was conducted under authority to support Iraqi security force and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

"Aug. 26: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Irbil," [Central Command](#), 26 Aug 2014.

25-26 Aug 2014: surveillance over Syria begins

On the night of 25 Aug, Obama approved U.S. surveillance flights over Syria. However, Obama has *not* made a decision about any airstrikes on ISIL in Syria, although surveillance flights could be a preliminary step that would enable future airstrikes. [Associated Press](#), 24:30 EDT; [Reuters](#), 21:10 EDT, both on 25 Aug. At 14:40 EDT on 26 Aug, *neither* the White House *nor* the Pentagon posted any webpage about this very important new policy, which I see as a significant escalation in the U.S. war against ISIL.

The White House posted a transcript of the Press Gaggle aboard Air Force One, while the president traveled to Charlotte, North Carolina.

QUESTION: Josh, can you talk to us a little bit about surveillance over Syria, what the goals are? Does that suggest that there's some imminent military action by the U.S.? And has the U.S. consulted at all with the Assad regime over this surveillance?

MR. EARNEST: Let me start with a couple of things that I said yesterday. The first is, the President has not made any decisions at this point about any military operations in Syria. I'm not in a position to discuss the details — the operational details of our nation's intelligence activities. As I also mentioned yesterday, there are teams of professionals at the Pentagon who are responsible on a daily basis for reviewing and updating and putting together contingency plans for the President of the United States and the Commander-in-Chief.

This is work that the Pentagon does on a regular basis, and for details about those plans I'd refer you to the Pentagon. But it certainly isn't a surprise to anybody here that those plans are based on intelligence.

What we have also made clear that is the President, as a matter of policy, will not hesitate to use military force where necessary to protect Americans. We've been just as clear about our view that resolving the situation in Iraq, related to ISIL, is not something that can be done only using America's military might. Permanently restoring — or at least restoring on a sustainable basis security to the nation of Iraq and to that region between Iraq and Syria will require the United States to use so many other tools in our arsenal. It will require an effective, inclusive Iraqi government that can unite that

country to face the threat that's posed by ISIL. It will require the involvement of other governments in the region that have a blatantly obvious interest in this outcome. It will require the involvement of countries around the world, particularly our Western allies that also have an incentive to confront that threat that's posed by ISIL.

"Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Josh Earnest en route Charlotte, NC, 8/26/2014," [White House](#), 10:44 EDT, 26 Aug.

Because the U.S. Government websites were initially silent on this topic, I was forced to rely on civilian journalists with their anonymous sources. On Tuesday, 26 Aug, the Associated Press reported:

The U.S. has begun surveillance flights over Syria after President Barack Obama gave the OK, U.S. officials said, a move that could pave the way for airstrikes against Islamic State militant targets there.

....

Two U.S. officials said Monday [25 Aug] that Obama had approved the flights, while another U.S. official said early Tuesday [26 Aug] that they had begun. The officials were not authorized to discuss the matter by name, and spoke only on condition of anonymity.

....

Obama has long resisted taking military action in Syria, a step that would plunge the U.S. into a country ravaged by an intractable civil war. However, the president's calculus appears to have shifted since the Islamic State announced last week that it had murdered American journalist James Foley, who was held hostage in Syria. The group is also threatening to kill other U.S. citizens being held by the extremists in Syria.

Lolita C. Baldor & Julie Pace, "AP Sources: US Surveillance Planes Fly Over Syria," [Associated Press](#), 13:10 EDT, 26 Aug 2014.

At night on 26 Aug, the Associated Press reported:

The intelligence gathered by U.S. military surveillance flights over Syria could support a broad bombing campaign against the Islamic State militant group, but current and former U.S. officials differ on whether air power would significantly degrade what some have called a "terrorist army."

Further complicating the plans, any military action against Islamic State militants in Syria would also have the effect of putting the U.S. on the same side as Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose ouster the Obama administration has sought for years.

....

The U.S. is not cooperating or sharing intelligence with the Assad government, Pentagon and State Department spokesmen said. But the U.S. flights are occurring in eastern Syria, away from most of Syria's air defenses. And experts expressed doubt that Syria would attempt to shoot down American aircraft that are paving the way for a

possible bombing campaign against Assad's enemies.

....

One senior congressional official said intelligence suggests that such an approach [i.e., heavy bombing] has its limits, because the Islamic State militants would be likely to melt into civilian areas as soon as the U.S. began bombing. Such a move by militants would complicate further bombing efforts, said the official, who was not authorized to discuss intelligence matters by name and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Ken Dilanian & Julie Pace, "Possible Airstrikes In Syria Raise More Questions," [Associated Press](#), 17:56 EDT, 26 Aug.

My comment is that Assad is entitled to shoot down U.S. reconnaissance aircraft if he wishes, because the aircraft have no permission to enter Syrian airspace. Moreover, the reconnaissance aircraft are from a hostile government — the U.S. Government is supplying the Free Syrian Army with weapons, equipment, and supplies, *and* the U.S. Government is calling for the removal of Assad.

Note that U.S. airstrikes from drones against terrorists in Pakistan and Yemen for years have failed to eradicate the insurgency in those nations. And those two failures were with better intelligence on the ground than the U.S. has in Syria.

27 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 27 Aug, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct three airstrikes in the vicinity of Irbil and the Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed an ISIL Humvee, a supply truck, three armored vehicles, and severely damaged an ISIL building. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted under authority to support Iraqi security force and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

Since Aug. 8, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 101 airstrikes across Iraq.

"Aug 27: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Irbil and Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 27 Aug 2014.

Agence France-Presse reported:

U.S. spy agencies face a difficult task in tracking Islamic jihadists in Syria, as Washington lacks a robust network of informants and faces threats to its drone fleet, experts and former officials say.

If President Barack Obama opts to expand airstrikes against the ISIS militants from

Iraq to neighboring Syria, the effort could be delayed or hindered by intelligence gaps, former White House officials and analysts say.

Unlike in Pakistan's tribal areas, or in Iraq, the United States has been largely absent in Syria for years and has not built up a web of relationships that it could use to monitor the movements of ISIS senior figures.

Dan De Luce, "U.S. facing intelligence challenge in Syria," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 21:05 GMT, 27 Aug 2014.

28 Aug 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 28 Aug, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using fighter aircraft to conduct five airstrikes in the vicinity of the Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed an ISIL Humvee, a tank, four armed vehicles, an ISIL construction vehicle and severely damaged an ISIL checkpoint. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

"Aug. 28: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 28 Aug 2014.

29 Aug 2014: costs & airstrikes

U.S. Military operations in Iraq since mid-June have cost the U.S. taxpayers \$ 560,000,000. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#).

Ironically, the U.S. airstrikes are now destroying U.S.-supplied weapons that were abandoned by the cowardly Iraqi army in June 2014, and then stolen by ISIL. [Reuters](#) reports that during 8-26 Aug, the U.S. airstrikes have destroyed between three and four million dollars of U.S.-supplied equipment that is now used by ISIL.

The U.S. Government declared victory at the Mosul Dam on 18 Aug. But nearly every day since then (except 25-26 Aug), the U.S. Military has conducted more airstrikes near the Mosul Dam. At a press conference, Admiral Kirby said ISIL was continuing to attack the Dam. [Pentagon](#).

On Friday, 29 Aug, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using fighter and attack aircraft to conduct four airstrikes in the vicinity of the Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed four ISIL armed vehicles, severely damaged another armed vehicle, and destroyed three ISIL support vehicles. All aircraft exited the strike areas

safely.

The strikes were conducted under the authority to support Iraqi security force and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

Since Aug. 8, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 110 airstrikes across Iraq.

"Aug. 29: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 29 Aug 2014.

30 Aug 2014: airstrikes & airdrops

On Saturday, 30 Aug, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in support of Iraqi security force operations, using fighter and remotely-piloted aircraft to conduct five airstrikes in the vicinity of the Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, ISIL weapons, and significantly damaged an ISIL building. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted under the authority to support Iraqi security force and Kurdish defense force operations, as well as to protect critical infrastructure, U.S. personnel and facilities, and support humanitarian efforts.

U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 115 airstrikes across Iraq.

"Aug. 30: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 30 Aug 2014.

The Pentagon reported an airdrop of humanitarian supplies to residents of Amirli, who were besieged by ISIL:

American military planes along with Australian, French and British aircraft airdropped humanitarian aid to the town of Amirli in Iraq, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a statement issued today.

U.S. aircraft also conducted airstrikes against nearby ISIL terrorists in order to support the humanitarian mission, Kirby said in his statement.

Kirby's statement reads as follows:

“At the request of the Government of Iraq, the United States military today airdropped humanitarian aid to the town of Amirli, home to thousands of Shia Turkomen who have been cut off from receiving food, water, and medical supplies for two months by ISIL. The United States Air Force delivered this aid alongside aircraft from Australia, France and the United Kingdom who also dropped much needed supplies.

“In conjunction with this airdrop, U.S. aircraft conducted coordinated airstrikes against nearby ISIL terrorists in order to support this humanitarian assistance operation.

“These military operations were conducted under authorization from the Commander-in-Chief to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and to prevent an ISIL attack on the civilians of Amirli. The operations will be limited in their scope and duration as necessary to address this emerging humanitarian crisis and protect the civilians trapped in Amirli.

“The U.S. military will continue to assess the effectiveness of these operations and work with the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, as well as international partners including the Government of Iraq, the United Nations, and non-government organizations to provide humanitarian assistance in Iraq as needed.”

"U.S., Partner-nations Conduct Humanitarian Airdrop in Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 30 Aug 2014.

Later on Saturday, 30 Aug, the U.S. Central Command reported:

At the request of the Government of Iraq, the U.S. military conducted airstrikes in support of an operation to deliver humanitarian assistance to address the humanitarian crisis and protect the civilians trapped in Amirli, Iraq at approximately 8:30 p.m. EDT today.

Two months ago, hundreds of ISIL terrorists advanced on Amirli cutting off food, water, and medical supplies to thousands of Shia Turkomen living there. ISIL has since blocked many attempts by Iraqi Security Forces and the United Nations from delivering critical supplies to Amirli, threatening the remaining population.

At the request of the Iraqi government, U.S. forces airdropped 109 bundles of much-needed humanitarian aid to the people of Amirli, including the Shia Turkomen minority ethnic group. Two U.S. C-17s and two U.S. C-130s airdropped the supplies, delivering approximately 10,500 gallons of fresh drinking water and approximately 7,000 meals ready to eat. In addition, aircraft from Australia, France, and the United Kingdom also dropped humanitarian aid.

To support the delivery of this humanitarian assistance, the U.S. military also conducted three airstrikes in coordination with the isolated Iraqi security forces responsible for protecting Amirli.

Fighter aircraft struck and destroyed three ISIL Humvees, one ISIL armed vehicle, one ISIL checkpoint and one ISIL tank near Amirli. All aircraft safely exited the area.

The President authorized these airstrikes in support of an operation to deliver humanitarian assistance to civilians in the town of Amirli. These operations will be limited in their scope and duration as necessary to address this emerging humanitarian crisis and protect the civilians trapped in Amirli.

U.S Central Command has conducted a total of 118 airstrikes across Iraq.
"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL, Airdrops Humanitarian Aid Near Amirli,"
[Central Command](#), 30 Aug 2014.

31 Aug 2014: Amirli liberated

At 11:30 GMT, 14:30 in Iraq, the Iraqi government announced the liberation of Amirli from ISIL. [All Iraq News](#).

At 12:28 GMT on 31 Aug, the Associated Press reported:

Iraqi security forces and Shiite militiamen on Sunday [31 Aug] broke a six-week siege imposed by the Islamic State extremist group on the northern Shiite Turkmen town of Amirli, following U.S. airstrikes against the Sunni militants' positions, officials said.

Army spokesman Lt. Gen. Qassim al-Moussawi said the operation started at dawn Sunday [31 Aug] and the forces entered the town shortly after midday.

Speaking live on state TV, al-Moussawi said the forces suffered "some casualties," but did not give a specific number. He said fighting was "still ongoing to clear the surrounding villages."

Breaking the siege was a "big achievement and an important victory" he said, for all involved: the Iraqi army, elite troops, Kurdish fighters and Shiite militias.

....

About 15,000 Shiite Turkmen were stranded in the farming community, some 105 miles (170 kilometers) north of Baghdad. Instead of fleeing in the face of the Islamic State group's rampage across northern Iraq in June, the Shiite Turkmen stayed and fortified their town with trenches and armed positions.

Residents succeeded in fending off the initial attack in June, but Amirli has been surrounded by the militants since mid-July. Many residents said the Iraqi military's efforts to fly in food, water and other aid had not been enough, as they endured the oppressive August heat with virtually no electricity or running water.

Sinan Salaheddin, "Iraqi Forces Break Militant Siege Of Shiite Town," [Associated Press](#), 12:28 GMT on 31 Aug 2014.

On Sunday, 31 Aug, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using fighter and attack aircraft to conduct two airstrikes Sunday, one near the Mosul Dam and the other near Amirli.

The strike near Amirli damaged an ISIL tank and the strike near Mosul Dam destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

The strikes were conducted under authority to protect U.S. personnel and facilities, support humanitarian efforts, and support Iraqi forces that are acting in furtherance of these objectives.

U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 120 airstrikes across Iraq.
Running summary:

- Defense of Erbil: 23
- Support of Sinjar: 13
- Support of Mosul Dam: 80
- Support of Amirli: 4

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near Amirli and Mosul Dam,"
[Central Command](#), 31 Aug 2014. Copy at [Pentagon](#).

Conclusions

I still agree with what I said in my Conclusion to my [eighth essay](#) on Syria that was written during June 2014.

The capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL on 10 June 2014 — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — changed the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.

Western View of Insurgency in Syria *Before 10 June 2014*

Before 10 June 2014, the conventional wisdom in the London11 nations — including the USA — was that Assad was Evil, and the removal of Assad was the Nr. 1 goal in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition has a consistent and intransigent demand that Assad resign. The intransigence of the Syrian National 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.

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, Obama's foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality.

One can summarize a series of events that exposed the futility of the plans of the London11 group of nations and the United Nations negotiations in Geneva:

1. The reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, Assad is winning the civil war in heavily populated western Syria, and the insurgents are unable to force Assad to resign.

2. Assad did *not* resign, and the Geneva peace negotiations ended in failure on 15 Feb 2014. The Coalition's intransigent demand that Assad resign, and Assad's insistence on remaining in power, are *impossible* for compromise.
3. Not only are there no plans to resume Syrian peace negotiations in the foreseeable future, but also the United Nations negotiator (Brahimi) resigned in frustration on 13 May 2014.
4. Assad was re-elected for another seven-year term on 3 June 2014.
5. It is now obvious that neither side in the Geneva negotiations genuinely wanted to negotiate. The U.S. Government essentially forced the Coalition to attend the Geneva negotiations, and Russia forced Assad's government to attend.

Not all of these facts or events were known on 15 Feb 2014, when the Geneva negotiations ended. But all of these facts are known at the end of June 2014, and were documented in my previous essays. A more detailed analysis of the failure of the Geneva negotiations is found in my separate [essay](#). I suggest that the London11 group of nations — and the Syrian National Coalition — were so obsessed with deposing Assad that they did not recognize that their demand that Assad resign would cause the Geneva2 negotiations to fail. Not only was much diplomatic effort and expense wasted on Geneva2, but also the frustration caused the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resign on 13 May 2014.

Western View of Insurgency in Syria After 10 June 2014

After the capture of Mosul by ISIL on 10 June 2014, it was obvious that the big enemy in Iraq was ISIL. Because ISIL actively operated in *both* Syria and Iraq, the problems in the two nations were suddenly recognized to be intertwined. The U.S. Government's view was that terrorists in Syria had spilled into Iraq. The Truth is that ISIL was created in Iraq in 2004 under the name "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" and entered Syria in May 2013, when the terrorists took the name "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL).

Iran is one of the two major suppliers to Assad's government in Syria, and Iran is also active in influencing the Shiite government in Iraq. Suppose the U.S. Government continues its policy of demanding the removal of Assad, and continues its policy of supporting the government of Iraq. Then the USA would be in the awkward position of opposing Iran in Syria, and agreeing with Iran in Iraq. This awkwardness could be avoided if the U.S. Government would both (1) abandon its declaration that Assad must resign, and (2) focus on the defeat of terrorism (e.g., ISIL) in both Syria and Iraq. Once the USA makes these two changes, there can be an alliance between Syria and Iraq, with both Iran, Russia, and the USA contributing to this alliance against terrorism.

An important point to recognize is that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL) was essentially defeated when the USA pulled its combat troops out of Iraq in Dec 2011. The weak and ineffective government of Maliki in Iraq allowed ISIL to capture much of western and northern Iraq from January 2014 through June 2014. There is an obvious lesson here. If

the weak and ineffective Syrian National Coalition were to control Syria, ISIL would exploit that weakness. The result would be that ISIL would quickly seize control of Syria. In other words, we *need* a strong, decisive, experienced leader (e.g., Assad) in control of Syria, to limit the expansion of terrorists like ISIL, because ISIL is worse than Assad.

Here is a list of citations to some commentators who have recognized that we should be cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL and other terrorist organizations:

- David Wearing, editorial, "Bashar al-Assad's interests and the West's coincide over Iraq," [The Guardian](#), 28 June 2014.
- Leslie H. Gelb, op-ed, [NY Times](#), 1 July 2014 ("The greatest threat to American interests in the region is ISIS, not Mr. Assad.").
- Fred Kaplan, "Kaplan: Obama must work with the bad to defeat the worse," [Salt Lake Tribune](#), 21 Aug 2014 ("The fight isn't a cakewalk, but it doesn't have to be a huge struggle, if the Western politicians can get over their complexes about working with certain bad people in order to defeat even worse people.").
- Zeina Karam, "Syria opposition: Deadly chemical attack forgotten," [Associated Press](#), 14:59 EDT, 21 Aug 2014 ("... global disapproval has shifted away from Assad and toward the Islamic extremists who are fighting him and spreading destruction across Syria and Iraq. Calls for Assad's ouster are no longer made publicly by Western officials.").
- Sam Jones, "US and allies must join Assad to defeat Isis, warns British MP," [Financial Times](#), 21 Aug 2014 (Sir Malcolm Rifkind — a former U.K. foreign secretary, former U.K. defence secretary, and a current member of Parliament — said “ 'Sometimes you have to develop relationships with people who are extremely nasty in order to get rid of people who are even nastier,' ..., referring to working with Mr Assad's dictatorship.").
- Lizzie Dearden, "James Foley beheading: Former Army chief urges Britain to co-operate with Syria's Assad regime to combat ISIS," [The Independent](#), 22 Aug 2014 ("The former head of the Army has said Britain must work with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to combat the Islamic State (ISIS). Lord Dannatt, the former Chief of General Staff, called on the West to reconsider its relationship with the leader, who was internationally condemned for a crackdown on civil liberties during the 2011 Arab Spring."). See also [The Telegraph](#) ("Britain must co-operate with President Assad, the Syrian dictator, in order to confront ISIL, the former head of the Army has said.").
- Max Abrahms, "The U.S. Should Help Assad to Fight ISIS, the Greater Evil," [NY Times](#), 18:27 EDT, 22 Aug 2014 (Assad does *not* threaten the USA; ISIL does threaten the USA. "But it's time for the Obama administration to pick its poison by prioritizing the safety of American civilians over the moral objection of helping out a leader who massacres his own.").

Conclusion for Syria

However, even *if* the U.S. Government were to support Assad's fight against terrorism, 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 31 August 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

Obama needs to end his obsession with deposing Assad, and begin coordinating with Assad a strategy to defeat ISIL in both Syria and Iraq. It's past time for Obama to get with the program of defeating terrorism.

The refusal of Obama to cooperate with Assad has multiple disadvantages for the USA:

1. any U.S. airstrikes in Syria would be an illegal aggression against Syria;
2. unnecessary risks to U.S. pilots from Syrian anti-aircraft fire or Syrian fighter jets;
3. U.S. airstrikes will be less effective without Syrian intelligence on the ground;
4. the airstrikes need to be coordinated with army action on the ground, and Assad has the best army in Syria (with the possible exception of ISIL); and
5. helps keep Assad in power, which is good, because Assad is the strongest leader and most able to defeat terrorists.

Assad's military is currently stretched thin by fighting against the jihadists in the Islamic Front, against Al-Qaeda (i.e., Nusra Front), and against ISIL. It is conceivable that ISIL could eventually defeat Assad. Having Syria under the control of ISIL would be a much worse outcome for not only Syria, but also for surrounding nations. That is another reason why Obama should cooperate with Assad to defeat ISIL.

Here is how Obama painted himself into a corner. ISIL has been in Syria since May 2013, with an increasing number of atrocities committed by ISIL. ISIL began to invade Iraq in Jan 2014. Obama ignored the ISIL problem in both Syria and Iraq. But, on 7 Aug 2014, Obama decided to help defeat ISIL in Iraq, by ordering airstrikes in Iraq, as described [above](#). But eastern Syria is now a safe haven for ISIL, so Obama realized sometime around 21 Aug (see the Hagel-Dempsey press conference, [above](#)) that ISIL would *also* need to be defeated in Syria. The logical plan would be for Obama to call Assad on the telephone and begin to arrange cooperation between the Syrian military and U.S. Military on defeating ISIL in Syria. But Obama will *not* do that, because of Obama's obsession with deposing Assad. As a result of the failure to cooperate, Obama's military campaign in Syria will be less effective, as explained in the previous paragraph. Ironically, Assad also needs help from a nation with a big military (e.g., the USA), but it would be futile for Assad to ask Obama for help in defeating ISIL.

Conclusion for Iraq

The situation is worse in Iraq, where on 7 July I characterized the members of the Iraqi Parliament as not able to find their way out of a paper grocery bag. The Syrians have an effective government and an effective military. In contrast, the Iraqi Parliament is unable to form a new government and the Iraqi army is unable to expel ISIL from towns and cities.

Iraq — like Somalia and Libya — is a failed nation.

On 19 June, Obama told the Iraqi Parliament to convene "as soon as possible" and select government leaders with an "inclusive agenda". The Iraqi response was to wait until the last possible day under their constitution, to have a first meeting of Parliament. 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. The Parliament also ignored Sistani.

Two months after the first session of Parliament, the Iraqi Parliament had *not* voted to confirm Ebadi, who was nominated on 11 Aug to be the new prime minister. While Parliament procrastinated and bickered, ISIL entrenched itself and the situation in Iraq deteriorated. On 22 Aug, an attack on a Sunni mosque caused Sunni politicians to [halt](#) cooperation with Ebadi on forming a new, inclusive government. Clearly, the Iraqi Parliament is making the problems in Iraq worse by failing to promptly form a new government.

The fact that the government of Iraq is unworthy of assistance is a separate issue from the suffering of the Iraqi people at the hands of the barbaric ISIL terrorists. Furthermore, ISIL in both Iraq and Syria must be annihilated to protect neighboring nations from future invasion by ISIL terrorists.

this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria12.pdf>
begun 1 August 2014, last modified 2 September 2014

The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

[my homepage](#)