

Syria & Iraq: September 2014

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Foreword

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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

My essay for [August 2014](#) and this essay are particularly important because they chronicle how the USA was sucked into 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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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.

Spelling of Abadi's Name

On 11 August, a prime minister was nominated in Iraq. His last name is spelt in English: Abadi, Ebadi, or Ibadi.

1. The BBC, *The Washington Post*, the Associated Press, Reuters, *Rudaw* in Kurdistan, and the [White House](#) all spell his name with an A. On 10 Sep, Abadi took over the prime minister's website from Maliki, and there Abadi spells his name with an A, which ends any dispute.
2. *All Iraq News*, *Iraqi News*, and *Al-Jazeera* spell his name with an E.
3. *Arab News* spells his name with an I.

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](#).

Chemical Weapons in Syria

Reuters reported Sigrid Kaag final briefing to the U.N. Security Council:

"The declaration by the Syrian authorities themselves — there are still some discrepancies or questions that are being asked," she said after briefing the U.N. Security Council for the last time before the joint mission ends on Sept. 30. "It's a discussion that's continuing in Damascus as well as The Hague." [9] "There are concerns over possible discrepancies in volume and other such matters," she said. "I am heading back to Damascus in the coming period and we will also pursue that."

But with the ultra-hardline al Qaeda offshoot Islamic State now in control of large swaths of Syria and Iraq, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power said there were worries that any undeclared chemical arms could fall into their hands. "The United States is concerned about all discrepancies, also the potential that there are real omissions in the declaration," Power, who is president of the Security Council for September, told reporters after Kaag's briefing. [9] "Certainly if there are chemical weapons left in Syria, there will be a risk that those weapons fall into (Islamic State's) hands. And we can only imagine what a group like that would do if in possession of such a weapon," she said.

....

Another 12 production facilities — seven hangars and five tunnels — are yet to be destroyed which could take up to six months, said Kaag. She also said that four of those were currently in "security affected" areas of Syria, which is in the fourth year of a civil war that has killed more than 191,000 people.

Michelle Nichols & Louis Charbonneau, "UN cites concerns over possible gaps in Syria's declared chemical arms," [Reuters](#), 20:40 GMT, 4 Sep 2014.

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 has now been amply contaminated, and there have been abundant opportunities for fabrication or tampering with evidence. That is why competent detectives immediately secure a crime scene and then promptly begin collecting evidence. The delay by OPCW 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 16 June report by the OPCW fact-finding team, which describes their failed mission and lack of facts.

On 10 Sep, OPCW finished a second report on alleged chlorine gas use in Syria during April 2014. The OPCW press release says:

The fact-finding mission (FFM) appointed by the OPCW Director-General to examine alleged uses of chlorine gas as a weapon in Syria has found information constituting “compelling confirmation” that a toxic chemical was used “systematically and repeatedly” as a weapon in villages in northern Syria earlier this year.

In its second report that includes key findings, the Mission states that “the descriptions, physical properties, behaviour of the gas, and signs and symptoms resulting from exposure, as well as the response of patients to the treatment, leads the FFM to conclude with a high degree of confidence that chlorine, either pure or in mixture, is the toxic chemical in question.”

The report says chlorine was used in attacks on the villages of Talmanes, Al Tamanah and Kafr Zeta, all located in northern Syria. In May this year, the FFM had attempted to visit Kafr Zeta to gather on-site evidence in the aftermath of an alleged use there but was prevented from doing so when the convoy was attacked. The FFM then decided to carry out witness interviews in a safe location outside of Syria.

The FFM’s report presents the key findings from dozens of interviews with victims, physicians, first responders and eyewitnesses to the attacks, together with a considerable amount of documentation such as video, medical records and other evidence collected since the publication of the FFM’s first report in mid-June.

Following the establishment of the FFM in late April 2014, there was a marked reduction in reported chlorine attacks in the months of May, June and July. But there was a spate of new allegations in August. The Director-General has asked the FFM to continue its work.

"OPCW Fact Finding Mission: 'Compelling Confirmation' That Chlorine Gas Used as Weapon in Syria" [OPCW](#), 10 Sep 2014.

The Associated Press reports:

The report does not apportion blame for the chlorine attacks on three villages in northern Syria, OPCW spokesman Michael Luhan said.

A copy of the full report obtained by The Associated Press says that witnesses generally linked the chlorine attacks to helicopter-borne barrel bombs, but said the helicopters were flying too high for them to see any identifying markings on the aircraft.

Both sides in Syria's conflict blame one another for using chlorine, but dropping heavy explosives from helicopters is a tactic often blamed on forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Human Rights Watch said in May that it had strong evidence that in April this year Syrian army helicopters dropped bombs containing chlorine on the same rebel-held villages mentioned by the OPCW report.

....

The OPCW report blamed the chemical attacks for at least 13 deaths and dozens of injuries.

Mike Corder, "Weapons Watchdog: Chlorine Likely Used In Syria," [Associated Press](#), 18:06 GMT, 10 Sep 2014.

On 21 Sep, Kerry released a statement about the OPCW Report that is still *not* available to the public:

The OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission investigating chlorine use in Syria recently released a second interim report that concludes with a high degree of confidence that chlorine was used as a weapon "systematically and repeatedly" in attacks on three villages in northern Syria earlier this year. The report cites witness accounts indicating helicopters were used in the attacks — a capability the opposition lacks. This strongly points to Syrian regime culpability.

The OPCW report raises serious questions about the Syrian regime's compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and UN Security Council Resolution 2118 as well as its willingness to continue using chemical weapons to kill or injure the people of Syria.

The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission also referenced a spate of reports about additional attacks in late August, "with accounts of the incidents bearing a strong resemblance to those that are now confirmed as having been chlorine attacks." This finding, coupled with deep concerns regarding the accuracy and completeness of Syria's declaration to

the OPCW, raises especially troubling concerns that continued chemical attacks on the Syrian people by the regime could occur. The United States is gravely concerned about the findings in this report, which point to a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Assad regime must know that it will be held to account for such use in the international community.

John Kerry, "OPCW Report and Ongoing Concerns With Chemical Weapons Use in Syria," [State Dept.](#), 21 Sep 2014.

On 26 Sep, the OPCW executive council reviewed the 10 Sep report and issued a press release:

In a meeting held today [26 Sep], the Executive Council discussed the second report of the Fact-Finding Mission issued on 10 September 2014. The report concludes, with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine was used as a weapon systematically and repeatedly in three villages in northern Syria.

In addressing the meeting, the Director-General noted that the conclusions were deeply disturbing.

"It is a tragic irony that a hundred years after chlorine was first used on the battlefield, its misuse to kill and terrorise unarmed civilians has again raised its ugly head. The OPCW must show zero tolerance for any actions that threaten the norm against the use of any chemical as a weapon," said Ambassador Üzümcü.

Several States Parties, who took the floor, expressed their views on the key findings of the report and supported the continuation of the Fact Finding Mission.

"Executive Council Discusses Findings of Fact-Finding Mission," [OPCW](#), 26 Sep 2014.

On 27 Sep, the 10 Sep report is still *not* publicly available.

Syria

Why Peace Negotiations in Syria 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. On 5 Sep, another ceasefire began.

- 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 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](#), [August](#), 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 3 Sep 2014, the English-language SOHR website released its monthly death toll: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented deaths of 7219 people in August [2014].

The death toll is as follows:

- Civilians: 2015 civilians, including 281 children and 138 women.
- Rebels and Islamist fighters: 1448.
- Non-Syrian fighters from IS, al Nusra Front, Jund Al-Aqsa and al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army: 1351.
- Defected soldiers: 5
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 1405
- Fighters of the People's Committees and NDF as well as spies: 817.
- Fighters of Hezbollah: 23.
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shia Sect: 140
- Unidentified victims (documented by photos and footages): 15.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimate the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, Al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion and pro-regime militants is approximately 1000 soldiers and fighters more than the documented number because; first there are a lot of missing from the regime forces in the province of al Raqqa and the IS reticence about casualties due to the regime's bombardment and aerial strikes on its posts, as well as the reticence of some Islamist and rebels' battalions, al Nusra Front and YPG about their casualties too, and second the difficulties of reaching to the outback and the difficulties to investigate about those who have died inside the regime and IS jails.

It is worth mentioning that 700 people from those who died in August [2014] are from Sheitaat tribe where the majority of them are civilians, in the Badeyat al-Sheitaat and the towns of Ghranij, Abo Hamam and Al Keshkeyyi while the destiny of other hundreds from the people of the tribe of al-Sheitaat are still unknown so far. As well as, hundreds of the people were killed after arrest, some of them were beheaded and some had been pursued and executed in the villages and towns that they escaped to in the countryside of Deir Ezzor. The SOHR could document dozens of their names.

On the other hand, nearly 600 soldiers from the regime forces were killed in the clashes with the Islamic State in the province of al Raqqa.

"More than 8000 people died in the last August 2014," [SOHR](#), 3 Sep 2014. (Some typographical errors corrected, and bulleted list added by Standler.)

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

U.S. Military Aid to Rebels in Syria

ISIL Acquired Weapons from Free Syrian Army

On 8 Sep, Agence France-Presse reports

ISIS fighters appear to be using captured U.S. military issue arms and weapons supplied to moderate rebels in Syria by Saudi Arabia, according to a report published Monday [8 Sep].

The study by the London-based small-arms research organization Conflict Armament Research documented weapons seized by Kurdish forces from militants in Iraq and Syria over a 10-day period in July.

The report said the jihadists disposed of "significant quantities" of U.S.-made small arms including M16 assault rifles and included photos showing the markings "Property of US Govt."

It also found that anti-tank rockets used by ISIS in Syria were "identical to M79 rockets transferred by Saudi Arabia to forces operating under the Free Syrian Army umbrella in 2013." The rockets were made in the then Yugoslavia in the 1980s. "ISIS fighters using US arms: study," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 8 Sep 2014.

On 8 and 14 Sep, I checked the [website](#) of Conflict Armament Research, but found no report on Syria or Iraq. I was hoping to find more details.

Insurgents steal weapons

On 28 August 2014, Nusra Front attacked U.N. observers in the Golan Heights, who were enforcing the Syria/Israel peace treaty of 1974. Nusra Front took about 43 U.N. observers prisoner, but the observers escaped on 12 Sep. [Reuters](#). Nusra Front stole weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and uniforms from the U.N. observers. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#). This is another example of jihadists or terrorists stealing weapons from supposedly secure sources. Previous examples include Islamic Front stealing weapons and ammunition from a Free Syrian Army warehouse on 5 or 7 Dec 2013 (see my [second essay](#) about Syria), and ISIL stealing weapons and vehicles from the Iraqi army near Mosul around 10 June 2014.

More Reorganization of Free Syrian Army

On 10 Sep, the Kurdish YPG, the Free Syrian Army group in the Forat area of Syria, and Islamic Front groups in that area, "declared a joint coordination military group against the Islamic State". [BAS News](#) in Kurdistan, Iraq; [Middle East Eye](#).

My comment is that the continually shifting alliances amongst the insurgent groups makes it

impossible for the USA to vet rebels so that U.S. supplies are *not* acquired by Islamic extremists.

On 14 Sep, the head of the Syrian National Coalition announced he would "revamp the Free Syrian Army and bring these fighters more effectively under the political leadership of his group." [Associated Press](#).

On 22 Sep, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported:

Syria's opposition-in-exile National Coalition has dissolved the Supreme Military Council [SMC], the Turkey-based leadership of the rebel Free Syrian Army. A statement by the Coalition, issued late Sunday [21 Sep], said it was giving itself one month to re-form the troubled body, which has been widely blamed for failing to exert control over a fragmented, massive number of rebel groups. The statement said that the decision was taken in part because members of the SMC had been absent from meetings of the body on a number of occasions. Pro-opposition media outlets added that a number of members of the SMC walked out of a meeting Sunday [21 Sep] when the decision was taken to dissolve the military leadership of the FSA. A statement by the members who walked out said that they were, like the Coalition, interested in re-forming the SMC on sounder bases, adding that "partial reforms" had proven ineffective. They said the SMC had become "unable to achieve the goals for which it was established."

"Syrian opposition dissolves FSA leadership body," [Daily Star](#), 21:10 GMT, 22 Sep 2014.

On the morning of 25 Sep, I checked the English-language webpages of the Syrian National Coalition, but they had posted no press release about this reorganization of the SMC.

However, the Coalition did have the following under "coalition news":

The Syrian National Coalition issued a decree to dissolve the FSA's Supreme Military Council, and decided that it would be re-formed in consultation with the revolutionary forces active on the ground within a month. The Syrian Coalition said in a statement that "recognizing the current circumstances surrounding the Syrian revolution, which require closing the ranks, reorganization of institutions, correction of mistakes, and providing the boost needed to achieve the demands of the Syrian people, fighting both the tyrant regime and the terrorist group ISIS, the Syrian Coalition decided to dissolve the FSA's Supreme Military Council. It also decided that the outcome of the meeting held in Gaziantep on September 17, 201 [sic] is null and void as the meeting took place before its scheduled time and the chiefs of staff of the SMC and representatives of active groups on the ground were absent from the meeting; while other representatives withdrew.

"Syrian Coalition Dissolves the FSA's Supreme Military Council," [SNC](#), 23 Sep 2014.

Gen. Salim Idriss, previous commander of the FSA, disappeared from the news in March 2014 (see my [fifth essay](#) on Syria). Also his replacement, Gen. Bashir, essentially disappeared in July-August 2014 (see my [tenth essay](#) on Syria). On 30 Sep 2014, I searched Google News for their names, and found that they continued to be absent from the mainstream news in September, with only a few exceptions:

- a rare interview with Idriss on 18 Sep by [CNN](#)

- a rare interview with Bashir on 5 Sep by [McClatchy](#) newspapers
- Bashir testified on 18 Sep before the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee [Al-Arabiya](#)

Training of Free Syrian Army

On 13 Sep, an editorial in *The New York Times* mentions the folly of the U.S. policy that relies on the Free Syrian Army to fight against ISIL in Syria:

Groups identified by Western intelligence agencies as the moderate opposition — those that might support democracy and respect human rights — have been weak, divided and without coherent plans or sustained command structures capable of toppling the Assad regime. Today, those so-called moderates are even weaker and more divided; in some cases, their best fighters are hard-line Islamists.

....

.... Last September [2013], the C.I.A. began delivering light weapons like rifles and ammunition to a rebel faction commanded by Gen. Salim Idriss, whom Americans considered a competent leader and whose forces were not connected to terrorist groups. But since then, the Supreme Military Council, which General Idriss headed, has broken apart, and he has been sidelined. Its weapons and supply storerooms have been looted by Islamist groups or stolen by its members.

....

... there are bigger questions. The main target of the United States right now is ISIS, but for the mainstream rebel groups, getting rid of Mr. Assad is the main goal. How do you reconcile those competing goals? And how can weapons shipped to rebel fighters be kept out of the hands of ISIS?

America's success at training security forces in other countries is mixed at best. Billions of dollars have been spent building up the Iraqi army, only to have key units collapse in the face of the ISIS invasion of Mosul. Unless the Obama administration can do better with the Syrian rebels, there is no chance the fight against ISIS can be successful.

Editorial, "A Risky Bet on Syrian Rebels," [NY Times](#), 13 Sep 2014.

My comments: Not only did Gen. Idriss disappear from the news in March 2014, but also his replacement, Gen. Bashir, essentially disappeared in July-August 2014, as described above.

The failure of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) during the past three years alone suggests that we should *not* rely on the FSA to do the ground war against ISIL in Syria. The disorganization and fragmentation of the rebels, and their continually shifting alliances and reorganizations, show they are *not* a stable force on which anyone can rely.

In contrast to the ineptitude of the FSA, there is the competent Syrian military. As I mention in the [Conclusion](#), there are numerous advantages in cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL. Smart people learn to first try the easy solution — here, cooperate with Assad. As for atrocities by Assad, ISIL is worse than Assad.

Obama proposes more training for the rebels in Syria. The rebels respond that they want anti-aircraft weapons and anti-tank weapons, *not* training. But Obama, correctly, fears that any advanced weapons to the rebels will be acquired by terrorists (e.g., ISIL). Reuters reports:

In Washington, some say it's not just a matter of weapons. They contend that while rebels could provide crucial intelligence for any U.S. air assault, they are too undisciplined a force to be taken seriously, a ragtag army of disconnected militias responsible for too many neighborhoods.

Some say it could be difficult, if not impossible, to build the fledgling FSA into credible ground force.

“I simply don't think there is much raw material there,” said Richard Haass, a former senior State Department official involved in preparations for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

“It is divided. It is weak. Any effort to build it up would take years, and I don't think we'd have much to show for it,” said Haass, currently president of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Jason Szep, "Syria's 'moderate' rebels say they need weapons, not training," [Reuters](#), 10:03 GMT, 15 Sep 2014. [Daily Star](#), 16 Sep.

On 18 Sep, the Associated Press reports it could take a year to train the moderate rebels in Syria.

Moderate Syrian rebels, once they are made battle-ready by a U.S.-led coalition, may be asked to help restore the border between Syria and Iraq that Islamic State group militants have effectively wiped out, the top American military official said Thursday [18 Sep].

Army Gen. Martin Dempsey cautioned, however, that it may be a year before the Syrian rebel force that President Barack Obama calls a key element of his strategy for destroying the Islamic State group is ready for action.

....

Speaking to a small group of reporters after meeting with his French counterpart, Dempsey said it will take three or four months to begin the \$500 million training program, which gained final congressional approval Thursday as part of a major spending bill and went to Obama for his signature.

....

Dempsey said that before training can start, the U.S. and certain allies must screen

potential candidates in Syria for competence and loyalty. Initially, they will be provided small arms and other light weaponry, Dempsey said, but that could graduate to more sophisticated weaponry — "once we know what's in their hearts."

Some members of Congress expressed concern that because the rebels' focus over three years of civil war has been to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad, not fight the Islamic State group militants, they may be tempted to use the U.S.-led training for that objective, instead of the U.S. priority of defeating the militant army [ISIL].

.... The goal is to train at least 5,000 rebels within one year.

Robert Burns, "US: Syrian Rebel Training May Take 12 Months," [Associated Press](#), 18:50 EDT, 18 Sep 2014.

My comments: No one knows the situation in the Syrian civil war one year from today. I assume ISIL will still be a problem in Syria in Sep 2015, but I wonder whether the Free Syrian Army will still exist then.

Furthermore, spending US\$ 500 million to train 5000 rebels is equivalent to \$100,000/rebel. That is a very expensive education — much more than the cost of tuition, dormitory room and meals, and books at a good state university in the USA.

On 19 Sep, the Press Secretary at the Pentagon, Rear Admiral John Kirby, talked about training moderate rebels in Syria:

QUESTION: Admiral, yesterday the president and Secretary Hagel both said they welcome the action by Congress to endorse the \$500 million training program for Syrian opposition forces. Now that that's moving, can you give us a sense about what the next couple steps are for this department in starting it up, building the site, and assigning the people who will be doing that work?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Well, you're right. And we are grateful for Congress's action, as you saw the secretary say last night. So what has to happen now is a process of working closely with the intelligence community and frankly with the Saudis on a proper recruiting and vetting program for the moderate opposition. And that work will begin very, very soon.

As Chairman Dempsey said in testimony, it's going to take a period of months to work our way through that process, probably three to five months is the best estimate, before the vetting process is complete. And we know we've got a body of willing, capable partners to work within the Syrian moderate opposition. And then there will be probably a period of eight to 12 months of actual training and fielding.

So it's going to be a little while before you start to see opposition fighters returning to Syria trained and capable and ready to take on ISIL inside Syria. But that work will, now that we have the authorization, now that we have the funds that go with it, that work will start immediately.

....

QUESTION: Okay. Back to the Syrian issue of training the moderate Syrian position. Is this force — the Syrian force that should be trained in Saudi Arabia, its mission to fight ISIS? That's what I understand, not the regime?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: There's three things, really, that we're going to help train and equip the moderate opposition to deal with. One is to defend their own communities and their own citizens — where they live, where they are; so basic defense, community defense.

Two, to go after ISIL as well. And then of course, third, to counter the Assad regime. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 19 Sep 2014.

My comments: By choosing to use moderate Syrian rebels as our ground forces in Syria, we postpone attacking ISIL in Syria for 11 to 17 months. Can we afford to wait that long?

Further, a year from now, we will have trained only 5000 rebels. We may need substantially more troops (e.g., 15,000?) on the ground to defeat ISIL, which is now estimated to have 30,000 fighters.

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 13 Sep, *The Telegraph* in London England reported:

Six months ago President Bashar al-Assad was said to be finally winning the war as the rebel forces collapsed due to extremism and infighting.

But now, even as America announces new plans to train fighters to take him on while also bombing bases of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil), he has been driven out in parts of the north with heavy losses, and some of his allies are said to be disillusioned with him.

Diplomats say that both Iran and the Lebanese-based Shia group Hizbollah, previously staunch backers, are questioning their unconditional support.

....

The integrity of Mr Assad's broad coalition, which includes Shia militias from Iraq and Hizbollah fighters from Lebanon, is also threatened. Iraqi militias have pulled back forces to fight at home, while Hizbollah has been reluctant to spread its protective shield beyond areas occupied by Syria's Shia minority.

Ruth Sherlock & Richard Spencer, "Syria crisis: support for Assad starting to fade as allies become disillusioned by setbacks," [The Telegraph](#), 13 Sep 2014.

On 18 Sep, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's army was "stretched thin", but still the strongest military in Syria. Reuters says: "Assad's allies warn against underestimating the strength of pro-government forces and their ability to endure with the help of powerful friends, notably the Iranian-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah."

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 until 9 Sep.

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.

On 30 Aug, the Arab newspaper *As-Safir* reported that de Mistura will visit Damascus on 9 Sep. [Daily Star](#). The top story in the [Daily Star](#) for the morning of 10 Sep says that de Mistura arrived in Damascus on Tuesday, 9 Sep, will meet with the Syrian Foreign Minister on 10 Sep, and is scheduled to meet with Assad on 11 Sep.

The Syrian government's propaganda agency, [SANA](#), posted a webpage about how Assad would cooperate with de Mistura in the fight against terrorism.

On 23 Sep, the United Nations news agency posted a press release:

Also today [23 Sep], Mr. Ban's Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura briefed [the U.N. Security Council] about his recent visit to Damascus, where he met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the other Syrian authorities, as well as civil society.

Mr. de Mistura said that while he did not any "grand projects at the moment," he had three main priorities for Syria: lowering the level of violence, increasing access to aid and promoting the political process.

"In order to move at the moment there is obviously a game changer and the game changer is Daesh and the fight against Daesh," Mr. de Mistura told reporters using the Arabic acronym for ISIL.

He said while the current period is a "delicate" and a "dangerous" one, the international community has to make sure that the 11 million Syrian in urgent need of aid are helped.

“Fighting terrorism needs to be accompanied with a genuine process, a political process including all Syrians,” the UN envoy said, adding that Mr. Assad agreed on the importance of a political process.

Turning to the participation of Iran in the efforts, Mr. de Mistura called Tehran “an important player” and voiced optimism that the Government is “an important partner in what should be a political process.”

"On eve of Security Council summit, Ban calls for decisive action against terrorism," [U.N.](#), 23 Sep 2014.

It is *not* clear whether de Mistura will continue to insist on the "transitional governing body" (TGB) specified by the Geneva1 conference in June 2012. I criticized the need for a TGB in my [essay](#), as one of the reasons why the Geneva peace negotiations in Jan/Feb 2014 failed.

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. As of 30 Sep 2014, these diplomatic efforts appear weak and ineffective.

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.

Beheading of James Sotloff

On Tuesday afternoon, 2 Sep, the Associated Press reported:

Islamic State extremists released a video Tuesday [2 Sep] purportedly showing the beheading of a second American journalist, Steven Sotloff, and warning President Barack Obama that as long as U.S. airstrikes against the militant group continue, "our knife will continue to strike the necks of your people."

The footage — depicting what the U.S. said appeared to be a sickening act of brutality — was posted two weeks after the release of video showing the killing of James Foley and days after Sotloff's mother pleaded for his life.

Barak Barfi, a spokesman for the Sotloff family, said that the family had seen the video but that authorities have not established its authenticity.

....

Sotloff, 31, who freelanced for Time and Foreign Policy magazines, vanished in Syria in August 2013 and was not seen again until he appeared in a video released online last

month [19 Aug] that showed Foley's beheading. Dressed in an orange jumpsuit against an arid Syrian landscape, Sotloff was threatened in that video with death unless the U.S. stopped airstrikes on the group in Iraq.

In the video distributed Tuesday and titled "A Second Message to America," Sotloff appears in a similar jumpsuit before he is apparently beheaded by a fighter with the Islamic State, the extremist group that has claimed wide swaths of territory across Syria and Iraq and declared itself a caliphate.

....

The fighter who beheads Sotloff in the video called it retribution for Obama's continued airstrikes against the group in Iraq.

"I'm back, Obama, and I'm back because of your arrogant foreign policy towards the Islamic State ... despite our serious warnings," the fighter said. "So just as your missiles continue to strike our people, our knife will continue to strike the necks of your people."

At the end of the video, he threatens to kill a third captive, a Briton, David Cawthorne Haines. It was not immediately clear who Haines was. Officials with the British Foreign Office declined to immediately comment.

Zeina Karam, "Video Purports To Show Beheading Of US Journalist," [Associated Press](#), 15:44 EDT, 2 Sep 2014.

The morning of the following day, Agence France-Presse reported that the U.S. Government confirmed the video was authentic:

The video purporting to show U.S. journalist Steven Sotloff being executed is authentic, the White House said Wednesday [3 Sep].

"The U.S. Intelligence Community has analyzed the recently released video showing U.S. citizen Steven Sotloff and has reached the judgment that it is authentic," said National Security Council spokesperson Caitlin Hayden.

"US says Sotloff execution video authentic," [Daily Star](#), 08:50 GMT, 3 Sep 2014.

Reuters repeated basic facts:

Sotloff, a 31-year-old freelance journalist from Florida, was kidnapped in Syria in August 2013.

"I'm back, Obama, and I'm back because of your arrogant foreign policy towards the Islamic State, because of your insistence on continuing your bombings and in Amerli, Zumar and the Mosul Dam, despite our serious warnings," the masked man said in the video, addressing U.S. President Barack Obama. "So just as your missiles continue to strike our people, our knife will continue to strike the necks of your people."

....

The White House said late on Tuesday [2 Sep] that Obama was sending three top officials — Secretary of State John Kerry, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and counterterrorism adviser Lisa Monaco — to the Middle East "in the near-term to build a stronger regional partnership" against the Islamic State militants.

William MacLean, "Islamic State issues video of beheading of U.S. hostage," [Reuters](#), 10:19 GMT, 3 Sep 2014.

The [Miami Herald](#) quotes some politicians on the beheading of Sotloff. Florida's governor says: "If you attack one American, you are attacking all Americans. I think I can speak for all Floridians and all Americans when I say that ... part of that strategy needs to include destroying [ISIS]." That is really inflammatory. Is the USA going to retaliate with a military response to destroy *every* foreign criminal gang who kills a U.S. citizen? How about the drug cartels in Mexico? The Islamic terrorists in Pakistan? The attack on one is an attack on all is propaganda, not rational thought. And no one appointed the governor of Florida to speak for *all* Americans — that is just more propaganda, and the government telling citizens they should believe.

In Feb 1898, a U.S. Navy battleship's gunpowder exploded ([probably](#) ignited by spontaneous combustion of coal in an adjacent bunker), sinking the ship in the Havana harbor. Journalists quickly blamed Spain for allegedly attacking the ship, and soon the USA was at war with Spain, which owned Cuba. That was the Spanish-American war, and we still own Puerto Rico as a result of that war.

My comments: Journalists report that ISIL is believed to had four American hostages in Syria. With the beheadings of Foley and Sotloff, ISIL has exhausted half of their supply of American hostages. ISIL will soon need to find another way to attract the attention of Obama and Kerry. Killing American hostages was a stupid act by ISIL, an act that could cause massive retaliation by the U.S. Military. The beheading of Foley was partly responsible for Obama ordering Kerry to assemble a coalition of nations to fight ISIL.

Kerry — in his 29 Aug op-ed in *The New York Times* (see my [tenth essay](#) on Syria) — could come up with only five Europeans or Americans killed by ISIL: four at the Jewish Museum in Brussels and Foley. Better reasons to defeat ISIL are to stop atrocities in Syria and Iraq, prevent ISIL from expanding into neighboring Arab nations, and prevent *future* attacks on Europe and the USA.

Like Foley, Sotloff traveled to Syria in defiance of U.S. State Department warnings. No one asked Foley or Sotloff to travel to Syria. Foley and Sotloff were certainly *not* in the service of the U.S. Government in Syria. It would be irrational to inflate Foley and Sotloff to become symbols of the USA who were slaughtered by ISIL. As explained in my previous paragraph, there are better reasons to fight against ISIL than the deaths of two U.S. citizens in Syria.

Beheading of David Haines

David Haines was a 44 year old humanitarian aid worker from Scotland. He was kidnapped by Islamic extremists in Syria in March 2013. On the night of 13 Sep 2014, ISIL released a

video online showing the beheading of Haines.

The Associated Press reports:

In the video, according to a transcript provided by SITE [a U.S. terrorism watchdog], Haines says that he holds Cameron "entirely responsible for my execution" because Britain has "voluntarily entered into a coalition with the United States against the Islamic state."

His killer says in the video that Haines was paying the price for Britain's decision to supply weapons to Kurdish Peshmerga fighters, who are battling the Islamic State group in northern Iraq. He references U.S. airstrikes against Islamic State fighters near the Haditha Dam in western Iraq, which the U.S. began targeting on Sept. 7 — indicating that Haines' killing took place sometime during the past week.

....

If the slaying of Haines took place in the last few days, [Michael] Rubin [a resident scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute] said, the timing suggests that U.S. and other forces have no idea where the extremists are keeping their captives and that, in turn, means a lack of intelligence about what goes on within the group itself.

Zeina Karam & Sylvia Hui, "Video Shows Slaying Of British Aid Worker," [Associated Press](#), 03:05 GMT, 14 Sep 2014.

My comments: By engaging in the brutal murder of a U.S. or U.K. citizen, ISIL invites the USA or NATO to retaliate against ISIL. If the USA/NATO retaliates, ISIL will then engage in propaganda claiming that ISIL is the *victim* of aggression by hedonist, infidel, Christian governments. This propaganda will encourage more disaffected Muslim young men to travel to Syria or Iraq, to fight with ISIL against the Christian aggressors. In this way, being blasted by USA/NATO could actually *help* ISIL.

If my comment sounds silly, look at how Hamas in Gaza engages in propaganda. First Hamas fires hundreds of rockets and mortar shells from Gaza into Israel. In retaliation for this provocation and to defend the Israeli homeland, Israel engages in airstrikes in Gaza. Hamas then portrays itself as the victim of aggression by Israel. Hamas cleverly launches rockets from near residences or schools, so that some of the Israeli retaliation accidentally hits residences and schools. Hamas can then take journalists on tours of damaged residences and schools, and have the journalists spread additional propaganda about the so-called "war crimes" by "Zionist aggressors". While Hamas dramatically loses every military war with Israel, Hamas wins the propaganda wars in Muslim nations, causing increased financial and munitions support to Hamas.

Following this argument, the proper response to the beheading of citizens of NATO nations would be to avoid military action against ISIL in retaliation for the beheadings. We should encourage Islamic clerics to repeatedly condemn such beheadings as unIslamic, to stop mainstream Muslims from sympathizing with ISIL. We can continue our campaign of airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq, where the Iraqi government invited us to help defeat ISIL.

Debacle in Iraq

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.

In August 2014, there were still more reports of atrocities by ISIL — including a threatened genocide of Yazidis in Iraq; an attack on a Sunni mosque in Iraq on 22 Aug; and ISIL executed captured Syrian soldiers in Raqqa, Syria — as described in my [tenth](#) essay.

U.N. Human Rights Council: 1 Sep

On 1 Sep 2014, the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva held a one-day meeting on Iraq and concluded by asking the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights to "to urgently dispatch a mission to Iraq to investigate alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated terrorist groups, and to establish the facts and circumstances of such abuses and violations, with a view to avoiding impunity and ensuring full accountability." [OHCHR News](#). Documents and statements are at [UNHRC](#).

Also on 1 Sep, Amnesty International, a non-governmental organization, issued a [Report](#) that accused ISIL of "a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing in northern Iraq".

Speicher Air Base massacre on 11-14 June

On 3 Sep, [Human Rights Watch](#) concluded that between 560 and 770 Iraqi soldiers from Speicher Air Force Base near Tikrit were executed by ISIL during 11-14 June 2014. This new death toll was about three or four times greater than initial estimates, but less than ISIL's boast of 1700 executed. [Associated Press](#).

On 2 Sep, a mob of approximately 100 families of victims of the massacre stormed the Parliament building and shut down the legislature. The legislature held a hearing on the massacre on 3 Sep. The families are demanding return of bodies for burial, and demanding return of any military personnel who were kidnapped by ISIL. [The Washington Post](#) reports: "[The families] have threatened reprisal killings against Sunnis if bodies of their relatives are not returned and the killers are not held accountable,...." The Sunnis who will be killed in revenge are *not* members of ISIL, so this will be irrational sectarian violence.

5 Sep: executions at Sulaiman Bek

On Friday, 5 Sep, Agence France-Presse reported:

Iraqi Kurdish forces and Shiite militiamen discovered mass graves containing 35 bodies after retaking the town of Sulaiman Bek from jihadists, an officer and a doctor said on Friday.

It was not clear when the shooting deaths took place, as the town north of Baghdad has fallen from government control several times this year, most recently from June until earlier this week.

The 35 bodies were taken under guard in ambulances to the morgue in Kirkuk, a city to the north of Sulaiman Bek, so their identities could be determined, Doctor Baha al-Bayati said.

....

A Kurdish officer said an area of bloodstained ground near the entrance to the town was apparently where the killings took place.

"35 bodies found in Iraq town retaken from jihadists," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 17:30 GMT, 5 Sep 2014.

ISIL executes human rights activist

On the morning of 25 Sep, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) tells us that ISIL tortured and then executed a female attorney in Iraq who was a human-rights activist.

UNAMI has learned that Ms. Al-Nuaimy was seized from her home by the ISIL group on 17 September 2014, reportedly following posts on her Facebook page that were critical of their destruction of places of religious and cultural significance. She was convicted by a so-called "Shari'a court" for apostasy. She was then held for a further five days during which she was subjected to torture in an attempt to force her to 'repent', before she was executed in public.

"By torturing and executing a female human rights' lawyer and activist, defending in particular the civil and human rights of her fellow citizens in Mosul, ISIL continues to attest to its infamous nature, combining hatred, nihilism and savagery, as well as its total disregard of human decency", Mr. Mladenov [Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Iraq (SRSG)] underlined. "ISIL has repeatedly targeted the weak and defenseless in acts of brutality and cowardice that are beyond description, bringing about unfathomable suffering to all Iraqis regardless of their gender, age, religion, faith or ethnicity", the SRSG continued.

"UN Envoy Condemns Public Execution of Human Rights Lawyer, Ms. Sameera Al-Nuaimy," [UNAMI](#), 25 Sep 2014.

On 25 Sep, the Associated Press reported:

Militants with the Islamic State group tortured and then publicly killed a human rights lawyer in the Iraqi city of Mosul after their self-proclaimed religious court ruled that

she had abandoned Islam, the U.N. mission in Iraq said Thursday [25 Sep].

Gunmen with the group's newly declared police force seized Samira Salih al-Nuaimi last week in a northeastern district of the Mosul while she was home with her husband and three children, two people with direct knowledge of the incident told The Associated Press on Thursday. Al-Nuaimi was taken to a secret location. After about five days, the family was called by the morgue to retrieve her corpse, which bore signs of torture, the two people said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of fears for their safety.

....

.... The [U.N.] statement did not say how she was killed. Vivian Salama, "Iraqi Woman Activist Killed By Islamic State," [Associated Press](#) 19:02 GMT, 25 Sep 2014.

Jen Psaki at the U.S. State Department interrupted her busy week to write a [press release](#) that condemns ISIL for executing al-Nuaimi.

Islamic Public Relations Problem

On 1 Sep, the [Associated Press](#) reports that Arab media are using satire to criticize ISIL. Copy at [Daily Star](#). A scholarly argument with citations to holy books might convince some people. But satire can devastate a target, making it appear ridiculous to everyone.

On 17 Sep, the highest body of 21 religious scholars in Saudi Arabia issued a fatwa that called terrorism a "heinous crime". The Associated Press reported that the scholars said: "any Muslim who thinks jihad — or striving in the path of God— means joining a terrorist group 'is ignorant and has gone astray'." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

No Criminal Prosecution of Cowardly Iraqi Army Officers

Back on 10 June 2014, ISIL quickly seized Mosul. Although the Iraqi army significantly outnumbered the ISIL terrorists, the Iraqi army simply fled instead of fighting against ISIL. (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria.) About a week later, there were news reports that Maliki had ordered the arrest of Iraqi army officers who deserted, instead of fighting ISIL. At the time, I was overwhelmed with reading and digesting the news from Iraq, so I ignored the criminal prosecution of these army officers.

On 17 June, [Reuters](#) reports that Maliki sacked four top army officers in Mosul, because they "failed to fulfill their professional and military duties".

On 18 June, [Reuters](#) reported that 59 officers will be tried in military court for fleeing from their posts. The same story also says on 17 June "Maliki dismissed four top generals and said they were being charged in military court for abandoning Mosul". Copy at [Daily Star](#) in

Lebanon.

On 18 June, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan reports that the four dismissed officers are "Lt. Gen. Mahdi al-Gharawi, his deputy Maj. Gen. Abdul Rahman al-Handal Mahdi, and chief of staff Brigadier General Hassan Abdul Razzaq Ghazi", along with one Kurdish officer, Brigadier General Hidayat Abdul Karim. Rudaw reports that only the Kurd will be charged in military court, the other three were dismissed but not criminally charged.

On 19 June, [The Daily Beast](#) reports that Lt. Gen. Mahdi Al Gharawi, who commanded the Iraqi army in Mosul, was accused of torture when he commanded a police unit in Baghdad during 2005-2008. Maliki not only granted Gharawi immunity from prosecution, but also promoted him to head the Iraqi army in Mosul. Gharawi is a Shiite, Mosul is predominantly Sunni — this is one of the sectarian abuses perpetrated by Maliki. On 17 June 2014, as mentioned above, Maliki finally sacked Gharawi.

On 15 July, about a month after the order for a court martial of Gen. Karim, [Rudaw](#) published an interview with Karim. He is living in Erbil, avoiding prosecution. He claims his troops had no ammunition, and he did not learn about the fall of Mosul until a day after it occurred. "Karim said that 85 percent of the Iraqi army is dominated by Shiites, with Kurds and Sunnis treated with suspicion and as outcasts."

When I searched Google News on 2 Sep, I found few news stories about this topic, and nothing on the arrest and trial of the officers. Apparently, the Iraqi military court is in no hurry to prosecute these deserters. That may be more evidence that Iraq is a failed nation, which no longer enforces its laws. Karim *may* be a victim of ethnic discrimination and now a scapegoat.

2 Sep 2014: Iraqi Parliament Meets

The agenda for the 2 Sep meeting of Parliament included "discussing the situation of the displaced families and voting on the parliamentary committees." [All Iraq News](#)

At 10:56 Baghdad time, it was reported that families of victims of the massacre at Speicher Air Force Base had forced their way into the Parliament building. The demonstrators want the bodies of the dead delivered to the families, and want the kidnapped personnel returned. [All Iraq News](#); [CNN](#). At 13:19 Baghdad time, it was reported that the Iraqi Parliament postponed until 4 Sep. The next meeting of Parliament will discuss the massacre at Speicher Air Force Base by ISIL in June. [All Iraq News](#).

At 19:20 Baghdad time, the next meeting of Parliament was changed to tomorrow, 3 Sep. [All Iraq News](#)

My comment is that Parliament is disorganized, and its agenda seems to be set by a mob in the street.

3 Sep 2014: Iraqi Parliament Meets

The Iraqi Parliament met, but then adjourned for a half-hour because of a lack of quorum.

[All Iraq News](#). At 12:22 Baghdad time, Parliament met again with 182 members (55%).

[All Iraq News](#). At 14:19 Baghdad time, Parliament adjourned for a half-hour because of "the shouts of the angry families of Speicher Camp massacre." [All Iraq News](#). At 18:26 Baghdad time, Parliament adjourned until 6 Sep. [All Iraq News](#).

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of the meeting dates, percent of members who attended, and either the duration of the meeting or the accomplishment. This table clearly shows infrequent meetings and poor attendance by the Iraqi Parliament.

Note that there was an attack on a Sunni mosque on 22 August that killed 70 people. Results of an investigation into the identity of the attackers were promised before 25 Aug, but still have *not* been made public on 3 Sep. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria, in the section on atrocities in Iraq.)

In summary, the Iraqi government is unable to prosecute army officers for desertion at Mosul on 10 June (see [above](#)), unable to find bodies of victims of a massacre by ISIL at Speicher Air Base on 11-14 June, and unable to determine who attacked a mosque on 22 Aug. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional.

6 Sep 2014: Iraqi Parliament Meets

At 13:15 Baghdad time it was announced that Parliament had convened, with 180 members (55%) attending. [All Iraq News](#). A half-hour later, Parliament postponed voting on its committees, because the committees were incomplete. [All Iraq News](#). After a five-hour meeting, Parliament adjourned until 8 Sep. [All Iraq News](#).

Meanwhile, "an informed source" says that Abadi has included "some unqualified figures for the key posts" and that is causing a delay in forming a new government. [All Iraq News](#). My opinion is that, in order to form a more inclusive government, it may be necessary to appoint some ministers who have no experience. The deadline for voting on the new government is 10 Sep, just four days from now.

7 Sep: New Government Almost Formed

At noon Baghdad time on 7 Sep, it was reported that "The prime-minister-designate, Haider al-Abadi, held intense meetings with the political blocs within the Iraqi National Alliance over the formation of the government." [All Iraq News](#). One can imagine the petty bickering and *quid pro quo* negotiations that were exchanged.

At 16:42 Baghdad time on 7 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reported that "negotiations among the blocs over the new government formation has finished."

At 18:25 Baghdad time on 7 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament has scheduled a

session to ratify the new government. The session will begin at 20:00 Baghdad time on 8 Sep. See also [Reuters](#): "The make-up of the cabinet has still not been revealed, but Abadi is expected to include representatives of all the country's religious and ethnic components in a bid to save Iraq from collapse."

[Iraqi News](#) reported on 7 Sep: "The Iraqi Sunni Bloc MP Khalid al-Mafraji affirmed that, the formation of the new government will not include any member from the Sunni bloc." If this be true, then the new government will *not* be inclusive, and the new government will likely be unacceptable to Obama and Kerry. On 22 Aug the Sunni blocs withdrew from negotiations about the new government, in retaliation for the bombing of a Sunni mosque that killed 70 people. Despite my reading the news from Iraq every day, I have not seen any indication that the Sunni political parties returned to negotiations.

The Iraqi constitution specifies how a new government is to be formed:

Second [Clause]: The Prime Minister-designate shall undertake the naming of the members of his Council of Ministers within a period not to exceed thirty days from the date of his designation.

Third: If the Prime Minister-designate fails to form the Council of Ministers during the period specified in clause "Second," the President of the Republic shall charge a new nominee for the post of Prime Minister within fifteen days.

Fourth: The Prime Minister-designate shall present the names of his members of the Council of Ministers and the ministerial program to the Council of Representatives. He is deemed to have gained its confidence upon the approval, by an absolute majority of the Council of Representatives, of the individual Ministers and the ministerial program.

Fifth: The President of the Republic shall charge another nominee to form the Council of Ministers within fifteen days in case the Council of Ministers did not win the vote of confidence.

[Iraqi constitution](#), Article 76.

Here is my interpretation of how the constitution applies to the current situation:

The Second Clause gives Abadi a deadline of 10 Sep (i.e., 30 days from his nomination as prime minister on 11 Aug) to name new ministers. Abadi apparently met that deadline on the morning of 8 Sep.

The Third Clause says that if Abadi misses that 10 Sep deadline, the President will select a different nominee for prime minister.

The Fifth Clause says that if Parliament does not approve the new government, the President will select a different nominee for prime minister.

If Parliament rejects the new government on 8 Sep, then Abadi *might* revise his list of ministers and try again on 9 or 10 Sep. That second chance would be consistent with the constitution, but is *not* mentioned in the constitution.

8 Sep 2014: Iraqi Parliament Meets

At 12:19 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports "Parliament adjourned its session to for half an hour due to the shouts of the angry families of Speicher Camp massacre."

At 12:42 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports 203 members (62%) attended today's session.

At 19:19 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament adjourned until 20:00 (should be 21:00). In the first session today, which was less than seven hours, Parliament approved the members of its committees.

8 Sep 2014: Iraqi Parliament Ratifies Cabinet

The state television channel reported the names of ten proposed ministers:

1. Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ibrahim al-Jaafari [physician, PM 2005-2006]
2. Interior Ministry to Hadi al-Ameri [Transport Minister 2010-2014]
3. Ministry of Transport to Bayan Jabr
4. Ministry of Municipalities to Tariq Kikhany
5. Ministry of Human Rights went to Mohammed Shiaa Al Sudani
6. Oil Ministry to Adel Abdul-Mahdi [economist, Vice-President 2005-2011]
7. Ministry of Higher Education to Hussain al-Shahristani [Ph.D. chemical engineering, Deputy PM 2010-2014]
8. Ministry of Youth and Sports to Abdul-Hussein Abtan
9. Ministry of Health to Adila Hammoud
10. Ministry of Water Resources to Jawad Alshahyla

[Iraqi News](#). I Googled four names that I recognized and added some of their credentials in the above list. Abadi has not yet chosen *all* of his ministers. [All Iraq News](#). The important Defense Minister is not yet chosen. [Al-Jazeera](#) reports that Parliament rejected Abadi's Interior Minister.

At 20:51 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Abadi arrived at the Parliament building. At 21:01 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament convened again today. At 21:57 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports that 289 members of Parliament (88%) attended this second session today.

At 22:40 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament approved three vice-presidents: Nouri al-Maliki, Ayad Allawi and Usama al-Nijaifi. Maliki has been prime minister since May 2006. Allawi was the interim prime minister during 2004-2005. al-Nujayfi was speaker of Parliament from Nov 2010 to July 2014, and is a Sunni. The [Associated Press](#) reports: "Kurdish politician and former Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari was named as one of three deputy prime ministers." [Reuters](#) reported that the other two deputy prime ministers are: "Saleh Mutlaq, a secular Sunni Muslim who served in the same position in the last government, and Baha Arraji, a Shi'ite Islamist and former lawmaker."

At 23:24 Baghdad time on 8 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament adjourned until 16 Sep.

Despite the importance of these votes in Parliament, it was frustratingly difficult to learn the names of the new ministers from reading [All Iraq News](#), [Iraqi News](#), [Associated Press](#), [Reuters](#), and [Al-Jazeera](#). Worse, some of the information was contradictory, e.g., [Iraqi News](#) reported that the Higher Education Ministry and Water Resources Ministry "remained unassigned", but other news organizations did *not* report that and state television earlier had announced the names of Abadi's candidates for those two ministries.

The Washington Post reported:

Frictions began as soon as Monday's [8 Sep] session got underway as Shiite parliamentarian Mohammed Naji took to the floor to lambaste the withdrawal of Hadi al-Amiri's name to head the interior ministry. Amiri, who was formerly transport minister, is the head of the Badr Brigade, a Shiite militia that has been fighting the Islamic State north of Baghdad. Sunni politicians had strongly objected to his nomination.

Though Abadi was unable to fill the interior and defense ministries in time for the vote, the roles had remained vacant under the last government, with outgoing Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki retaining the key security portfolios himself.

....

Sunni politicians took the culture and finance ministries, while Shiites filled the weightier portfolios of oil and finance.

....

The Kurds were also upset that they were offered only three ministries in the current power-sharing deal; they argued that based on their population and influence, they should receive at least five. There are also outstanding questions over how and whether the pesh merga fighters should be incorporated into the national Iraqi security forces. Loveday Morris & Greg Jaffe, "Iraq approves new government, opens way for expanded U.S. role," [Washington Post](#), 16:01 EDT, 8 Sep 2014.

The New York Times reported:

But even as lawmakers were sworn in, there was deep skepticism among Iraqis, especially Sunni Arabs who felt marginalized and abused by the last government, led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, who will stay on in the new government in one of Iraq's three largely ceremonial vice president posts.

As Iraqi cities fell to ISIS this summer and the Iraqi military crumbled, some Sunnis chose to support the militants rather than fight for a government they loathed. Kareem Fahim & Azam Ahmed, "Lawmakers Approve Cabinet in Iraq, but 2 Posts Are Empty," [NY Times](#), 8 Sep 2014.

It appears that the new government *may* not be inclusive. There are 28 ministries in the Iraqi government ([Wikipedia](#)) and only 5 (18%) went to Sunnis or Kurds, who comprise 38% of the population. The experienced foreign minister, one of a few Kurds in previous governments, became one of three deputy prime ministers.

My concern is echoed by Dr. Reidar Visser, who wrote in his blog:

The international community has largely welcomed the new government as somehow being more “inclusive” than past ones. This is largely inaccurate as far as ministerial appointments are concerned. The ethno-sectarian balance, which seems to be the prime interest to these commentators, remains largely the same. What has improved somewhat, though, is the size of the government (it has been reduced in size by at least 25% compared with past governments) as well as language emphasizing the need for reform.

To what extent Abbadi means business will be seen over the coming week, when candidates for the key positions of defence and interior ministers have been promised. Maliki in 2010 also issued such promises, only to keep the portfolios for himself or close friends acting as ministers without parliament approval for the duration of his term. That, in turn, formed the basis for many of the accusations of over-centralization and mismanagement of the Iraqi security forces that ultimately prevented him from a third term.

Reidar Visser, "The Iraqi Parliament Approves the Abbadi Cabinet," [Iraq & Gulf Analysis](#), 9 Sep 2014.

On 10 Sep, W.G. Dunlop at Agence France-Presse reported:

Iraq’s new Cabinet lineup is not a major change and much more is needed to address grievances that contributed to the rise of brutal jihadists who seized swaths of the country, experts say.

....

.... But the key interior and defense portfolios remain unfilled and the Cabinet has not undergone major changes.

The proportion of posts given to members of the Shiite majority and the Sunni Arab and Kurdish minorities is largely the same as the previous government, and almost a third of the new ministers and deputy premiers held such posts before.

“In terms of the sectarian division of the government, it’s actually, if you’re going to take it strictly by numbers, less inclusive,” said Fanar Haddad, a research fellow at the Middle East Institute of the National University of Singapore.

W.G. Dunlop, "New Cabinet not enough to address woes," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 10 Sep 2014.

11-15 Sep 2014: government slithers forward

On 8 Sep, above, Iraqi state television reported that the Ministry of Higher Education had

been offered to Hussain al-Shahristani. On 10 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Dr. Shahristani had refused that offer, and instead requested to become the Foreign Minister. Also on 10 Sep, Abadi visited Shahristani and "urged Shahristani to participate in the next government to bring success to it."

16 Sep 2014: Iraqi Parliament Rejects 3 of 4 Nominees

At 15:04 Baghdad time, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament had *rejected* the nominees for Defense Minister and Interior Minister. The Iraqi news source did not report how many members of Parliament attended the session. However, the [Associated Press](#) reported a total of 235 votes cast for/against the nominee for Interior Minister and 239 votes cast for/against the nominee for Defense Minister. Using the 239 total gives 73% attendance.

At 15:37, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament approved the nominee for Minister of Water Resources.

At 15:45, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament rejected the nominee for Ministry of Tourism.

At 16:13, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament adjourned until 18 Sep. They did not report when Parliament began its session, so I am unable to say how long Parliament worked today.

At 16:48, [All Iraq News](#) reported Abadi refused to set a time limit for nominating new candidates for Defense Minister and Interior Minister.

My comments: The current method of assigning each Minister nomination to one political bloc *may* provide a more inclusive cabinet, but it is *not* a good recipe for selecting competent and experienced Ministers. Today's rejection of 3 of 4 nominees shows that the Iraqi Parliament is still unable to form a government, now six days *after* the 10 Sep deadline.

18 Sep 2014: Parliament meets

At 11:18 Baghdad time on 18 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reported that the Iraqi National Alliance bloc had decided to postpone the confirmation of Defense Minister and Interior Minister until 2 Oct, to give Abadi time to find qualified candidates.

At 12:15, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament convened with 219 members (67%) present.

At 16:24, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Parliament adjourned until 20 Sep.

20 Sep 2014: Parliament meets

At 12:43 Baghdad time on 20 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 214 members (65%) present.

At 18:18, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 22 Sep.

22 Sep 2014: Parliament meets

At 12:20 Baghdad time on 22 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 223 members (68%) present.

At 14:33, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 25 Sep.

24 Sep 2014: Parliament meets

At 15:53 Baghdad time on 24 Sep, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with "more than 200" members present.

At 17:23, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until "after Eid al-Adha." (after 5 Oct)

Daily News About Iraq & Syria

1 Sep 2014

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) released the casualty figures for Iraq during August: "A total of at least 1420 Iraqis were killed ... in acts of terrorism and violence in August", excluding Anbar province. The 1420 dead included 1265 civilians and 155 Iraqi security forces. An additional 268 dead were reported in Anbar province. [UNAMI](#).

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of monthly death tolls announced by UNAMI in 2014.

2 Sep 2014

2 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 15 mentions of "Syria" and 18 mentions of "Iraq". The previous press briefing was 28 Aug, five days ago, owing to no briefings on Fridays in August and no briefing on Labor Day (1 Sep). The video of the beheading of Sotloff became available only a half-hour before the press briefing, and the video had not yet been authenticated.

QUESTION: Does the Obama Administration consider [the beheading of Sotloff] an act of war?

MS. PSAKI: We certainly — I'm not going to put new labels on it, James. I would say

we certainly consider this act, this reported act, the act of the killing of James Foley, as a horrific terrorist act that we certainly have — has helped — has not helped to, I should say — has been one of the motivating factors in the effort to undergo the creation of international coalition to address this threat.

QUESTION: So now we have on the books two American journalists beheaded by this group. Is there any doubt on your part or the part of this Administration that, in fact, the United States is at war with ISIS?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think I want to be very careful here, just that we have not confirmed through the proper processes. And I just need to restate that as a U.S. — speaking on behalf of the U.S. Government. I know that wasn't your intention.

I'm not going to, again, put new labels on it. I think it's clear that we are concerned about the threat of ISIL to Western interests, to interests in the region. That's why the Secretary, the President, Secretary Hagel are all going to be working every contact they have to continue to build a coalition to address this threat.

....

QUESTION: Can I just ask one more thing about the Administration's broader thinking on ISIL/ISIS in that is it still the Administration's position that it is President Assad who is to blame for the growth of this group and its mushrooming?

MS. PSAKI: In Syria, yes, that he's been a magnet for terrorism. That certainly has not changed in our view.

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

My comments: According to the U.S. Constitution, only Congress can declare war, *not* the State Department. In 1898, journalists pushed the USA into a war with Spain, over published statements about Spain allegedly attacking a U.S. Navy ship that exploded in the Havana Cuba harbor. Now, 116 years later, journalists are still trying to push the USA into wars.

I do not understand this propaganda about Assad allegedly being a "magnet" for terrorism. When Assad attempted to put down an insurrection against his lawful government, jihadists and terrorists did appear in Syria, some of whom travelled from foreign nations into Syria. Suppose Assad had resigned in late 2011, and let the rebels control the government of Syria. The resulting lack of a strong, experienced, decisive government would have created an environment for anarchy and terrorism — as seen in Iraq after Saddam Hussein, and in Libya after Gaddafi. So, even if Assad had resigned in 2011, ISIL might have come to Syria in 2012 or 2013. And, regardless of the presence or absence of Assad, ISIL might want to establish a caliphate in Syria.

3 Sep 2014

3 Sep: Press Conference by Obama

On 3 Sep, Obama gave a press conference in Estonia.

QUESTION [by Ann Compton]: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Now that you say a second American has been slain, what is your response? Will airstrikes continue inside Iraq? Might they expand into Syria? Will you have a full strategy now on ISIS which will satisfy those like Prime Minister Cameron, who call it an imminent threat to all the interests? And will it satisfy some of your supporters like Senator Feinstein who fears that on this you may have been too cautious? Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, keep in mind that from the outset, the moment that ISIS went into Mosul, we were very clear that this was a very serious threat not just to Iraq but to the region and to U.S. interests. And so we've been putting forward a strategy since that time that was designed to do a number of things. Number one, to make sure that Americans were protected in Iraq, in our embassies, in our consulates. Number two, that we worked with Iraqis to create a functioning government that was inclusive and that could serve as the basis for Iraq to begin to go on the offensive.

And the airstrikes that we've conducted in support of protecting Americans conducting humanitarian missions and providing space for the Iraqi government to form have borne fruit. We've seen that in Sinjar Mountain. We've seen it most recently in the town of Amerli, which heroically held out against a siege by ISIL. We're seeing progress in the formation of an inclusive Sunni-Shia-Kurd central government. And so what we've seen is the strategy that we've laid out moving effectively.

But what I've said from the start is, is that this is not going to be a one-week or one-month or six-month proposition. Because of what's happened in the vacuum of Syria, as well as the battle-hardened elements of ISIS that grew out of al Qaeda in Iraq during the course of the Iraq war, it's going to take time for us to be able to **roll them back**. [Emphasis added by Standler.] And it is going to take time for us to be able to form the regional coalition that's going to be required so that we can reach out to Sunni tribes in some of the areas that ISIS has occupied, and make sure that we have allies on the ground in combination with the airstrikes that we've already conducted.

So the bottom line is this: **Our objective is clear, and that is to degrade and destroy ISIL** [Emphasis added by Standler.] so that it's no longer a threat not just to Iraq but also the region and to the United States. In order for us to accomplish that, the first phase has been to make sure that we've got an Iraqi government that's in place and that we are blunting the momentum that ISIL was carrying out. And the airstrikes have done that.

But now what we need to do is make sure that we've got the regional strategy in place that can support an ongoing effort — not just in the air but on the ground — to move that forward.

And last week when this question was asked, I was specifically referring to the possibility of the military strategy inside of Syria that might require congressional approval. It is very important from my perspective that when we send our pilots in to do a job, that we know that this is a mission that's going to work, that we're very clear

on what our objectives are, what our targets are; we've made the case to Congress and we've made the case to the American people; and we've got allies behind us so that it's not just a one-off, but it's something that over time is going to be effective.

And so the bottom line is this, Ann — it's not only that we're going to be bringing to justice those who perpetrated this terrible crime against these two fine young men. More broadly, the United States will continue to lead a regional and international effort against the kind of barbaric and ultimately empty vision that ISIL represents. And that's going to take some time, but we're going to get it done. I'm very confident of it.

QUESTION: Did you just say that the strategy is to destroy ISIS, or to simply contain them or push them back?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Our objective is to make sure that ISIL is not an ongoing threat to the region. And we can accomplish that. It's going to take some time and it's going to take some effort. As we've seen with al Qaeda, there are always going to be remnants that can cause havoc of any of these networks, in part because of the nature of terrorist activities. You get a few individuals, and they may be able to carry out a terrorist act.

But what we can do is to make sure that the kind of systemic and broad-based aggression that we've seen out of ISIL that terrorizes primarily Muslims, Shia, Sunni — terrorizes Kurds, terrorizes not just Iraqis, but people throughout the region, that that is **degraded** [Emphasis added by Standler.] to the point where it is no longer the kind of factor that we've seen it being over the last several months.

....

And to go back to what I said earlier to Ann, we know that if we are joined by the international community, we can continue to **shrink** ISIL's sphere of influence, its effectiveness, its financing, its military capabilities to the point where **it is a manageable problem**. [Emphasis added by Standler.] And the question is going to be making sure we've got the right strategy, but also making sure that we've got the international will to do it. This is something that is a continuation of a problem we've seen certainly since 9/11, but before. And it continues to metastasize in different ways.

"Remarks by President Obama and President Ilves of Estonia in Joint Press Conference," [White House](#) 3 Sep 2014.

My comments: Obama says: "Because of what's happened in the vacuum of Syria, ... it's going to take time for us to be able to roll [ISIS] back." This is another example of Obama blaming Assad for ISIL. There is *no* "vacuum" in Syria. The Syrian government — unlike the Iraqi so-called government — is strong and decisive. As I have said before, Assad made a tactical decision to concentrate his military in heavily populated western Syria, and to ignore ISIL in northern and eastern Syria.

A better example of "vacuum" is in Iraq, where ISIL invaded in January 2014, and the Iraqi army repeatedly failed to engage ISIL in combat, which allowed ISIL to capture about 1/3 of Iraq by the end of June 2014.

Obama says: "Our objective is clear, and that is to degrade and destroy ISIL" At his press conference on 28 Aug 2014, Obama said his objective was to "degrade" ISIL. That was in contrast to the Pentagon was talking about "destroying" ISIL. It appeared that there might be a discrepancy, and, of course, the president's policy would prevail. It may be that Obama is a bit put off by military terms like "destroy", "annihilate", or "exterminate". When specifically asked on 3 Sep to clarify about "degrade" vs. "destroy", Obama chose to retreat to "degrade". Obama is being inconsistent in expressing his goal. Elsewhere in his speech, Obama mentions "roll back" ISIL to where it was at an earlier point in time, and "shrink" ISIL until "it is a manageable problem".

Obama lamely explains: "there are always going to be remnants" of terrorist organizations, and Obama seems to accept that it is impossible to completely destroy ISIL. On the other hand, when one looks at the history of evil organizations (e.g., Nazis, Mafia), if one can kill or imprison the leadership, seize the assets and equipment of the group, then the individual members rarely commit murder. The evil organizations are dangerous only when the organization is functioning. The organization gives the members not only resources, but also direction and courage to undertake evil acts. As a practical matter, it may not be necessary to kill *every* member of ISIL, if we can destroy *all* of the leaders of ISIL and seize (or destroy) the assets of ISIL.

Obama was educated as an attorney, and Obama never served in the military. It might be expected that Obama is more focused on arresting bad people and then trying them in criminal court, instead of annihilating them on the battlefield. And so it is no surprise when Obama says: "we're going to be bringing to justice those who perpetrated this terrible crime against these two fine young men [Foley and Sotloff]." Additionally, note that Obama was asked policy questions about ISIL, and suddenly Obama shifted focus from *many* atrocities by ISIL, to the killing of *two* Americans.

3 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 36 mentions of "Syria" and 14 mentions of "Iraq".

QUESTION: And to touch on Matt's question yesterday about Syria, what is it that the United States is hoping that the coalition can actually do in Syria given that ISIL doesn't respect the border between Syria and Iraq?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think the President and the Administration has also been clear that **we're not going to be limited by geography**. [Emphasis added by Standler.] Obviously, there are a range of decisions and discussions that are ongoing — or decisions that are ongoing in the Administration, I should say, and decisions that still need to be made. But I'm not going to get into specifics other than to convey that there are a range of ways to take on the threat. There are certainly military steps that can be taken. There are also financial targeting. There's also efforts to fund engagements that we may be participating in. There also is humanitarian assistance.

....

QUESTION: Can we move more broadly to the U.S. approach to ISIS and the President's comments this morning? In just the one appearance in Estonia, the President iterated three times the mission against ISIS, and in all three iterations it seems strikingly different. At one time he spoke about wanting to destroy and degrade ISIS. At another point he spoke about wanting to roll them back. And at still another point he talked about wanting to shrink its sphere of influence to the point where it would be a manageable problem.

Am I correct in identifying those three iterations as markedly different from each other?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it's important for everybody, including people at home who watch Fox, to look at the context of the remarks that the President made. Certainly, **our objective here is to degrade and destroy ISIL**. [Emphasis added by Standler.] I think the President also said that that's going to require an ongoing effort, that what we want to see is preventing this group from destroying — or being an ongoing threat to the region.

....

QUESTION: I wasn't asking you about what was escaping the lips of the White House press corps in Estonia. I was asking you about the pronouncements of the President of the United States. And I think you would agree that it is very important, especially in a situation like this, that the President speak with clarity so that the American people at home and people around the world, not least of all the members of ISIS, understand him.

So when he speaks about making something a manageable problem but also speaks about destroying something, can you understand why people might be confused about that and regard it as mixed messaging?

MS. PSAKI: Well, James, with all due respect, I know there sometimes is a desire to twist words or take things out of context, but I think there should be no question that **the President's desire is to degrade and destroy ISIS**. [Emphasis added by Standler.] He has taken action to do that. I think actions are an important factor, not just a word game of what you think it means. He has been clear he wants to build an international coalition. That's not going to be overnight. We need capabilities from many countries. And I think his actions tell you what you need to know about his commitment to doing this.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 3 Sep 2014.

My comments: The "not being limited by geography" was an idea floated by Ben Rhodes on 21-22 Aug. It now seems to be official U.S. Government policy.

Above, I quoted and discussed Obama's inconsistent goals about "degrade and destroy" ISIL vs. "degrade" ISIL. Ms. Psaki bravely refused to admit that Obama was inconsistent in stating

his goals, but the record is clear that Obama is inconsistent. Sometimes journalists twist words, but *not* this time. The Secretary of Defense, speaking at the Naval War College, *five times* [stated](#) Obama's goal is "to degrade and destroy the capability of ISIL." But notice that Hagel said Obama wanted to destroy the "capability" of ISIL, but apparently *not* destroy ISIL itself. I ask rhetorically, what is so difficult about clearly stating that the USA wants to annihilate ISIL, by exterminating its leaders and by seizing or destroying the assets of ISIL?

4 September 2014

4 Sep: Cameron

On the morning of 4 Sep, *The Guardian* mentioned a speech by the United Kingdom prime minister at a NATO conference:

David Cameron has for the first time opened a legal path to strike Islamic State (Isis) inside Syria by saying Bashar al-Assad's government is illegitimate.

He suggested the west would not need an invitation from Assad under international law to strike at Isis within Syrian borders.

Speaking at the start of the Nato summit in Wales, Cameron ramped up the imminent case for UK involvement in air strikes in Iraq, saying that Isis represented a direct threat to the UK — and that decisions on strikes would be taken if they were in the national interest.

....

Asked if he thought the west should cooperate with Assad in Syria so as to attack the headquarters of Isis inside Syria's borders, Cameron argued: "President Assad is part of the problem, not part of the solution."

....

Asked if he needed to make a pragmatic deal with Assad in face of the greater Isis threat he said "in the past just simply saying 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' has led to all sorts of moral quagmires and difficulties. Assad has been part of the creation of Islamic State rather than being part of its answer."

In terms of the legalities of air strikes and the need to be invited by a sovereign country to make such strikes he said "the Iraqi government was legitimate", but in Syria: "President Assad has committed war crimes on his own people and is therefore illegitimate. We would not do anything without moral or legal justification."

Patrick Wintour, "UK could launch strikes against Isis in Syria without Assad's support, says PM," [Guardian](#), 08:46 GMT, 4 Sep 2014.

My comments: Conducting military acts inside a nation's borders without permission from the lawful government of that nation is at least reckless. Without permission and cooperation,

there is no sharing of information, and a risk of Syria's military striking a coalition aircraft.

By ostracizing Assad, we make it more difficult to defeat ISIL.

International law is an esoteric subject, and there are only a few specialists in international law, who are mostly employed by governments or international organizations (e.g., United Nations). Ordinary law is created by legislatures and approved by a president or governor. International law is created by treaties signed by many nations. I am *not* familiar with international law, but it seems like a bad idea when a leader of an aggressor nation (e.g., Hitler) invades a sovereign nation (e.g., Poland or Czechoslovakia). Uninvited military forces crossing a border is the traditional way to begin a war.

Just because Obama and Cameron believe Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of Syria should *not* imply that the USA and U.K. can legally invade Syria. That gives too much power to Obama and Cameron, and too little respect to Assad's government.

4 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 11 mentions of "Syria" and 7 mentions of "Iraq".

QUESTION: Two days ago I asked Jen Psaki in the briefing whether she could assure the American people that the President, however he defines his mission against ISIS, would complete that mission before he leaves office. And at the time, Ms. Psaki replied to the effect that she was not going to place a deadline or a timeframe on it.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Since then, the deputy national security adviser at the White House, Tony Blinken, has appeared on CNN and stated, and I quote, "It's going to take time and it will probably go beyond even this Administration to get to the point of defeat."

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: So now the Administration has placed some kind of timeframe on this.

MS. HARF: Well, we've always said it would be a long fight. I think those comments are all consistent.

QUESTION: So perhaps you could explain why this President, when he has about two and a half years left on his term, a little less than that, feels he cannot complete this mission?

MS. HARF: Well, let's talk about what this mission means, because I think that's a catchphrase, and let's talk about what it means to degrade, disrupt, and ultimately defeat a terrorist organization. And we can look at some examples from recent history. We have to, I think, step back here.

Obviously, we can never kill or capture every terrorist in the world. That's not how this ends. We've been clear about that. What we can do is take the fight to them, take their leaders off the battlefield, cut off their funding, build partner networks on the ground, as you've seen us do in places like Pakistan and Yemen. Just this week taking a strike, the U.S. military did, in Somalia against a high-value al-Shabaab target there. So we can take away their capability to attack the United States and significantly degrade that. If you look at the fight — taking al-Qaida senior leadership, for example — that fight has gone on for many, many years, started before this Administration, has carried over into this Administration, and we have continued that fight to the point where al-Qaida senior leadership does not have the capabilities they had on 9/11, they had the year we came into office, and that they will have — that they've had even up until a year or so ago.

So we have consistently worked at this problem, taking their leaders off the battlefield, cutting off their financing, degrading their capabilities to the point where they cannot carry out the kind of attacks against the homeland that they would like to. That's how you fight terrorist organizations. "Completing the mission" is a term — I don't even know what that means when you're talking about terrorist organizations. What we think it means is taking away their ability to attack the homeland and to threaten our interest. You've seen us do that other places, we're doing it right now around the world; again, just this week taking a shot against an al-Shabaab leader, and we will continue doing it.

The conversations that are ongoing right now are how we do this long-term against ISIS. Those are the conversations happening in NATO with our partners; they're happening in the Secretary's onward travel. We have to look at this in a nuanced way about how you fight terrorists, and it doesn't always fall into a nice little buzzword as you used in your question.

QUESTION: What was the [buzzword ?]

MS. HARP: "Complete the mission."

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

I found the CNN news item cited in the Press Briefing:

The extremist group ISIS "probably" won't be defeated under the current Obama administration, Deputy National Security Adviser Tony Blinken told CNN's Wolf Blitzer on Wednesday [3 Sep].

"This, as the President has said, is going to have to be a sustained effort," Blinken said.

"It's going to take time, and it will probably go beyond even this administration to get to the point of defeat."

"Defeat of ISIS called unlikely on Obama watch," [CNN](#), 23:08 EDT, 3 Sep 2014.

On 3 July, General Dempsey said: "we're stuck with [the threat of Islamic extremists] for the foreseeable future, a generation or two."

5 September 2014

On 5 Sep 2014, the Associated Press reported:

America's top diplomatic and defense leaders pressed a core coalition of 10 nations to summon the willpower to go after the Islamic State group in Iraq militarily and financially, and said they must build a plan by the time the U.N. General Assembly meets in about two weeks.

In a private meeting with the foreign and defense ministers from the United Kingdom, France, Australia and six other nations [Germany, Canada, Turkey, Italy, Poland and Denmark], Secretary of State John Kerry said leaders need a clear strategy and a solid idea about what each country will contribute to the fight. And, while noting that many won't be willing to engage in military strikes, he said they can instead provide intelligence, equipment, ammunition or weapons.

....

The session ... focused on the Islamic State group in Iraq, but Kerry said there are obviously "implications about Syria in this" and suggested they could discuss that later in the day.

Lolita C. Baldor, "Kerry, Hagel Urge Coalition Against Islamic State," [Associated Press](#), 11:11 GMT, 5 September 2014.

My comments: Obama, Kerry, and Hagel have not make a clear statement of Obama's goals (i.e., degrade vs. destroy), and now Kerry wants a group of ten nations to develop "a clear strategy and a solid idea" in less than two weeks!

Why begin with a core group of nations in Western Europe, Canada, and Australia? Turkey is the *only* NATO nation with a Muslim majority population. Turkey is also in a dilemma, because on 11 June, ISIL kidnapped 49 Turkish citizens from a consulate in Mosul, and Turkey does not want to provoke ISIL to execute those kidnapped diplomats and soldiers. See, e.g., [Reuters](#).

NATO is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, formed to protect Western Europe, Canada, and the USA from aggression by the USSR. ISIL poses a future hazard to these member nations — from former ISIL fighters returning from Syria to England, France, etc.; as well as by acts of ISIL itself.

I suggest that it would be more logical to begin building a coalition with the nations near Iraq or Syria (e.g., Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, Qatar, UAE) who are more threatened by ISIL.

If the coalition would partner with Assad in Syria, there would be a better chance of really destroying ISIL. Assad is already involved in a fight against ISIL, so we should cooperate with Assad, because:

1. we need Assad's permission for airstrikes inside Syria,

2. Assad's army would be the best ground force for annihilating ISIL in Syria,
3. Assad already has an extensive intelligence network on the ground in Syria, unlike the USA.

However, because of Obama's continuing obsession with deposing Assad, we will ostracize Assad and thereby weaken our fight against ISIL.

5 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 17 mentions of "Syria" and 16 mentions of "Iraq". Russian aggression against Ukraine was again the big topic at the State Department.

QUESTION: And do you expect [the coalition] to — you mentioned various different things, but do you expect it to be primarily militarily?

MS. HARF: I wouldn't say that. I think we're looking right now at all the different ways. I mean, if you look at a terrorist organization — and I think the President outlined this in a good way today how you begin to degrade and ultimately defeat a terrorist organization. You first push them back from territory, right? That's partly military, in large part military. Also, working with partners on the ground, you systematically degrade their capabilities. Part of that is financing and fighting the foreign fighter network. You narrow the scope of their action, you shrink their territory, you take out their leadership. Again, some of that is military, some of that can be intelligence and law enforcement. And then over time, they aren't able to as significantly plan attacks or threaten U.S. homeland or U.S. interests.

Obviously, there will always be people who are terrorists in the world; we can't kill or capture all of them. And as the President said, we will continue to hunt them down where they operate, where they plan, and go after them.

But that's how you take the fight — as we've done in Pakistan, as we've done in Yemen, as we've done in Somalia. If you saw today, we confirmed the U.S. military strike did kill the leader of al-Shabaab. These are all tools, and we need all of those tools — not just military — to go after this fight.

QUESTION: So you want to hunt them down where they operate, but of course, they operate not just in Iraq, but also in Syria.

MS. HARF: Absolutely.

QUESTION: So does that mean that you're anticipating operations within Syria?

MS. HARF: We're looking at a number of options right now. Decisions have not been made about what that might look like, but we know, obviously, that this is a — we will not stop, as we've said it, at geographical borders in trying to take the fight to ISIS.

....

MS. HARF: Well, we're not going to coordinate military action or share intelligence with Iran. We have no plans to do so.

QUESTION: There have been numerous reports over the last 36 hours about the U.S. and Iran —

MS. HARF: And that's why I was very clear: We do not coordinate military action or share intelligence with Iran, and have no plans to do so.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 5 Sep 2014.

5 Sep: Obama Speech

At the NATO summit in Wales, Obama gave a brief speech followed by a press conference. I have boldfaced some phrases that are significant.

OBAMA: I also leave here confident that NATO Allies and partners are prepared to join in a broad, international effort to combat the threat posed by ISIL. Already, Allies have joined us in Iraq, where we have stopped ISIL's advances; we've equipped our Iraqi partners, and helped them go on offense. NATO has agreed to play a role in providing security and humanitarian assistance to those who are on the front lines. Key NATO Allies stand ready to confront this terrorist threat through military, intelligence and law enforcement, as well as diplomatic efforts. And Secretary Kerry will now travel to the region to continue building the broad-based coalition that will enable us to **degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL**. [Emphasis added by Standler.]

....

QUESTION [by Angela Keane, Bloomberg News]: Thank you, Mr. President. What are your specific expectations for what regional actors like Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Jordan can legitimately provide to a coalition against Islamic State? Is there a role there for Iran, as well? As you know, Secretary Kerry today said that he expects the Allied countries to coalesce around a specific plan by the end of September. Do you agree with the timeline that he set out? And what concrete commitments, if any, are you leaving this summit with from the other nations that were here?

OBAMA: Let me start with a general point. There was unanimity over the last two days that ISIL poses a significant threat to NATO members. And there was a recognition that we have to take action. I did not get any resistance or pushback to the basic notion that we have a critical role to play in **rolling back** this savage organization that is causing so much chaos in the region and is harming so many people, and poses a long-term threat to the safety and security of NATO members. So there's great conviction that we have to act as part of the international community **to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL**. And that was extremely encouraging.

Beyond that, what we have already seen is significant support from a variety of member states for specific actions that we've been taking in Iraq. Keep in mind, we've

taken already 100 strikes in Iraq that have had a significant impact on degrading their capabilities, and making sure that we're protecting U.S. citizens, **critical infrastructure**, providing the space for the Iraqi government to form. Our hope is that the Iraqi government is actually formed and finalized next week. That, then, allows us to work with them on a broader strategy.

And some of the assistance has been in the form of airlift or humanitarian assistance. Much of it has been providing additional arms to the Peshmerga and the Iraqi Security Forces. There's been logistical support, intelligence and surveillance and reconnaissance support. And so a variety of folks with different capabilities have already made a contribution. I'm confident that we're going to be able to build on that strong foundation and the clear commitment, and have the kind of coalition that will be required for the sustained effort we need **to push ISIL back**.

Now, John Kerry is going to be traveling to the region to have further consultations with the regional actors and the regional players. And I think it is absolutely critical that we have Arab states, and specifically Sunni majority states, that are rejecting the kind of extremist nihilism that we're seeing out of ISIL that say that is not what Islam is about, and are prepared to join us actively in the fight. And my expectation is, is that we will see friends and allies and partners of ours in the region prepared to take action, as well, as part of a coalition.

One of our tasks, though, is also going to be to build capability. What we've learned in Iraq is, yes, ISIL has significant capabilities, and they combine terrorist tactics with traditional military tactics to significant effect, but part of the problem also is, is that we haven't seen as effective a fighting force on the part of the Iraqi Security Forces as we need. And we're going to have to focus on the capable units that are already there, bolster them, bolster the work that the Peshmerga has done. We can support them from the air, but ultimately we're going to need a strong ground game, and we're also going to need the Sunni tribes in many of these areas to recognize that their future is not with the kind of fanaticism that ISIL represents so that they start taking the fight to ISIL, as well. And that's going to require the sort of regional partnerships that we're talking about.

In terms of timetable, we are working deliberately. If you look at what we've done over the last several months, we've taken this in stages. The first stage is to make sure that we were encouraging Iraqi government formation. Second stage was making sure that, building on the intelligence assessments that we have done, that we were in a position to conduct limited airstrikes to protect our personnel, **critical infrastructure** and engage in humanitarian activities.

The third phase will allow us to take the fight to ISIL, broaden the effort. And our goal is to act with urgency, but also to make sure that we're doing it right — that we have the right targets; that there's support on the ground if we take an airstrike; that we have a strong political coalition, diplomatic effort that is matching it; a strong strategic communications effort so that we are discouraging people from thinking somehow that ISIL represents a state, much less a caliphate. So all those things are going to have to

be combined.

And as I said, it's not going to happen overnight, but we are steadily moving in the right direction. And we are going to achieve our goal. **We are going to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL**, the same way that we have gone after al Qaeda, and the same way that we have gone after the al Qaeda affiliate in Somalia where we released today the fact that we had killed the leader of al-Shabaab in Somalia, and have consistently worked to degrade their operations.

We have been very systematic and methodical in going after these kinds of organizations that may threaten U.S. personnel and the homeland. And that deliberation allows us to do it right. But have no doubt, we will continue and I will continue to do what is necessary to protect the American people. And ISIL poses a real threat, and I'm encouraged by the fact that our friends and allies recognize that same threat.

QUESTION [by Julie Davis]: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to follow up on what you were saying about ISIL and ask, if you think that the objective here is to destroy and degrade them, are those the same thing in your mind? Is the goal to ultimately — Secretary Kerry said that there's no containing them, so is the goal to ultimately annihilate them? And also, you talked about the importance of expertise on the ground and building up capacity on the ground. Do you think since airstrikes are not going to do it here, if ultimately action is needed in Syria, can you realistically expect the Free Syrian Army to do what's needed on the ground to really destroy, not just push back, ISIL?

OBAMA: You can't contain an organization that is running roughshod through that much territory, causing that much havoc, displacing that many people, killing that many innocents, enslaving that many women. **The goal has to be to dismantle them.**

And if you look at what happened with al Qaeda in the FATA [Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan], where their primary base was, you initially push them back. You systematically degrade their capabilities. You narrow their scope of action. You slowly shrink the space, the territory that they may control. You take out their leadership. And over time, they are not able to conduct the same kinds of terrorist attacks as they once could.

....

With respect to the situation on the ground in Syria, we will not be placing U.S. ground troops to try to control the areas that are part of the conflict inside of Syria. I don't think that's necessary for us to accomplish our goal. We are going to have to find effective partners on the ground to push back against ISIL. And the moderate coalition there is one that we can work with. We have experience working with many of them. They have been, to some degree, outgunned and outmanned, and that's why it's important for us to work with our friends and allies to support them more effectively.

Obama, "Remarks by President Obama at NATO Summit Press Conference," [White House](#), 15:50 GMT, 5 Sep 2014. (All boldface added by Standler.)

My comments: Notice that Obama is becoming more consistent about his goals (degrade and destroy), but he still makes inconsistent statements.

Notice that Julie Davis asked Obama "... can you realistically expect the Free Syrian Army to do what's needed on the ground to really destroy, not just push back, ISIL?" But Obama did *not* answer her question. Instead, Obama said: "And the moderate coalition [in Syria] is one that we can work with." Actually, Obama refuses to work with Assad, the jihadists (Islamic Front), Al-Qaeda (Nusra Front), leaving Obama with a choice of one, the Free Syrian Army. As I have said previously in these essays, Obama should cooperate with Assad. The Free Syrian Army is poorly equipped, disorganized, and ineffective — making the FSA the worst choice amongst the possibilities. Any equipment that we give to the FSA is likely to be captured by either the jihadists, Al-Qaeda, or ISIL. Then Obama admits that the FSA is "outgunned", but that is because Obama himself — against the recommendations of Ambassador Ford and Hillary Clinton (see my [eighth essay](#) on Syria) — failed to adequately support the FSA in 2011-2012.

Note that Obama twice says his goal is that airstrikes will "protect critical infrastructure". That was *not* in his initial criteria on 7 August. After the airstrikes at Mosul Dam began, Central Command inserted "protect critical infrastructure" as one reason for airstrikes during 17-30 Aug. On 31 Aug, Central Command mysteriously stopped including "protect critical infrastructure", although that phrase occurred in a 28 Aug speech by Obama.

5 Sep: Kerry Speech

Early on 5 Sep, before the meeting with ministers of nine other nations, Kerry said:

Contrary to what you sort of heard in the politics of our country, the President is totally committed; there is a strategy that is clear, becoming more clear by the day. And it really relies on a holistic approach to ISIL. That is to say that we need to do kinetic, we need to attack them in ways that prevent them from taking over territory, that bolster the Iraqi security forces, others in the region who are prepared to take them on, without committing troops of our own, obviously. I think that's a redline for everybody here, no boots on the ground. Nevertheless, there are many ways in which we can train, advise, assist, and equip. There are kinetic operations we can run in direct support of Iraqi security forces.

....

There is no contain policy for ISIL. They're an ambitious, avowed genocidal, territorial-grabbing, Caliphate-desiring, quasi state within a regular army. And leaving them in some capacity intact anywhere would leave a cancer in place that will ultimately come back to haunt us.

John Kerry, "Remarks at Top of Meeting on Building an Anti-ISIL Coalition Co-Chaired by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, U.K. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, and U.K. Defense Secretary Michael Fallon," [State Dept.](#), 5 Sep 2014.

My comments: In his first paragraph quoted above, Kerry says Obama has a "holistic approach to ISIL". What exactly does that mean? Sounds like meaningless blather to me.

Holistic correctly means treating the whole problem, instead of just a part of the problem. In this context, it could mean:

- using bombs to blow ISIL terrorists into tiny chunks,
- attacking ISIL with propaganda and satire on social media, to degrade recruiting by ISIL
- having Islamic clerics repeatedly explain why ISIL is unIslamic,
- interrupting ISIL's financial transactions,
- halting flow of munitions to ISIL,
- preventing foreigners from traveling to Syria/Iraq to join ISIL,

But that is *not* how Kerry explains "holistic" in his next sentence.

In his next sentence after "holistic", quoted above, Kerry says "we need to do kinetic". Kinetic is an adjective, and it needs a noun to modify. Kinetic is properly used in physics to indicate "kinetic energy", energy of a mass arising from its motion, as opposed to other kinds of energy (e.g., potential energy). Kerry really needs to trash "kinetic" and plainly say what he means (e.g., bomb and strafe ISIL so their blood stains the desert for one hundred years).

In his second paragraph quoted above, Kerry's long string of pejoratives (i.e., "ambitious, avowed genocidal, territorial-grabbing, Caliphate-desiring, ...") is excessive, and makes his rhetoric into amateurish propaganda. At this time, *everyone* agrees that ISIL is bad, the question is what to do about the ISIL problem. Kerry's rhetoric should focus on what to do about the ISIL problem.

The New York Times summarized:

The Obama administration said Friday [5 Sep] that it had formed a coalition of countries to counter the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, unveiling a military and political campaign that officials said could eventually serve as a model for fighting extremist groups around the world.

....

But [Kerry] and other officials made clear that at the moment, any ground combat troops would come from either Iraqi security forces and Kurdish fighters in Iraq, or moderate Syrian rebels opposed to the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria. "Obviously I think that's a red line for everybody here: no boots on the ground," Mr. Kerry said.

Helene Cooper, "At Summit, U.S. and Allies Form Coalition Against ISIS," [NY Times](#), 5 Sep 2014.

Also see [Washington Post](#): "President Obama said Friday that a new NATO-directed coalition could reach out to some Syrian rebels as possible proxy fighters in a sharply expanded push to battle Islamic State militants."

6 September 2014

On 6 Sep 2014, the head of the Associated Press bureau in Lebanon wrote a thoughtful analysis:

The U.S. and its allies are trying to hammer out a coalition to push back the Islamic State group in Iraq. But any serious attempt to destroy the militants or even seriously degrade their capabilities means targeting their infrastructure in Syria.

That, however, is far more complicated. If it launches airstrikes against the group in Syria, the U.S. runs the risk of unintentionally strengthening the hand of President Bashar Assad, whose removal the West has actively sought the past three years. Uprooting the Islamic State group, which has seized roughly a third of Syria and Iraq, may potentially open the way for the Syrian army to fill the vacuum.

The alternative would be to finally get serious about arming the mainstream Western-backed rebels fighting to topple Assad. But there is a reason the administration of President Barack Obama has been deeply reluctant to throw its weight behind them.

The relatively moderate rebel factions fighting in Syria are in tatters. There are no secular groups, and the strongest factions are Islamic groups, many of which work with al-Qaida's official branch in Syria, the Nusra Front.

The Nusra Front, which has somewhat dropped from international headlines because of the Islamic State group's exceeding brutality, is on the U.S. list of terrorist groups and is still very active.

....

[Obama's] statement ["we don't have a strategy yet"] epitomizes the caution that many say has been at the heart of U.S. foreign policy on Syria the past three years. For better or for worse, Obama has avoided wading into the Syria mud, resisting pressure to directly arm the rebels in part because of fears the weapons would only end up in extremists' hands.

Zeina Karam, "AP Analysis: US Wary Over Hitting Syrian Militants," [Associated Press](#), 06:01 GMT, 6 September 2014.

An earlier version is posted at [Fox News](#).

6 Sep: Dr. Kissinger

Dr. Kissinger — former professor at Harvard University and former U.S. Secretary of State (1973-77) — gave an interview to Scott Simon of National Public Radio:

SIMON: Kissinger said that in all the crises roiling the world, the U.S. shouldn't lose focus on Iran.

HENRY KISSINGER: [They] have come into being a kind of a Shia-belt from Tehran through Baghdad to Beirut. And this gives Iran the opportunity to reconstruct the ancient Persian Empire, this time under a Shia label. From a geo-strategic point of view, I consider Iran a bigger problem than ISIS. ISIS is a group of adventurers with a

very aggressive ideology. But they have to conquer more and more territory before they can become a geo-strategic, permanent reality. I think a conflict with ISIS — important as it is — is more manageable than a confrontation with Iran.

SIMON: What would you do about ISIS?

KISSINGER: They have cut the throat of an American on television. This is an insult to the United States, which requires that we demonstrate that this is not an act that is free. I would strongly favor a strong attack on ISIS for a period that is related to the murder of the American. Then, we have to go into the long-range problem. I think when we're dealing with a unit like ISIS, we should not get into a position where they can lead us by establishing ground forces. But we should set strategic objectives where we thwart any goal they set themselves, which we should be able to do by superior air power. And then if we can enlist other countries or other more local groups to do the ground fighting, we might actually destroy them.

"Henry Kissinger's Thoughts On The Islamic State, Ukraine And 'World Order'," [transcript](#), 6 Sep 2014.

[NPR](#) news story.

My comment: It is true that both Iraq and Iran have a Shiite majority, but these two nations have different languages: Iran speaks Farsi, while Iraq speaks Arabic. So I am not worried about a "Shia-belt" from Damascus to Tehran. The Shiites are in the minority in Syria. If we wanted to reduce Iran's influence in Syria, we could provide military supplies to Assad's government, to make Assad less dependent on Iran.

7 September 2014

7 Sep: Arab League

On 7 Sep 2014, the Associated Press reported the head of the Arab League endorsed the fight against ISIL:

Arab League chief Nabil Elaraby said that what is needed from Arab countries is a "clear and firm decision for a comprehensive confrontation" with "cancerous and terrorist" groups. The Arab League includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates [and 16 other nations].

....

[Elaraby] called the Islamic State a threat to the existence of Iraq and its neighbors. It is "one of the examples of the challenges that are violently shaking the Arab world, and one the Arab League, regrettably, has not been able to confront," he said.

Sarah El Deeb & Sameer N. Yacoub, "Arab League Chief: Confront Islamic State Group," [Associated Press](#), 19:05 GMT, 7 September 2014.

See also Agence France-Presse story at [Daily Star](#).

Later, *Al-Jazeera* reported that the "Arab foreign ministers Arab foreign ministers meeting in

Cairo for an Arab League meeting have vowed to take all necessary measures to combat the Islamic State group while agreeing to cooperate with all international and regional efforts." [Al-Jazeera](#). See also [Al-Arabiya](#).

8 September 2014

Obviously, we need to defeat ISIL inside Syria, but that would help Assad in his fight against insurgents. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and other Sunni-majority Arab nations are all loath to help Assad, who is a Shiite and who is supported by Iran. For that reason, [Reuters](#) reports that Arab nations are "skeptical" of U.S. plans to destroy ISIL. The [Associated Press](#) reports that Arab nations have "hesitation" and "reluctance" to join the U.S. fight against ISIL.

8 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 7 mentions of "Syria" and 24 mentions of "Iraq".

MS. PSAKI: Well, one, let me state very clearly that we have long made clear, and this certainly continues to be the case, that Assad has lost legitimacy in Syria and therefore should go. We don't believe Syria can be stable under his leadership, and his policies and preference to prosecute a war against his own people have created the situation in which ISIL and other extremist groups thrive. So our position has not changed on that. Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 8 Sep 2014.

8 Sep: Propaganda from Kerry

On 8 Sep, after the Iraqi Parliament approved the new government, Kerry issued two statements commenting on the new government in Iraq. In the later statement, Kerry said in part:

Today's decision is a milestone in the emergence of the new Iraq and testament to the determination of the Iraqi people to overcome sectarian divisions and build their own future, a goal only they can achieve.

.... The critical issues to address include security sector reform, power and revenue sharing, and other important aspects under the Iraqi constitution that will strengthen Iraq's federal and democratic system and help unify the Iraqi people as they confront terrorism and work to defeat ISIL.

....

We look forward to working with this new government to expand our cooperation under the Strategic Framework Agreement and to pursue together our shared goal of building a long-term, multidimensional relationship between our two nations. The defeat of ISIL will be a long-term challenge but Iraq will have the support of the United States and its other friends and allies, as it

- rises above its differences,
- strengthens its democratic institutions,
- meets the needs of its vulnerable citizens,
- combats terrorism,
- and unites in its resolve against ISIL.

John Kerry, "U.S. Congratulates Iraqis on the Formation of a Government," [State Dept.](#), 8 Sep 2014. (Bulleted list added by Standler to make long sentence easier to read.)

My comments: In his first paragraph, Kerry says the Iraqi have "overcome sectarian divisions". But Kerry does *not* provide any facts to support this assertion. And no news source has identified how many of the new ministers are from the minority Sunni or Kurdish groups.

In his last paragraph, what is a "multidimensional relationship"? Exactly how many dimensions does the relationship have? Two? Three? Four?

In his last paragraph, Kerry forgot to mention that the Iraqi government needs to strengthen its criminal justice system and hold politicians and government employees accountable for corruption, nepotism, sectarianism, and human rights abuses. Kerry forgot to mention that the Iraqi army and air force need to be retrained and have new leadership that is both competent and loyal to Iraq. Kerry forgot to mention that Iraq needs to rebuild homes and cities that were damaged by ISIL, or by fighting against ISIL. Kerry forgot to mention that the Iraqi Parliament should be meeting every day, with attendance figures around 90% (not 55% to 70% that has been typical), until they finish their agenda.

In his earlier statement, Kerry said:

Good afternoon, everybody. Tonight we mark what is unquestionably a major milestone for Iraq, and what President Obama has made clear will be a cornerstone of our efforts against ISIL.

Just a few hours ago, overcoming the obstacle of ethnic and sectarian divides, the Iraqi parliament approved a new and inclusive government, one that has the potential to unite all of Iraq's diverse communities for a strong Iraq, a united Iraq, and to give those communities the chance to build the future that all Iraqis desire and deserve.

....

Tonight Iraq has a unity government.

John Kerry, "Remarks on the Formation of the Iraqi Government," [State Dept.](#), 8 Sep 2014.

My comment: Again, Kerry gives no evidence for his conclusion that Iraq now has an "inclusive" or "unity government". Again, it is not obvious from reading the news reports from Iraq. But on 9-10 Sep there were some indications that the new ministers were less diverse than previously, see quotations at end of the section on Parliament ratifies minister, [above](#). Kerry simply decreed that the new ministers were "inclusive", perhaps because if Kerry objected, the Iraqi Parliament would delay another month or two, and even then Iraq might not obtain a more diverse group of ministers.

A terrorism expert told the Associated Press:

More than 12,000 foreigners from 74 countries have gone to fight with rebels in Syria, 60 to 70 percent from other Middle Eastern countries and about 20 to 25 percent from Western nations, a leading expert on terrorism said Monday [8 Sep].

Prof. Peter Neumann, who directs the International Center for the Study of Radicalization at King's College London, said the Syrian conflict has sparked the most significant mobilization of foreign fighters since the 1980s war in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation, where up to 20,000 foreigners participated over the course of a decade.

....

Neumann said that is significant because out of the Afghan conflict came al-Qaida and other jihadist networks.

The Syrian conflict is now forging new networks, and Neumann said, "I am confident ... that out of that foreign fighter mobilization, over the course of the next generation there will be terrorist attacks."

....

Tunisia has sent the largest number of foreign fighters to Syria, up to 3,000, he said. Saudi Arabia's government has given two estimates — 1,200 and 2,500 Saudi fighters — while Morocco and Jordan each have about 1,500 though a lot of the Jordanians have tribal connections in Syria, he said.

Among Western countries, there are about 700 foreign fighters from France, more than 500 from Britain, 400 from Germany, 300 from Belgium and 100 from the United States, Neumann said.

"If you take into account per capita population, the most heavily affected countries are the Belgians, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries — Denmark, Sweden, Norway — which are small countries but have produced 50-100 fighters each," he said.

Edith M. Lederer, "Expert: Over 12,000 Foreign Fighters In Syria," [Associated Press](#), 21:47 EDT, 8 Sep 2014.

9 September 2014

On 9 Sep, there was a meeting of the leaders of the Ahrar al-Sham, one of the jihadist groups in the Islamic Front in Syria. A suicide bomber attended the meeting and detonated, killing 11 leaders of Ahar al-Sham and also killing an additional 30 jihadists.

The Associated Press reports:

The leader of an ultraconservative Islamic rebel group in Syria was killed Tuesday

[9 Sep] in a suicide bombing along with other of its top officials, its allies said, weakening the ranks of the country's already shaky armed opposition.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack that killed Hassan Aboud and other leading members of Ahrar al-Sham, part of the strongest front that challenged the Islamic State group, which holds wide swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria. But given that forces loyal to President Bashar Assad's government do not typically use suicide bombers, it appeared likely that forces in the murky mix of opposition fighters in Syria's 3-year-old civil war were involved.

The attack struck a high-level meeting of Ahrar al-Sham, or The Islamic Movement of Free Men of the Levant in English, held in the northwestern town of Ram Hamdan in the Syrian province of Idlib, one of its strongholds. A statement from the group said the blast killed [Hassan] Aboud, also known by the nom de guerre Abu Abdullah al-Hamwi, along with 11 other top leaders.

"They were martyred ... in an explosion inside their meeting headquarters," said a statement on the Twitter feed of the Islamic Front, the rebel coalition to which it belonged.

....

"Ahar al-Sham had been one of the best led and most organized, and overall, one of the most effective groups on the ground," [Noah] Bonsey [a Syria analyst for the International Crisis Group] said. "It's a loss of talent within the rebel spectrum as a whole. Ahrar al-Sham was one of the strongest, if not the strongest rebel group, and the question is, what will it look like going forward?"

Diaa Hadid & Albert Aji, "Bombing Kills Head, Leaders Of Syrian Rebel Group," [Associated Press](#), 20:43 GMT, 9 Sep 2014.

Reuters reports:

An explosion killed the leader of one of Syria's most powerful Islamist insurgent groups Ahrar al-Sham on Tuesday [9 Sep], the group said, and an organisation [i.e., Syrian Observatory for Human Rights] that monitors violence in the civil war said at least 28 of [al-Sham's] commanders had died.

....

Ahrar al-Sham, which is widely believed to have received funding from Gulf states, aims to implement Islamic sharia law in Syria. It was at one point considered the strongest insurgent group in the Syrian civil war.

"Blast kills leader of Syrian Islamist group, other top figures," [Reuters](#), 00:30 GMT, 10 Sep 2014.

ISIL has a history of killing al-Sham's leaders. At the end of Dec 2013, ISIL tortured and executed Dr. Hussein al-Suleiman, as described in my [third essay](#) on Syria. That execution caused Islamic Front to begin fighting against ISIL on 3 Jan. On 23 Feb 2014, a suicide bomber from ISIL killed Abu Khaled al-Suri [al-Soury], as described in my [fourth essay](#) on

Syria.

9 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 13 mentions of "Syria" and 19 mentions of "Iraq".

MS. HARF: Well, to be fair, the countries in the region want the United States to play a leadership role here and have said so publicly, starting with the Iraqis, who've invited us in. And we've already taken, I think, around 150 air strikes against ISIL targets, taken a number of their fighters off of the battlefield and pushing them back from some areas.

But I think the purpose of building this coalition, particularly in the region, is so it is a multilateral effort. This cannot be a United States only effort, nor should it be. But just practically speaking, to really do all of the things we have to do to fight against ISIS, we need countries in the region who are at most direct threat from ISIS to step up to the plate and join this coalition. So certainly U.S. leadership is playing a key role here, but a large part of that role is bringing these other countries together and saying we all have a role to play here. That's certainly the balance we are striking.

....

QUESTION: There have been several media reports of civilian casualties in Syria as the government takes efforts to target ISIL militants. The U.S., of course, has said it's not going to engage directly with the Syrian Government. Is there going to be perhaps an effort to get some of the coalition partners to engage with Syria, if for no other reason than to look at ways of diminishing the civilian casualties?

MS. HARF: That's a good question that I, quite frankly, don't know the answer to. I'm happy to check with our team and see if those discussions are ongoing. Throughout the Syrian conflict, we have engaged with countries like Russia, for example, who have some leverage over the Syrian regime, the Assad regime, particularly to get them to stop killing civilians en masse, whether it's with chemical weapons or barrel bombs. I don't know if we're doing the same thing now, although we certainly have in the past. So let me check on that.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 9 Sep 2014.

9 Sep: *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* report Obama to use airstrikes on Syria

The [Washington Post](#) at 19:38 EDT reports Michele Flournoy, a former undersecretary of defense for policy under Obama, said Obama will authorize U.S. airstrikes inside Syria. *The Post* said: "There is no indication that a U.S. strike in Syria is imminent,"

The [NY Times](#) quotes an anonymous "senior administration official" as saying that Obama will authorize U.S. airstrikes inside Syria. *The Times* says: "But Mr. Obama is still wrestling with a series of challenges, including how to train and equip a viable ground force to fight ISIS inside Syria, how to intervene without aiding President Bashar al-Assad, and how to enlist potentially reluctant partners like Turkey and Saudi Arabia."

My comment is that it is unfortunate that the bellicose U.S. Government is going to expand the civil war in Syria at the same time that the new U.N. envoy is in Damascus to arrange peace negotiations, see [above](#). And, as I have said above, the USA *should* have the permission of Assad before the USA conducts airstrikes in Syria. More than just permission, there *should* be sharing of intelligence between Syria and the USA and active cooperation in defeating ISIL in Syria. I agree that we eventually will need airstrikes on ISIL in Syria, to prevent Syria from becoming a safe haven for ISIL. But the above-stated conditions must be satisfied before we begin airstrikes in Syria.

I wonder if Russia could provide airstrikes against ISIL in Syria, while the USA provides airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq. That would avoid violation of Syrian sovereignty by the USA, and the Russians would be willing to cooperate with Syria, thus getting Obama out of a place he does not want to be. This hypothetical would also split costs with Russia, instead of letting the USA pay the lion's share of the costs.

10 September 2014

On 9 Sep, as described above, an explosion killed most of the leaders of Ahrar al-Sham, a major group in the Islamic Front. On 10 Sep, the group appointed new leaders.

A Syrian rebel group named a new leader and military chief on Wednesday [10 Sep], less than 24 hours after an explosion killed a dozen of its senior figures in a devastating blow to one of the most powerful factions in the country's armed opposition.

The group, Ahrar al-Sham, has been among the steadiest and most effective forces fighting to oust President Bashar Assad in Syria's civil war. It has also been on the front lines of a now nine-month battle in northern Syria against the extremist Islamic State group.

The deaths of so many of its leaders throws Ahrar al-Sham's future into question, while also laying bare the tangled dynamics of Syria's broader anti-Assad scene just as the United States is considering injecting itself into the country's conflict by going after the Islamic State group. Washington's efforts to crush the extremists could include ramping up support for Syria's rebels.

The U.S. has long looked askance at Ahrar al-Sham, considering the group too radical for Washington's tastes and too cozy with the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front. For that reason, the limited support Washington has provided so far to rebels was not directed Ahrar al-Sham's way.

....

Following the death of Ahrar al-Sham's leadership, it remains unclear whether the group could survive the loss of nearly all of its senior members, including leader Hassan Aboud. They were killed late Tuesday when an explosion struck a high-level meeting in the town of Ram Hamdan in Syria's Idlib province.

It was not immediately clear who was behind Tuesday's [9 Sep] explosion, and there even were conflicting reports on the nature of the blast. The Observatory said it was a car bombing. Ahrar al-Sham's described it as only an explosion.

Ahrar al-Sham's new leaders could steer the group in that direction [i.e., "a more moderate stance, potentially as a way to curry favor with the U.S. and secure Washington's backing."], or they could plot a new course more in line with the Nusra Front and other radicals.

Ryan Lucas, "Syrian Rebel Group Names New Leaders After Blast," [Associated Press](#), 18:35 GMT, 10 September 2014.

Reuters reported:

The new head of the Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham, once one of the strongest militias in the Syrian civil war, has urged fellow insurgents to fight on after a blast on Tuesday [9 Sep] wiped out its senior leadership.

....

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a group monitoring the conflict, said the blast killed 28 of Ahrar al-Sham's commanders, dealing a major blow to the organization that is believed to have received funds from Gulf states.

....

Ahrar al-Sham, which has advocated sharia law in Syria, was once considered among the strongest insurgent groups in the civil war but has since been overtaken by Islamic State.

Sylvia Westall, "Syrian Islamist group names new leader after blast," [Reuters](#), 13:56 GMT, 10 Sep 2014.

The Associated Press article quoted above also engages in speculation that the YPK, a Syrian Kurdish militia, will seek U.S. military aid in the fight against ISIL and Assad. The YPK is concentrated in the Kurdish area of north-east Syria. But on 10 Sep, the YPK formed an alliance with "eight other rebel groups ... to fight the Islamic State group". This *might* be a more viable ally for the USA than the Free Syrian Army, which is weak and disorganized. But we need to know the identity of these other eight "rebel groups", and the goals of each of them.

In my opinion, the U.S. Government was correct *not* to support Islamic Front, because they seek to impose a Sunni state under sharia law on Syria, which is just a kinder version of what Al-Qaeda and ISIL offer. The secular government of Assad offers more religious freedom to the diverse people of Syria than does Islamic Front. Given their long and

consistent commitment to sharia law, I would not trust Ahrar al-Sham or Islamic Front if they suddenly change to a more moderate goal, to attract U.S. support.

On 11 Sep, the Associated Press tersely reported:

The fact that no one knows whether it was Assad's forces or the Islamic State group that was behind the bombing [of Ahrar al-Sham on 9 Sep] underscores how muddled the situation is.

Zeina Karam & Daa Hadid "Attacking Syria May Entangle Us In Rebel Rivalries," [Associated Press](#), 19:22 GMT, 11 September 2014.

10 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

Kerry (with Jen Psaki) were in Baghdad on 10 Sep in an unannounced visit. While in Baghdad, Kerry met with Prime Minister Abadi, President Masum, Speaker Jabouri, and Foreign Minister Jafari. Kerry then flew to Jordan. On 11 Sep, Kerry will visit Saudi Arabia, where there is a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council. On 15 Sep Kerry will attend the *ad hoc* International Conference on Iraq in Paris, convened by French President Hollande.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department on 10 Sep, there were 33 mentions of "Syria" and 36 mentions of "Iraq". I read the transcript but found nothing worth quoting. [State Dept.](#), 10 Sep 2014.

On 10 Sep, Abadi took over the prime minister's [website](#) from Maliki. The links to Maliki's speeches during the years 2006 through 2014 have been deleted from the prime minister's homepage. I checked the links to Maliki's speeches on 4 July and 13 August in my previous essays, and both of the links still function.

10 Sep: Obama's Speech

On 10 Sep, Obama made a major policy speech on Iraq and Syria that was televised nationwide at 21:00 EDT. I added boldfacing to some critical phrases.

Still, we continue to face a terrorist threat. We can't erase every trace of evil from the world, and small groups of killers have the capacity to do great harm. That was the case before 9/11, and that remains true today. And that's why we must remain vigilant as threats emerge. At this moment, the greatest threats come from the Middle East and North Africa, where radical groups exploit grievances for their own gain. And one of those groups is ISIL — which calls itself the "Islamic State."

Now let's make two things clear: ISIL is not "Islamic." No religion condones the killing of innocents. And the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslim. And ISIL is certainly not a state. It was formerly al Qaeda's affiliate in Iraq, and has taken advantage of sectarian strife and Syria's civil war to gain territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syrian border. It is recognized by no government, nor by the people it subjugates.

ISIL is a terrorist organization, pure and simple. And it has no vision other than the slaughter of all who stand in its way.

In a region that has known so much bloodshed, these terrorists are unique in their brutality. They execute captured prisoners. They kill children. They enslave, rape, and force women into marriage. They threatened a religious minority with genocide. And in acts of barbarism, they took the lives of two American journalists — Jim Foley and Steven Sotloff.

So ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and the broader Middle East — including American citizens, personnel and facilities. If left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies. Our Intelligence Community believes that thousands of foreigners — including Europeans and some Americans — have joined them in Syria and Iraq. Trained and battle-hardened, these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks.

I know many Americans are concerned about these threats. Tonight, I want you to know that the United States of America is meeting them with strength and resolve. Last month, I ordered our military to take targeted action against ISIL to stop its advances. Since then, we've conducted more than 150 successful airstrikes in Iraq. These strikes have protected American personnel and facilities, killed ISIL fighters, destroyed weapons, and given space for Iraqi and Kurdish forces to reclaim key territory. These strikes have also helped save the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children.

But this is not our fight alone. American power can make a decisive difference, but we cannot do for Iraqis what they must do for themselves, nor can we take the place of Arab partners in securing their region. And that's why **I've insisted that additional U.S. action depended upon Iraqis forming an inclusive government**, which they have now done in recent days. So tonight, with a new Iraqi government in place, and following consultations with allies abroad and Congress at home, I can announce that America will lead a broad coalition to roll back this terrorist threat.

Our objective is clear: We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy.

First, we will conduct a systematic campaign of **airstrikes** against these terrorists. Working with the Iraqi government, **we will expand our efforts** beyond protecting our own people and humanitarian missions, so that we're hitting ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on offense. Moreover, I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. That means **I will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria**, as well as Iraq. This is a core principle of my presidency: If you threaten America, you will find no safe haven.

Second, we will increase our support to forces fighting these terrorists on the ground.

In June, I deployed several hundred American servicemembers to Iraq to assess how we can best support Iraqi security forces. Now that those teams have completed their work -- and Iraq has formed a government -- **we will send an additional 475 servicemembers to Iraq. As I have said before, these American forces will not have a combat mission -- we will not get dragged into another ground war in Iraq.** But they are needed to support Iraqi and Kurdish forces with training, intelligence and equipment. We'll also support Iraq's efforts to stand up National Guard Units to help Sunni communities secure their own freedom from ISIL's control.

Across the border, in Syria, we have ramped up our military assistance to the Syrian opposition. Tonight, I call on Congress again to give us additional authorities and resources to train and equip these fighters. In the fight against ISIL, **we cannot rely on an Assad regime that terrorizes its own people -- a regime that will never regain the legitimacy it has lost.** Instead, we must strengthen the opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL, while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria's crisis once and for all.

Third, we will continue to draw on our substantial counterterrorism capabilities to prevent ISIL attacks. Working with our partners, we will redouble our efforts to cut off its funding; improve our intelligence; strengthen our defenses; counter its warped ideology; and stem the flow of foreign fighters into and out of the Middle East. And in two weeks, I will chair a meeting of the U.N. Security Council to further mobilize the international community around this effort.

Fourth, we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians who have been displaced by this terrorist organization. This includes Sunni and Shia Muslims who are at grave risk, as well as tens of thousands of Christians and other religious minorities. We cannot allow these communities to be driven from their ancient homelands.

So this is our strategy. And in each of these four parts of our strategy, America will be joined by a broad coalition of partners. Already, allies are flying planes with us over Iraq; sending arms and assistance to Iraqi security forces and the Syrian opposition; sharing intelligence; and providing billions of dollars in humanitarian aid. Secretary Kerry was in Iraq today meeting with the new government and supporting their efforts to **promote unity.** And in the coming days he will travel across the Middle East and Europe to enlist more partners in this fight, especially Arab nations who can help mobilize Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria, to drive these terrorists from their lands. This is American leadership at its best: We stand with people who fight for their own freedom, and we rally other nations on behalf of our common security and common humanity.

My administration has also secured bipartisan support for this approach here at home. I have the authority to address the threat from ISIL, but I believe we are strongest as a nation when the President and Congress work together. So I welcome congressional support for this effort in order to show the world that Americans are united in confronting this danger.

Now, it will take time to eradicate a **cancer** like ISIL. And any time we take military action, there are risks involved — especially to the servicemen and women who carry out these missions. But I want the American people to understand how this effort will be different from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. **It will not involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil.** This counterterrorism campaign will be waged through a steady, relentless effort to take out ISIL wherever they exist, using our air power and our support for partner forces on the ground. This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years. And it is consistent with the approach I outlined earlier this year: to use force against anyone who threatens America's core interests, but to mobilize partners wherever possible to address broader challenges to international order.

....

America, our endless blessings bestow an enduring burden. But as Americans, we welcome our responsibility to lead. From Europe to Asia, from the far reaches of Africa to war-torn capitals of the Middle East, we stand for freedom, for justice, for dignity. These are values that have guided our nation since its founding.

Tonight, I ask for your support in carrying that leadership forward. I do so as a Commander-in-Chief who could not be prouder of our men and women in uniform — pilots who bravely fly in the face of danger above the Middle East, and servicemembers who support our partners on the ground.

When we helped prevent the massacre of civilians trapped on a distant mountain, here's what one of them said: "We owe our American friends our lives. Our children will always remember that there was someone who felt our struggle and made a long journey to protect innocent people."

That is the difference we make in the world. And our own safety, our own security, depends upon our willingness to do what it takes to defend this nation and uphold the values that we stand for — timeless ideals that will endure long after those who offer only hate and destruction have been vanquished from the Earth.

May God bless our troops, and may God bless the United States of America.

Obama, "Statement by the President on ISIL," [White House](#), 10 Sep 2014. (Emphasis added by Standler.)

My comments: ISIL has probably killed tens of thousands of people, but Obama is focused on ISIL's execution of *two* American journalists. Compared with the total harm done by ISIL, those two journalists were trivial. We should not be making policy that will spend tens of billions of dollars and engage the U.S. military over *two* Americans.

Obama asserts: "I've insisted that additional U.S. action depended upon Iraqis forming an inclusive government, which they have now done in recent days." It is true that Obama's 19 June speech did wait for an inclusive government *before* the U.S. military would become

involved. But on 7 Aug Obama could no longer wait for the glacially slow Iraqis, and Obama ordered limited airstrikes. On 8 Sep, the Iraqi Parliament finally formed a new government, but there are doubts about whether it is adequately inclusive. But Kerry and Obama simply decreed that the new government was inclusive, perhaps because if the USA objected, the Iraqi Parliament would delay another month or two, and even then Iraq might not obtain a more diverse group of ministers. Later in his speech, Obama mentions "promote unity" as a goal for the new Iraqi government.

Obama will, at some indefinite future time, authorize airstrikes in Syria to attack ISIL. Obama will also refuse to cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL in Syria. I think the worst part of Obama's strategy is his refusal to cooperate with Assad, and Obama's concurrent decision to partner with the moderate rebels. Refusing to cooperate with Assad has at least five serious disadvantages for the USA, as explained in the [Conclusion](#) at the end of this essay. And partnering with the moderate rebels (i.e., the weakest of the insurgent groups in Syria), instead of partnering with the Syrian army (i.e., the strongest military in Syria, with the possible exception of ISIL), is a recipe for failure. Obama intends to strengthen the moderate rebels by training them, but such training could take *many months* and we need to attack ISIL now.

Any military intervention in Syria will drag us into their sectarian civil war. But Obama is correct that we can *not* allow Syria to become a safe haven for ISIL. I suggest we focus on the elimination of ISIL as our Nr. 1 goal, and let that goal shape our other policies. One consequence would be changing to supporting Assad's fight against ISIL, and maybe also the fight against Al-Qaeda and the jihadists in Islamic Front.

At the end of his second strategy, Obama promises to "pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria's crisis once and for all." That is probably more than Obama can deliver. The insistence of Obama (and others) that Assad resign scuttled the Geneva2 negotiations in Jan/Feb 2014, as explained in my [essay](#). On 7 June 2014, the U.N. negotiator, 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.)

Obama touts the success of U.S. airstrikes in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan. The Truth is that these areas are still infested with Islamic extremists after years of airstrikes from U.S. drones.

Obama calls ISIL a "cancer". Cancer is a tumor that not only grows, but also spreads to other sites. A cancer must be removed, or it will kill the patient. While there are some analogies between ISIL and a cancer, the use of the word "cancer" is propaganda. Obama previously called ISIL a cancer:

1. in his 20 Aug 2014 [statement](#) on the execution of Jim Foley. ("... there has to be a common effort to extract this cancer, so that it does not spread.")
2. in his 26 Aug 2014 speech to the [American Legion](#) ("And rooting out a cancer like ISIL won't be easy, and it won't quick.")
3. and mentioned twice in his 28 Aug 2014 [press conference](#).

A prudent patient begins treatment for cancer promptly, but Obama ignored ISIL in Syria

until they beheaded an American journalist, and Obama ignored ISIL in Iraq from Jan 2014 until ISIL captured Mosul on 10 June 2014. After the fall of Mosul, Obama waited about two months before beginning limited airstrikes in Iraq.

10 Sep: White House Fact Sheet on Iraq

On 10 Sep, the White House released a "Fact Sheet" on Iraq. I quote this "Fact Sheet" because it is a well-organized statement of U.S. strategy against ISIL:

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) poses a clear threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and to the broader Middle East, as well as U.S. persons, allies and interests in the region. Left unchecked, ISIL could pose a growing threat beyond the region, including to the U.S. homeland.

The United States is meeting this threat with strength and resolve. In recent weeks, we have increased intelligence resources devoted to the threat and sent U.S. personnel to assess the situation on the ground. We have responded with immediate action to protect Americans in Iraq and to prevent large-scale humanitarian catastrophes, including by conducting over 150 successful airstrikes in Iraq. These strikes have kept our personnel and facilities in Baghdad and Erbil safe, killed ISIL fighters, destroyed ISIL equipment, protected Iraqi critical infrastructure, and broken ISIL sieges against an Iraqi city [Amirli] and civilians trapped on a mountain [near Sinjar]. Along with dozens of international partners, we have provided material support for Iraqi forces to support their fight against ISIL. Our strikes and resupply efforts have enabled Iraqi forces to take the fight to ISIL on the ground, reclaim key territory, and saved thousands of innocent lives.

Our goal is clear: to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL [Emphasis added by Standler.] through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy so that it's no longer a threat to Iraq, the region, the United States, and our partners.

Supporting Effective Governance in Iraq: We have made clear that additional U.S. action depended on Iraq forming an inclusive government, because only a united Iraq — with a government in Baghdad that has support from all of Iraq's communities — can defeat ISIL. A new Iraqi government was formally sworn in on September 8 and we will support it in efforts to govern inclusively and to take significant, concrete steps to address the legitimate grievances and needs of all Iraqis.

Denying ISIL Safe-Haven: The Iraqi Government is taking the fight to ISIL, and will ultimately be the one to defeat it in Iraq. But our Iraqi and regional partners need our support and unique capabilities to blunt ISIL's advance. The President announced that we will conduct **a systematic campaign of airstrikes against these terrorists**. Working with the Iraqi government, we will expand our efforts beyond protecting our own people and humanitarian missions so that we're hitting ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on offense. The President also made clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country, wherever they are. The President will not hesitate to take direct military action against ISIL terrorists in Syria and in Iraq. We will **degrade** ISIL's leadership, logistical and operational capability, and deny it sanctuary and resources to

plan, prepare and execute attacks. Simply put, ISIL will find no safe-haven.

Building Partner Capacity:

- We will build the capability and capacity of our partners in the region to sustain an effective long-term campaign against ISIL. The President announced that he will send an additional 475 U.S. service members to Iraq to support Iraqi and Kurdish forces with training, intelligence and equipment. In addition to providing weapons, ammunition and equipment, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) will train and advise Iraqi forces, including Kurdish forces, improving their ability to plan, lead and conduct operations against ISIL. Further, the new Iraqi government has asked for help forming National Guard units that would be recruited locally and be responsible for protecting their own communities and securing areas freed from ISIL's control - a step that, along with long overdue political reforms, can drive a wedge between ISIL and Sunnis who have been alienated by their central government.
- The President is also calling on Congress to provide additional authorities and resources to train and equip Syrian opposition fighters in the Continuing Resolution they are debating this work period, so they can defend themselves and their neighborhoods against ISIL incursions and ultimately **push back on ISIL forces and the Assad regime**. We will strengthen the opposition as the best counterweight to extremists like ISIL, while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria's crisis once and for all.
- The growing and evolving nature of the ISIL threat underscores the importance of the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF). The CTPF request for \$5 billion would allow us to train, build capacity, and facilitate support for partner countries on the front lines of countering shared terrorist threats, both in the region and beyond. The CTPF includes \$500 million for a Department of Defense program to train and equip the Syrian opposition as described above and \$1 billion to build resiliency in the states neighboring Syria to ensure they can continue to counter threats to their internal stability and to support communities that are contending with refugees.

Enhancing Intelligence Collection on ISIL: Continuing to gain more fidelity on ISIL's capabilities, plans, and intentions is central to our strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy the group. Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance flights and other important efforts will strengthen our ability to understand this threat, as well as to share vital information with our Iraqi and other regional partners to enable them to effectively counter ISIL.

Disrupting ISIL's Finances: ISIL's expansion over the past year has given it access to significant and diverse sources of funding. The U.N. Security Council resolution [2170] that passed unanimously in August demonstrated the broad international consensus to disrupt ISIL's finances. We are already working aggressively with our partners on a coordinated approach that includes: reducing ISIL's revenue from oil and assets it has plundered; limiting ISIL's ability to extort local populations; stemming ISIL's gains

from kidnapping for ransom; and disrupting the flow of external donations to the group. Our domestic laws also provide additional tools in this effort, enabling us to sanction or prosecute those who fund ISIL's activities.

Exposing ISIL's True Nature: Clerics around the world have spoken up in recent weeks to highlight ISIL's hypocrisy, condemning the group's barbarity and criticizing its self-proclaimed "caliphate." We will work with our partners throughout the Muslim world to highlight ISIL's hypocrisy and counter its false claim to be acting in the name of religion.

Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters: Foreign terrorist fighters are ISIL's lifeblood, and a global security threat—with citizens of nearly 80 countries filling its ranks. Over 100 foreign fighters from the United States have traveled or attempted to travel to the conflict. On September 24, the United States will convene an historic Summit-level meeting of the UN Security Council, focused on this issue.

Protecting the Homeland: We will continue to use the criminal justice system as a critical tool in our counterterrorism toolbox. Federal criminal laws provide a sound basis to prosecute those who provide material support to ISIL or who conspire with ISIL to plot attacks at home or abroad. With respect to aviation security, we will work with air carriers to implement responsible threat-based security and screening requirements, and provide additional screening to individuals suspected of affiliation with ISIL. Finally, we will counter violent extremism here at home, including tailored domestic programs to prevent violent extremism and radicalization in order to intervene with at-risk individuals before they become radicalized toward violence and decide to travel abroad to Syria and Iraq to join ISIL.

Humanitarian Support: We and our partners will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the displaced and vulnerable in Iraq and Syria. We will also continue to work with host governments to mitigate the humanitarian and economic effects of the conflict in neighboring countries, recognizing that the refugee crisis calls on our common humanity and presents a significant challenge to regional stability. As ISIL seeks to destroy the diversity of the territories it terrorizes, we will continue to work to help prevent mass atrocities, particularly against vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities.

"FACT SHEET: Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)" [White House](#), 10 Sep 2014. (I indented the three paragraphs under the heading "Building Partner Capacity:". I boldfaced a few phrases. Underlining was in original.)

My comments: In the second paragraph, the White House touts the accomplishment of "destroyed ISIL equipment". Note that much of this equipment was originally supplied by the USA to the Iraqi army. The cowardly Iraqi army at Mosul fled, and abandoned this equipment, which ISIL then stole. So the U.S. taxpayers are now paying to destroy expensive equipment that they gave to the Iraqi army.

In the second of three paragraphs under "Building Partner Capacity", the White House promises that the U.S.-supported rebels in Syria will "push back on ISIL forces and the Assad regime." In contrast, Obama's speech limited U.S. airstrikes in Syria only to fighting

ISIL. Apparently, the U.S. airstrikes will *not* target Assad's military, while the U.S.-supported rebels will target Assad's military.

In the second of three paragraphs under "Building Partner Capacity", the White House promises "while pursuing the political solution necessary to solve Syria's crisis once and for all." That is a repeat from Obama's speech, and I criticized that strategy above.

11 September 2014

On 11 Sep 2014, two Associated Press journalists in Lebanon wrote a thoughtful analysis of the reaction to one part of Obama's speech:

In expanding its airstrikes into Syria against Islamic State extremists, the U.S. could find itself entangled in a morass of jihadis, rebel rivalries and religious hatred.

Unlike Iraq, the U.S. has no firm allies inside Syria to take over areas if fighters from the Islamic State group are pushed back. Unless the West decisively backs the outgunned moderate rebels, it risks the unintended consequence of prolonging the widely discredited rule of President Bashar Assad.

....

The group [ISIL] might also be hiding its assets and fighters among the civilian population, making it harder for the U.S. to carry out the attacks.

....

Another question is whether Assad would retaliate against U.S. airstrikes.

....

As in previous efforts, the U.S. will struggle to pinpoint groups it can arm and train, because of the lack of truly secular factions. The struggle is made more difficult because most of the groups that have successfully waged war against the Islamic State group are far too extreme to obtain Western support.

Zeina Karam & Daa Hadid "Attacking Syria May Entangle Us In Rebel Rivalries," [Associated Press](#), 19:22 GMT, 11 September 2014.

Reuters reports that U.S. airstrikes inside Syria would be an act of aggression unless there was permission of either Assad or the U.N. Security Council.

Russia said on Thursday [11 Sep] air strikes against Islamist militants in Syria without a U.N. Security Council mandate would be an act of aggression, raising the possibility of a new confrontation with the West in coming weeks.

"The U.S. president has spoken directly about the possibility of strikes by the U.S. armed forces against ISIL positions in Syria without the consent of the legitimate government," Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said.

"This step, in the absence of a U.N. Security Council decision, would be an act of aggression, a gross violation of international law."

....

France, a key ally for the United States in the planned coalition, said on Wednesday [10 Sep] it was ready to take part in air strikes in Iraq, but said its involvement in any military action in Syria would need to have international law behind it.

Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said the Iraqi government has asked for help internationally, but in Syria the legal basis would have to be established first.

French officials have said that would come either through a Security Council resolution or under Article 51 of the U.N. charter, allowing for protection of threatened populations.

....

[Russia] has repeatedly argued that it does not believe the Syrian opposition can fill the void that would be left by Assad's departure, warning the country would fall into the hands of Islamic militants.

"Russia says air strikes in Syria would be act of aggression without U.N. vote," [Reuters](#), 13:57 GMT, 11 September 2014.

11 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 54 mentions of "Syria" and 28 mentions of "Iraq".

MS. HARF: As we've said, we will not work with the Assad regime. We will not coordinate with them on this effort, and we won't coordinate with the Iranians either on this effort.

....

QUESTION: Can't remember — yes, representative. But is there a legitimate government in Syria?

MS. HARF: So let me get our — pull up our exact language on this. We believe when we've been clear that President Assad has lost all legitimacy to be the leader of Syria. We've said that very clearly and publicly. We have recognized the SOC [Syrian Opposition Coalition] as the representative of the Syrian people. That does not confer on them official governmental duties.

....

MS. HARF: Well, to be clear here, when the President talks about potential action in

Syria, as he did last night, he is focused on the threat from ISIL. And that is the — his priority as Commander-in-Chief is protecting the American people. Obviously, we believe Assad has lost legitimacy, but that is separate from our fight against ISIL.

QUESTION: So there would — what you're saying is that this is not about ousting Assad as well.

MS. HARF: Correct. Not at all. No. Look, the President has emphasized repeatedly that Assad has lost legitimacy and should go, but the President has also been clear that his first priority, as I just said, is the safety of the American people. ISIL, obviously, poses a threat to us, and that is what we are focused on when it comes to any potential action in Syria, to be very clear about that.

....

QUESTION: Right. But is it not possible that any military action in Syria could have a perhaps unintended effect of either helping or hurting the Assad regime?

MS. HARF: Well, I don't want to do much analysis on what those unintended effects could be. What I am saying very clearly is what the goals of any action would be, and the aims. So —

QUESTION: But the U.S. officials said yesterday that this increasing the arming and training of the Syrian opposition is to fight both the regime and the ISIL.

MS. HARF: That is true. That is true. But that's been an ongoing effort. We've increased our military assistance to the moderate opposition since last year, so I think that that has been an ongoing effort. You are correct. But when it comes — when the President talks about potential American military action, that's what he's referring to.

QUESTION: I guess I — the question is, then, if you're really committed to seeing both the end of ISIL and the Assad regime, why not go all in? And whether you — you ruled out boots on the ground, but why not come by — if you're already going to be bombing Syria, why don't you bomb the regime as well?

MS. HARF: Because we —

QUESTION: That will further your goal of trying to get them out, right?

MS. HARF: Well, we believe that there needs to — and I know this is far away from here now from where we are in terms of the situation politically. But there needs to be a political transition. There cannot be a military solution for the Assad regime leaving power, I think, for all of the reasons we are very familiar with. The last thing we want is a power vacuum more than there already is in Syria. So that's why there needs to be a political transitional process that puts in a transitional governing body for exactly that reason.

QUESTION: But aren't you going to — don't you run the risk of creating a power vacuum by doing what the President has said that he will do?

MS. HARF: Well, the Assad regime has created the security situation there is, where there are parts of their country that they don't control. Whether it's the moderate opposition or Nusrah or ISIS, what we're focused on is tailored to go after ISIL wherever they are. That is the threat we are focused on right now, and that's the threat that we are going to continue taking the fight to regardless of borders.

....

QUESTION: A couple weeks ago, the President said [Obama on [18 Aug](#), actually Kerry said this on 24 June] that the United States will not be Iraq's air force. Now, what we heard last night is quite a departure from that position.

MS. HARF: No, I don't think so. I think it's a partnership and the goal is to train them up to be able to do this on their own.

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

My comments: Ms. Harf properly distinguishes (1) removing Assad from power from (2) defeating ISIL in Syria. But the inescapable conclusion is that destroying (or degrading) ISIL in Syria *helps* Assad, by removing one strong group of insurgents who are fighting against Assad and capturing land that Assad should control. And Harf admits that training and equipping the moderate Syrian opposition will *both* defeat Assad *and* defeat ISIL. In my opinion, we should have realized months ago that Assad is preferable to ISIL, and then we should have decided to support Assad in his fight against ISIL. If Assad is defeated, then terrorist organizations will flourish in the anarchy after Assad is defeated (e.g., Iraq after Saddam Hussein, and Libya after Gaddafi).

11 Sep: CIA Estimate of ISIL Strength

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency estimates that ISIL now has between "20,000 and 31,500 fighters across Iraq and Syria". [Associated Press](#). In June 2014, the previous estimate was 10,000.

11 Sep: Jeddah Communiqué

On 11 Sep, there was a one-day meeting in Jeddah of the Gulf Cooperation Council (i.e., Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) plus Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and the USA. A [Communiqué](#) was issued, which Turkey did *not* sign. Turkey declined to sign the Jeddah Communiqué about fighting ISIL, in part because of concerns about 46 Turkish citizens kidnapped by ISIL at the Turkish Consulate in Mosul in June. [Reuters](#).

12 September 2014

Reuters reports that approximately 1000 French muslims have gone to Syria or Iraq to fight with the jihadists, Al-Qaeda, or ISIL. About 100 of these French muslims have returned to France, requiring France to expend "massive" resources for surveillance and other security measures to prevent attacks". Reuters quote a French legislator as saying "it takes about 20 security agents to keep watch on one person".

12 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

Kerry was in Turkey on 12 Sep.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 25 mentions of "Syria" and 16 mentions of "Iraq".

QUESTION: Yesterday, the deputy foreign minister — the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad, said — I think on NBC — he said that they are ready to cooperate with the United States, they are ready to cooperate fully, that no one has had the experience that they have, which probably is true, but that you need to sort of reach out to them. And so he made quite the reasonable sort of outline on how you could go —

MS. HARF: Well, I don't think anything that the Assad regime does I would describe as reasonable, as they continue to kill their own people.

QUESTION: But don't you see that the involvement of the Syrian regime, whether involving their ground forces, for instance, to sort of have some sort of a juggernaut along with U.S. superior air forces could actually diminish or degrade or — ISIS's power?

MS. HARF: Look, the answer is not the Assad regime. I get asked this every day and I'm happy to keep answering the question. But the answer to the security challenge is not the Assad regime. They have created this security vacuum; we are not going to be working with them in this fight. They have lost legitimacy to lead, period. So I'm just not sure how much clearer I can be on this.

QUESTION: As these strikes become more imminent, striking Syria — I mean, to go back to a question that Matt asked at the beginning of the week, I mean, how would you guard against, let's say, something going fluke, hitting an area that belongs to the regime or the regime fighting — shooting back at these airplanes and bringing one down would — maybe a pilot captured and so on. I mean, don't you need some sort of coordination once these operations begin?

MS. HARF: No, Said. We do not believe that we do. We will not be coordinating with the Assad regime.

....

QUESTION: Marie, we've seen Assad in power for three-plus years now. What is the

U.S. plan? Do you plan to revive the Geneva process now that you're more involved in Syria? How do you see this ending?

MS. HARF: Well, nothing that anyone can do or nothing that can happen at this point will ever restore Assad's legitimacy. That is gone. We have said that there needs to be a political process to get a transitional governing body in place, and we've had two rounds, as you mentioned, in Geneva. We will not have a third round until the regime makes clear it will come to the table ready to discuss that kind of transitional governing body. They have refused to do so. So we are, unfortunately, in a position where we do not have a political process path to move forward on right now. We are committed to it. We know that's the best path forward here, but it requires the regime taking some steps that thus far they've been unwilling to take.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 12 Sep 2014. (Link to NBC added by Standler.)

13-14 September 2014

Kerry was in Egypt on 13 Sep for discussions about the coalition against ISIL. On Sunday, 14 Sep, Kerry arrived in Paris for the conference on 15 Sep.

On 14 Sep, the French Interior Minister said that 700 citizens or residents of France had travelled to either Syria or Iraq to fight with Islamic jihadists (e.g., ISIL and other groups), and an additional 230 Frenchmen were planning to go. Not counted in the 700 are 36 Frenchmen who have died in Syria. [France24](#).

11-14 Sep: counterterrorism vs. war

Above, I have been critical of Obama's fumbling of the goal of the war against ISIL (i.e., degrade or destroy). On 11 Sep, Kerry made a misstatement that he corrected on 14 Sep, about whether we had a "war" against ISIL.

On 11 Sep, Kerry said:

QUESTION: Is the United States at war with ISIS? It sure sounds from the President's speech that we are.

SECRETARY KERRY: I think that's the wrong terminology. What we are doing is engaging in a **very significant counterterrorism operation** [Emphasis added by Standler.], and it's going to go on for some period of time. If somebody wants to think about it as being at war with ISIL, they can do so. But the fact is it's a major counterterrorism operation that will have many different moving parts, many different things that one doesn't think of normally in context of war. But it's an effort to destroy them ultimately through that counterterrorism approach.

"Interview With Elise Labott of CNN," [State Dept.](#), 11 Sep 2014.

This was not an isolated slip by Kerry, because Kerry said similar things in an interview with Margaret Brennan of CBS:

QUESTION: Is the U.S. at war with ISIS?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, we're engaged in a major counterterrorism operation —

QUESTION: Not a war?

SECRETARY KERRY: — and it's going to be a long-term counterterrorism operation. I think "war" is the wrong terminology and analogy, but the fact is that we are engaged in a very significant global effort to curb terrorist activity, and it's unfortunately too prevalent in certain parts of the world, and in certain cases represents a direct threat to the United States and to our interests in those regions. So we're going to have to, obviously, be super focused on that. But I don't think people need to get into war fever on this. I think they have to view it as a heightened level of counterterrorist activity. It's — have a slightly higher level of activity, but it's not dissimilar to what we've been doing the last few years with al-Qaida in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and in Yemen and elsewhere.

"Interview With Margaret Brennan of CBS," [State Dept.](#), 11 Sep 2014.

On 14 Sep, on the CBS television program "Face the Nation", Kerry admitted that we were at war with ISIL:

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, thank you so much. Can I clear up one thing first? This week, you went to some lengths to say you wouldn't call this a war, but yet at the Pentagon and at the State Department even they were saying we are at war with ISIS. Are we at war?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, Bob, I think there's, frankly, a kind of tortured debate going on about terminology. What I'm focused on, obviously, is getting done what we need to get done to ISIL. But if people need to find a place to land, in terms of what we did in Iraq originally, this is not a war. This is not combat troops on the ground, it's not hundreds of thousands of people, it's not that kind of mobilization. But in terms of al-Qaida, which we have used the word "war" with, yeah, we went — we're at war with al-Qaida and its affiliates, and in the same context, if you want to use it, yes, **we're at war with ISIL** [Emphasis added by Standler.] in that sense.

But I think it's a waste of time to focus on that, frankly. Let's consider what we have to do to **degrade and defeat ISIL** [Emphasis added by Standler.], and that's what I'm, frankly, much more focused on.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, let me ask you about your trip. The Syrian foreign minister is being quoted here as saying that Syria was no problems with American airstrikes going after ISIS targets in Syria, as long as they are coordinated, and he said he was ready to talk. Will we be coordinating this campaign with Syria?

SECRETARY KERRY: No, we're not going to coordinate it with Syria. We will certainly want to de-conflict to make certain that they're not about to do something that they might regret even more seriously, but we're not going to coordinate. It's not a cooperative effort. We're going to do what they haven't done, what they had plenty of

opportunity to do, which is to take on ISIL and to degrade it and eliminate it as a threat. And we will do that with allies.

"Interview With Bob Schieffer of CBS's Face The Nation," [State Dept.](#), 13 Sep 2014. Another transcript at [CBS](#), 14 Sep 2014.

Kerry's remark about "de-conflict" with Assad's government appeared again in a press conference on 15 Sep, which is quoted below. Basically, Kerry avoids mentioning specific methods of communication with the Syrian government.

Mediaite [12 Sep](#) and [14 Sep](#) published some commentary on this confusion about nomenclature. More reports of this confusion about nomenclature are at [Politico](#) and [The Hill](#).

My comments: The U.S. Constitution says that only Congress can declare war. World War II was the most recent war in which the U.S. Congress formally declared war. The wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq (both 1991 and 2003) were done with less Congressional authorization.

The nature of warfare changes with time. In medieval times, soldiers attacked each other with swords and axes, as well as shot arrows — which required that one see one's opponent. The development of accurate artillery and bombs from aircraft meant that one could destroy an enemy without ever seeing them.

The things that do not change about war is the notion of:

- capturing territory,
- an unwelcome invasion (i.e., a military crossing the border of a sovereign nation without their permission), and
- defeating an enemy.

ISIL has definitely captured territory from sovereign nations of Syria and Iraq. ISIL is unwelcome by the governments of Syria and Iraq, and presumably also by most of the people in the towns captured by ISIL. ISIL definitely needs to be defeated. I would say this means we are at war with ISIL. U.S. airstrikes on ISIL are warfare.

Kerry weasels away from his prior misstatement by essentially saying he is focused on action, *not* words. That was a weak response. Worse, one gets the impression that Obama and Kerry have *not* carefully thought about the long-term implications of what they are doing, including the technical legal considerations. Obama continues to be confused about the goal (degrade or destroy?), now Kerry is not sure whether it is a real war.

One gets the impression that Obama and Kerry are being less than honest with U.S. citizens. Few Americans understand that Obama has begun a war with ISIL that will likely take *at least* two years to win and will consume an enormous amount of money. Even fewer Americans understand that Obama is sucking the USA into the sectarian civil war in Syria, which will also require years.

15 Sep 2014

Agence France-Presse reported on the shortcomings of the Iraqi army:

The shortcomings of the Iraqi military, which withered under a June militant onslaught and relies on Shiite militias for support, pose a significant challenge to international efforts against jihadists.

....

But in Iraq, police and soldiers lost control of the whole of one city and part of another west of Baghdad early this year, multiple Iraqi divisions folded when faced by an ISIS-led offensive in June and aside from small elite units, security forces have since struggled to push the militants back.

....

The army “was not a force that was combat ready at the end of 2011,” when U.S. troops exited Iraq, said Anthony Cordesman, an expert on the country’s security forces from the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Former premier Nouri al-Maliki then “bled down the quality of the force, corrupted it, made it loyal to him,” Cordesman said, adding that “it doesn’t take that long to politicize and destroy a force which wasn’t ready in the first place.”

“The Iraqi security forces could use a lot more training and experience,” said John Drake, a security analyst with risk consultancy AKE Group. “Between 2011 and the beginning of 2014 they went through a period of little training and limited battle experience.”

“Some units were engaged in counter-insurgency operations but large parts of the force spent most of their time maintaining checkpoints and checking vehicles, rather than actively being involved in combat operations against militants.”

....

In the months since the start of the militant offensive in June, Baghdad’s forces have launched multiple unsuccessful attempts to retake the city of Tikrit and have largely struggled to regain ground.

W.G. Dunlop, "Is Iraqi Army ready for fight against ISIS? [Daily Star](#), 15 Sep 2014.

12-13 Sep 2014: Preparation for Paris Conference

French President Hollande will convene an international conference on ISIL in Paris on 15 Sep. Hollande announced he is considering inviting Iran to attend. [Associated Press](#) 12 Sep; [WSJ](#), 28 Aug; [PressTV](#) in Iran on 29 Aug. Predictably, Kerry has his knickers in a twist over the presence of Iran at the Paris conference. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Kerry is correct that Iran is a rogue nation, *but* there is no doubt that Iran strongly opposes ISIL, and

there is no doubt that Iran is already involved in both Syria and Iraq. So there is nothing to be gained by ostracizing Iran, and Kerry might make his coalition less effective by ostracizing Iran. Remember that back in Jan 2014, Kerry forced the U.N. Secretary General to rescind an invitation to Iran to attend a one-day meeting in Montreux. (See my [third essay](#) on Syria.) The U.S. Government sometimes acts like a belligerent, flesh-eating Tyrannosaurus Rex.

On 13 Sep 2014, the Associated Press reported:

However, France doesn't want to be a pawn in a U.S. game, and it disagrees with Washington on two key points: Iran and Syria.

The French are stopping short of possible action in Syria, at least for now, fearing that airstrikes on extremists in Syria could strengthen President Bashar Assad's hand and raise international legal problems.

France also is increasingly pragmatic in its attitude toward Iran — and wants to invite Iran to Monday's conference. Iran, a Shiite Muslim nation and neighbor of Iraq, joins regional states and the West in adamantly opposing the advance of the militants. Tehran's long-time influence in Iraq, including at times a military presence, makes it a logical — and even essential — partner, in France's eyes.

But Kerry said Friday [12 Sep] that "no one has called me and asked me" whether France should invite Iran to the meeting.

Lara Jakes & Desmond Butler "Cobbling Coalition For Iraq, Syria No Easy Task," [Associated Press](#), 14:49 GMT, 13 September 2014.

I searched for the source of Kerry's arrogant "no one has called me and asked me" remark and found it at the end of a press briefing in Turkey on 12 Sep:

QUESTION: (Inaudible) with respect to Iran?

SECRETARY KERRY: No one has called me and asked me with respect to the presence of Iran, but I think under the circumstances, at this moment in time, it would not be right for any number of reasons. It would not be appropriate, given the many other issues that are on the table with respect to their engagement in Syria and elsewhere. But — so that would be my answer, but I haven't been asked with respect — and I don't know specifically where that stands in terms of the French invitations.

QUESTION: Would you mind if I did a quick follow-up on that? I know it's against the rules, but —

MS. PSAKI: You just did an entire interview yesterday. I think we can —

QUESTION: Well, I mean, I'm sorry, but this has been an issue with Iran that has gone on with many of these types of conferences. I mean, I understand that they — that you have problems with their behavior, but don't you think engaging them is part of —

SECRETARY KERRY: We are engaged with Iran. We're engaged in a very deep, serious conversation about their nuclear program with high hopes that it will be

possible to change the relationship through an agreement that would meet the international standards that have been set at the United Nations and the questions that have been raised not just at the UN, but by the International Atomic Energy Agency. So it's not the United States; it's the world that is asking serious questions about Iran's nuclear program.

Now, Iran has been deeply involved with its forces on the ground in Syria. IRGC [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps] forces are on the ground. So there would have to be much greater clarity and understanding of exactly what the purpose was and what the meaning was of any kind of presence, which is the only thing that stands in the way, as well as they're a state sponsor of terror in various places.

So these are serious issues, and that's why they need to be approached in a proper way, not a conference like this at this moment, but through a process which we are entirely prepared over a period of time to engage in, or we wouldn't be engaged in the negotiations that we're engaged in today.

MS. PSAKI: Okay. Thanks, everyone.

QUESTION: Would you boycott if they were invited?

STAFF: Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: Thank you, everyone.

SECRETARY KERRY: I'm not going to answer hypotheticals.

"Press Availability in Ankara, Turkey," [State Dept.](#), 12 Sep 2014. (Kerry misspoke and called the IAEA an "association" instead of the proper "agency", I corrected his error above.)

My comment: Kerry was arrogant when he said "no one has called me". French President Hollande proposed and will convene the conference, and Hollande alone is perfectly capable of choosing a guest list at his conference.

Iran has managed to drag negotiations on its nuclear weapons program past many so-called "deadlines" for solving the crisis with a written agreement. This is partly the fault of the USA and the European Union for not being tougher on Iran. If Iran were part of the coalition against ISIL, Iran would probably use their participation in the coalition as leverage in the nuclear negotiations, thereby joining two distinctly different issues. But Iran is still an indispensable party in solving problems in Syria and Iraq, because of Iran's continuing engagement with the governments of those two nations.

15 Sep 2014: Paris Conference

A total of 26 nations — plus the Arab League, European Union, United Nations — sent representatives to the Paris Conference that was convened by Hollande. But Iran and Syria were *not* invited. Note that the conference is focused only on the problem of ISIL in Iraq, and

the conference did *not* consider ISIL in Syria.

The [Associated Press](#) reported: Iraq's President Fouad "Massoum — a Kurd, whose role in the government is largely ceremonial — expressed regret that Iran was not attending." [Reuters](#) reported: "'We wanted a consensus among countries over Iran's attendance, but in the end it was more important to have certain Arab states than Iran,' a French diplomat said, signalling that Saudi Arabia had not been keen on Tehran coming."

At 11:10 GMT on 15 Sep, Reuters tersely reported:

Some 30 countries present at a Paris conference on Iraq agreed to provide Baghdad with "appropriate military aid" to combat insurgents of the Islamic State group, a statement issued after the talks said.

The statement issued by French officials said tackling the Islamic State group was "a matter of urgency", however it did not elaborate on what military aid was being envisaged.

"Paris meet on Iraq pledges 'appropriate military aid'," [Reuters](#), 11:10 GMT, 15 Sep 2014.

At 15:00 GMT on 15 Sep, I looked at the English-language webpages of the French Foreign Ministry and found the Communiqué:

1. At the invitation of the President of the French Republic and the President of the Republic of Iraq, an international conference on peace and security in Iraq was held today in Paris.
2. The conference participants (Bahrain, Belgium, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Arab League, European Union, United Nations) expressed their commitment to the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq. They welcomed the formation of a new government under the authority of the Prime Minister, Mr Ha dar al-Abadi, and offered him their full support to strengthen the rule of law, implement a policy of inclusiveness, and ensure that all components are fairly represented within the federal institutions and all citizens are treated equally. All of these measures are necessary in order to successfully combat Daech (ISIL) and terrorist groups, which represent a threat to all Iraqis.
3. The conference participants asserted that Daech (ISIL) is a threat not only to Iraq but also to the entire international community and that confronting such a threat will require a long term effort from the international community. They condemned the crimes and acts of mass violence that Daech (ISIL) commits against civilians, including the most vulnerable minorities, which may amount to crimes against humanity. They agreed to cooperate and do everything to ensure that the culprits are brought to justice. They confirmed support for the inquiry led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to that end.
4. All participants underscored the urgent need to remove Daech (ISIL) from the

regions in which it has established itself in Iraq. To that end, they committed to supporting the new Iraqi Government in its fight against Daech (ISIL), by any means necessary, including appropriate military assistance, in line with the needs expressed by the Iraqi authorities, in accordance with international law and without jeopardizing civilian security.

5. The conference participants also reaffirmed their commitment to the relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on the fight against terrorism and its sources of recruitment and financing, in particular Resolution 2170. They will make sure that this resolution is correctly implemented and will take the necessary measures to ensure it has all the intended effects. They firmly believe that resolute action is necessary to eradicate Daech (ISIL), particularly measures to prevent radicalization, coordination between all security services and stricter border control. They welcomed the prospect of working on an action plan to combat terrorist financing.
6. Reiterating their support for the Iraqi Government, the international partners recalled the need to support the Iraqi people's desire for human rights to be observed in a federal framework that respects the constitution, regional rights and national unity.
7. They recognized the role played by the United Nations in Iraq, particularly in coordinating and facilitating international assistance to the Iraqi Government. The conference participants also recognized that the Arab League and the European Union are essential long-term strategic partners for Iraq. They also welcomed the results of the Jeddah conference of September 11, 2014.
8. The conference participants agreed to continue and increase, depending on changes in the situation on the ground, the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi Government and local authorities, in order to help them accommodate and assist refugees and displaced persons, who should be able to return to their homes safely.
9. The international partners declared that they were willing to assist Iraq in its reconstruction work, with the aim of achieving fair regional development, in particular by providing expertise, know-how and appropriate financial support, through, for example, specific global fund to help reconstruction of areas devastated by Daech (ISIL).
10. The international partners agreed to remain fully mobilized in their support for the Iraqi authorities and in the fight against Daech (ISIL). They will ensure that the commitments made today are implemented and followed up on, notably in the framework of the United Nations and during the high-level meetings that will be held alongside the United Nations General Assembly.

"International Conference on Peace and Security in Iraq (Paris, September 15, 2014)"
[French Foreign Ministry](#), 15 Sep 2014.

My comments: The Communiqué says "Daech (ISIL)" — Daech is a transliteration of the Arabic-language acronym for ISIL. The French government stopped using the name "Islamic State". [Washington Post](#), 17 Sep.

Note that both Russia and China attended the Paris conference.

This Communiqué is rather vague. For example, paragraph 4 promises "appropriate military assistance".

There is an inconsistency: Paragraph 4 says there is an "urgent need to remove Daech (ISIL)" while paragraph 5 states a firm belief "that resolute action is necessary to eradicate Daech (ISIL)". So is the goal to remove ISIL or to eradicate ISIL?

15 Sep 2014: More USA vs. Iran spat also USA vs. Syria

The Islamic Republic [of Iran] News Agency reported its interview with Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei:

[Ayatollah Khamenei] added there are evidences indicating that US claims about fighting Daesh terrorists "are lies."

....

On the very first days of Daesh incursion into Iraq [i.e., sometimes between January and June 2014], the US ambassador to [Iraq] asked his Iranian counterpart for a meeting between Iranian and American officials to discuss bilateral cooperation on the issue of Daesh terrorists. [Ayatollah:] "I said we do not work with the Americans as they have evil intentions and stained hands. How is it possible to cooperate with Americans under such circumstances?"

"Supreme Leader: US claims about ISIS empty, biased," [IRNA](#), 15 Sep 2014.

[PressTV](#) in Iran clarifies that the Iranians refused to cooperate with the USA *before* the USA opposed inclusion of Iran in the Paris conference.

The Washington Post explained some of this Iranian propaganda:

Khamenei said the American offer to participate in countering the militants came before the public U.S. opposition to Iran's attendance at the Paris conference, but he did not give further details.

Although details of the U.S.-Iranian discussion remain vague, it appears to have been an offer of behind-the-scenes cooperation rather than public partnership.

....

Psaki, however, ruled out any U.S. military coordination with Iran. The United States and Iran have been diplomatically estranged for more than 30 years and have long considered one another principal adversaries in the Middle East.

By going public with the American offer Monday [15 Sep], Iran appeared to close off the possibility of cooperation against the militants for now.

Anne Gearan, "Iran won't team with U.S. against Islamic State," [Washington Post](#), 10:09 EDT, 15 Sep 2014.

See also [Reuters](#).

Kerry held a press conference in Paris after the conference, in which Kerry made a number of important observations:

KERRY: Now, as I said today — you guys weren't in there, but I said it in this meeting — the military piece is one piece. It's one component of this. It's a critical component, but it's only one component. And the truth is, equally — probably far more important than the military in the end is going to be what countries are able to do to help Iraq to be able to step up and other places, by the way, to step up and start drying up this pool of jihadis who get seduced into believing there's some virtue in crossing into Syria to fight or to join ISIL. And a young nine-year-old kid who goes with his father and his mother and holds up the severed head of someone. I mean, that's just beyond imagination. And what this effort has to do is literally dry up the money, dry up the foreign fighters, prevent the foreign fighters from going home back to various places to do harm. It has to start major efforts to delegitimize ISIS's claim to some religious foundation for what it's doing and begin to put real Islam out there and draw lines throughout the region.

And I think this is a wake-up call with respect to that because every Arab leader there today was talking about this, about real Islam and how important the Friday sermons are and where they need to go. Those are critical components of this strategy. Getting logistics, airlift, putting humanitarian assistance in, flying it in, ammunition, equipment, training, advisers — all of these roles are the totality and you have to be able to describe this in a logistic way — in a holistic way.

....

QUESTION: Yes, sir. Apropos Iraq, Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, said today in a series of statements and tweets that Iran had rejected an Obama Administration proposal to cooperate on security in Iraq and on ISIS, and in fact, he wrote — he said, "Mr. Zarif rejected U.S. Secretary of State offer too." That's a direct quote from what he said. What is the nature of the dialogue or proposal that you've made to Iran? Have they rejected it? And if they've rejected it, why is your spokesman holding open the possibility of discussing this at the upcoming — in the margins of the P5+1 talks?

SECRETARY KERRY: Because we've always been open to having a discussion on the side of the P5+1, and we've had several discussions. I'm not going to get into a back-and-forth. I don't want to do that. I don't think it's going to be — I don't think it's constructive, frankly. But we have had conversations on the sides of the P5+1. It's not Foreign Minister Zarif's file, which I think I said previously to all of you. So I'm just going to hold open the possibility always of having a discussion that had the

possibility of being constructive, but I'm not going to make any other — I'm not going to get into a back-and-forth.

....

QUESTION [by Lara Jakes of AP]: Okay. So if there's no prospect of having any kind of military coordination with the Iranians, what kind of things are in the realm of possibility to work with them or to engage with them on the ISIS? And then also, you had said in your interview with CBS [Face the Nation] that there would be — I think you said there would be some de-conflicting with the Syrians. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Is there going to be some kind of communication between Washington and Damascus?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, we're not going to coordinate with the Syrians. We've made that very, very clear. But there are all kinds of ways of communicating to avoid mistakes or disasters and not — strike the word "disasters" — there are all kinds of ways of avoiding bad things. And I'm not going to go into them, but we're not going to coordinate. We're not coordinating with them, no.

QUESTION: Would that be a direct Washington-Damascus discussion?

SECRETARY KERRY: I'm not going to — just there are all kinds of ways.

QUESTION: Okay. And then — and to what extent or how do you envision any kind of discussion with Iran? What could there be some coordination on?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, we're not coordinating with Iran either, but —

QUESTION: On anything? You said militarily, but not on anything?

SECRETARY KERRY: We're not coordinating with Iran, but as I said, we're open to have a conversation at some point in time if there's a way to find something constructive.

"Roundtable Discussion With Press in Paris," [State Dept.](#), 15 Sep 2014.

Kerry's initial remark on "de-conflicting" with Syria was quoted above in the transcript on 13-14 Sep, in the section titled "counterterrorism vs. war". Given Obama's obsession with removing Assad, which means the USA can *not* cooperate with Assad, the proposed "de-conflicting" communications may be the only way to prevent Assad's military from accidentally attacking U.S. airplanes.

Obama has approved airstrikes against ISIL in Syria. If the USA were only attacking ISIL, then Assad *might* welcome the airstrikes. But the USA will be coordinating with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on the ground, to capture Syrian land formerly held by ISIL. The airstrikes without Assad's permission are a violation of Syria's sovereignty, and coordination with the FSA is a hostile act against Assad's lawful government. That might motivate Assad to order his military to shoot at U.S. aircraft. The USA will retaliate by destroying Assad's

air-defense systems on the ground, and also by destroying Assad's air force. I can not predict what happens next, but Assad would surely be outraged at the USA. Assad *might* send a few dozen special operations agents to the USA, to engage in attacks like Al-Qaeda did on 11 Sep 2001. Alternatively, either ISIL or Assad will shoot down a U.S. aircraft in Syria, then attack the American rescue mission to retrieve the pilot. The point of this paragraph is to show how the USA can be sucked deeper and deeper into the Syrian civil war.

15 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 16 mentions of "Syria" and 55 mentions of "Iraq".

QUESTION: Secretary of State John Kerry said on CBS Face the Nation that ... we will not coordinate airstrikes with the Assad government.

MS. HARF: Correct.

QUESTION: But we will "de-conflict to make certain that they're not about to do something that they might regret even more seriously." What did he mean by that?

MS. HARF: Well, as he said several times in that interview, we will not — this is like I'm a broken record today — we will not be coordinating in any way with the Syrian Government. The President has made clear we will hunt down terrorists wherever they are if they threaten America; that means we will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria as well as Iraq. We're obviously not going to telegraph our plans in advance, and as the Secretary said during that interview multiple times, we are not and will not be coordinating with the regime.

QUESTION: What did he mean by "de-conflict"? I mean —

MS. HARF: I think I just made clear what he meant. And we have to move on. I'm on a little bit of a tight time schedule today, so any last ones on ISIS? Yes, last [question]. Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 15 Sep 2014.

Ms. Harf failed to clarify what Kerry meant by "de-conflict". Kerry may not have informed her. Perhaps, Kerry himself does not not know what "de-conflict" will mean in practice, when the U.S. airstrikes are occurring in Syria.

16 September 2014

16 Sep: Gen. Dempsey tells Truth, Washington Aghast

Beginning with Obama's first policy speech on ISIL in Iraq on 19 June 2014, Obama has repeatedly and clearly emphasized that U.S. military will *not* serve in a combat role in Iraq (i.e., "no U.S. boots on the ground"). But, on the morning of 16 Sep, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Dempsey, testified before the U.S. Congress that U.S. soldiers *may*

need to fight in Iraq.

On 16 Sep, the Associated Press reported:

American ground troops may be needed to battle Islamic State forces in the Middle East if President Barack Obama's current strategy fails, the nation's top military officer said Tuesday as Congress began debating Obama's plan to expand airstrikes and train Syrian rebels.

"To be clear, if we reach the point where I believe our advisers should accompany Iraqi troops on attacks against specific ISIL targets, I will recommend that to the president," Army Gen. Martin Dempsey declared in testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, referring to the militants by an alternative name.

Pressed later by Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., the panel's chairman, the four-star general said if Obama's current approach isn't enough to prevail, he might "go back to the president and make a recommendation that may include the use of ground forces."

Obama has maintained repeatedly that American forces will not have a renewed ground combat mission in Iraq in this new phase of a long war against terrorists.

David Espo & Donna Cassata, "Top General: US Ground Troops Possible In Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 15:08 EDT, 16 September 2014.

At the very first opportunity, a press gaggle aboard Air Force One as the president and journalists traveled to Georgia, the White House repudiated the U.S. combat role on the ground in Iraq:

[FIRST] QUESTION: Josh, I wanted to ask you about General Dempsey's testimony today. He said that under certain circumstances he could see himself asking the President to allow advisers on the ground to participate in combat operations. I wonder if the President is open to that, if that recommendation would come from General Dempsey.

MR. EARNEST: Jim, I think, as was clear from General Dempsey's remarks, that he was referring to a hypothetical scenario in which there might be a future situation in which he might make a tactical recommendation to the President as it relates to the use of ground troops.

It's the responsibility of the President's military advisers to plan and consider all the wide range of contingencies. It's also the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief to set out a clear policy. And the President has been clear about what that policy is. He reiterated it on a number of occasions; most recently, I believe in his address to the nation on Wednesday [10 Sep] night, which is that the President does not believe that it would be in the best interest of our national security to deploy American ground troops in a combat role in Iraq and Syria. That policy has not changed.

QUESTION: So under no circumstances would there be boots on the ground?

MR. EARNEST: Well, precision is important here. And what the President has been very clear about is the role of American forces in Iraq. The President has deployed

American servicemen and women — a limited number of them — to serve in an advise-and-assist capacity, to staff joint operation centers, to defend the embassy in Baghdad and the consulate in Erbil. So there are American service personnel in Iraq.

There are also, obviously, American servicemen and women who are engaged in some of the air combat operations, right? There are more than 150 strikes, I believe, that have been announced by Central Command that have taken place at the direction of the President.

But what he's been very specific and precise about is that he will not deploy ground troops in a combat role into Iraq or Syria.

....

MR. EARNEST: And the President is confident that this mission can be successfully executed without deploying American servicemen and women in a combat role on the ground in Iraq and Syria.

"Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Josh Earnest en route Atlanta, Georgia, 9/16/14," [White House](#), 13:26 EDT, 16 Sep 2014.

My comments: I was astounded to hear the military speak honestly — and in defiance of Obama's clearly stated condition — so soon. It is easy to foresee that the cowardly Iraqi army will be inadequate to expel ISIL from cities and towns that ISIL captured earlier this year. There are two groups of militias in Iraq that are able to engage ISIL: the Kurdish peshmerga and some Shiite militias. The Kurdish peshmerga may balk at fighting in Anbar province, far from the Kurdish homeland. It would alienate Sunni residents to have Shiite militia fighting in Sunni areas. At that time, Obama would need to consider whether to send in U.S. soldiers to fight on the ground in Iraq for the third time in 25 years, an act that would be enormously unpopular with voters in the USA. One hopes that Iraq's neighbors could send troops to engage ISIL on the ground in Iraq.

Alternatively, on 8 Sep, Abadi announced his plan to form local militias (e.g., like the National Guard in the USA) that are equipped by the Iraqi federal government and controlled by both the Iraqi federal and provincial governments. Abadi's plan would end private, sectarian militias, which have allegedly been responsible for much of the violence against civilians in Iraq since 2003. [Reuters](#), 9 Sep; [Washington Post](#), 13 Sep; [Al-Monitor](#), 16 Sep.

16 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department, there were 31 mentions of "Syria" and 40 mentions of "Iraq".

QUESTION: Not that there's a lot to say after the rather lengthy hearing this morning on the Hill, but perhaps you can offer us some comment on the fact that even this morning in the hearing and for the last couple weeks, we've been hearing about how wonderfully inclusive the new Iraqi Government is and how it's going to be a strong partner. But yet today, they were unable to agree on these two key cabinet posts. And I'm just wondering if you're at all concerned that that's a harbinger of bad things to

come.

MS. HARF: Well, forming governments and parliamentary systems, as you know, often involves multiple nominations, votes, and re-votes as part of the normal democratic process. We do appreciate the effort that Iraq's leaders have put forth thus far in forming an inclusive government, as you mentioned. And they now, of course, must act without delay and make the necessary decisions to complete the cabinet. We'll continue to urge Iraqi leaders to come to agreement on these two critical positions as soon as possible. Obviously, there are crucial parts of the national plan they have put forward. And I think they've talked about having another vote later in the week, so we'll keep watching.

QUESTION: Right. But are you — I mean, yesterday, CENTCOM announced the first airstrikes under the new authority have been carried out.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm, correct.

QUESTION: And are you comfortable proceeding with the new strategy in support of the government when these two, as you noted, critical, crucial spots are still vacant and still very much contested?

MS. HARF: We are. We are. Again, we know parliamentary systems often take a while to get all of the posts filled. We want them to do so as soon as possible, but we are comfortable with where we are today.

....

QUESTION: Do you oppose the formula that they have used thus far that they would actually divide the cabinet or they divide the ministries along almost purely sectarian lines?

MS. HARF: Well, we've said we appreciate the new Iraqi Government's efforts to form this government in an inclusive manner. They have done so thus far. Again, there's two key posts that need to be filled, but we have been supportive and happy with the way they've done so thus far.

QUESTION: Okay. So you see that Haidar al-Abadi is doing all he can to maintain an inclusive government, as he said publicly and as he promised all world leaders?

MS. HARF: Yes, that's how we feel today. As I said, these are two key posts though, so we need the Iraqi Government to come together and make some decisions hopefully as soon as possible to get those filled.

....

QUESTION: And finally, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey, General Martin Dempsey, said that they — the advisors will be doing combat duties, in

essence. Does that in any way nullify the promise not to have boots on the ground?

MS. HARF: Well, I think you're parsing his words a little bit, or shortening them maybe. The President's been very clear we will not have troops on the ground in combat roles, period. That is an underlying principle of our actions in Iraq. I think there was a long exchange this morning about what the advisors are doing; but again, we've been very clear about the military — the combat boots on the ground question.

....

QUESTION: On ISIS, the Chairman also said — I think the Chairman or the Secretary of Defense said that he warned the Syrians against responding or trying to attack — any attacking American airplanes and so on. Does that rule out any kind of coordination so you guys are not crowding the sky at the same time?

MS. HARF: Well, the President has been clear and the Secretary's been clear we are not coordinating with the Syrian regime and will not coordinate with the regime. That means we will not hesitate to take action against ISIL in Syria as well as in Iraq. We are not going to telegraph our plans in advance, and again, as we said on numerous occasions, we won't ask their permission. I would note the rescue operation we undertook to try and rescue the hostages. Of course, we did not ask their permission.

QUESTION: So let me ask you something. I mean, before you attack Syria — I mean, ISIL in Syria — will you tell at least the Syrians to make — to clear the skies, so to speak?

MS. HARF: As I just said, we will not coordinate with them, we will not telegraph our plans. I don't have any — anything else in terms of a hypothetical about what action we might take. But I want to be clear about where we are today and that is what I just —

QUESTION: So you will not inform them that there is some sort of an American combat mission over Syrian territory in any way, shape, or form?

MS. HARF: Well, I would point to what we did when we undertook the rescue operation inside Syria for the hostages; of course, we did not inform them.

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

My comments: [Above](#), I described how the Iraqi Parliament rejected 2 of 3 nominees for Ministers. On one hand, Ms. Harf does *not* seem concerned (i.e., "we are comfortable with where we are today"), but she does say the Parliament "must act without delay" and "make some decisions hopefully as soon as possible". In case Ms. Harf had not noticed, the Iraqi Parliament has been delaying since the election results were certified on 17 June, and the Parliament has missed multiple deadlines specified in their constitution.

16 Sep: Iraq advises Assad in Syria

On 16 Sep 2014, Reuters reported:

Iraq's national security adviser briefed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on efforts to counter Islamic State on Tuesday [16 Sep], in the first such meeting since the United States launched air strikes on the radical group in Iraq [on 8 Aug].

....

.... Western governments see Assad as part of the problem and say he must leave power.

But the Shi'ite-led government in Baghdad, together with Iran and the Lebanese group Hezbollah, have been important allies for Assad since the uprising against his rule erupted in 2011. Shi'ite Iraqi militias have fought on Assad's side against the insurgency spearheaded by Sunni Islamists.

The meeting between Faleh al-Fayad, the Iraqi national security adviser, and Assad indicated that the Iraqi government aims to maintain those ties. It also points to the scope for possible indirect contact between Syria and the West over the fight against Islamic State via third parties such as Iraq.

Tom Perry & Sylvia Westall, "Iraqi official briefs Syria's Assad on efforts against Islamic State," [Reuters](#), 21:07 GMT, 16 September 2014.

Copy at [Daily Star](#).

17 September 2014

On 17 Sep 2014, on an airplane flight from Washington, DC to Paris, General Dempsey chatted with journalists. The Associated Press reported:

About half of Iraq's army is incapable of partnering effectively with the U.S. to roll back the Islamic State group's territorial gains in western and northern Iraq, and the other half needs to be partially rebuilt with U.S. training and additional equipment, the top U.S. military officer said Wednesday [17 Sep].

....

Dempsey said U.S. military teams that spent much of the summer in Iraq assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Iraqi security forces concluded that 26 of 50 army brigades were capable partners for the U.S. He described them as well led and well equipped, adding, "They appear to have a national instinct, instead of a sectarian instinct." He said the 24 other brigades were too heavily weighted with Shiites to be part of a credible national force.

Sectarianism has been a major problem for the Iraqi security forces for years and is in part a reflection of resentments that built up during the decades of rule under Saddam Hussein, who repressed the majority Shiite population, and the unleashing of reprisals against Sunnis after U.S. forces toppled him in April 2003. Sunni resistance led to the relatively brief rise of an extremist group called al-Qaida in Iraq, led by the late Abu

Musab al-Zarqawi. That group withered but re-emerged as the Islamic State organization, which capitalized on Sunni disenchantment with the Shiite government in Baghdad.

....

Dempsey also said the Islamic State fighters in Iraq have reacted to weeks of U.S. airstrikes by making themselves less visible.

"What we've seen so far is, a lot of the black flags have come down, a lot of the convoys have dispersed, a lot of the (fighter) assembly areas have been moved into urban areas," Dempsey said, adding, "This will be a campaign of adaptation." He predicted the Islamic State fighters would "literally litter the road networks" with improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, in the days ahead. That, in turn, will require more counter-IED training and equipment for the Iraqi army, he said.

Robert Burns, "Dempsey: Half Of Iraqi Army Not OK As US Partners," [Associated Press](#), 09:25 EDT, 17 September 2014.

On 21 Sep, the [Associated Press](#) reported that General Dempsey "said one of the major problems with the other half [of the Iraqi army] is that they have been infiltrated by extremists."

My comments: General Dempsey was kind enough not to mention cowardice and corruption in the Iraqi army. However, 52% of the Iraqi army is defective and will need more training and more equipment, less than three years after the U.S. military finished training and equipping the Iraqi army. The other half of the Iraqi army is apparently destined for the scrap heap.

17 Sep: Abadi rejects all foreign troops Abadi wants cooperation with Syria and Iran

On 17 Sep 2014, the Associated Press reported its exclusive interview with Abadi: Iraq's new prime minister ruled out stationing U.S. ground troops in his country, chiding the international community Wednesday for inaction in Syria and lamenting the "puzzling" exclusion of neighboring Iran from the coalition being assembled to fight the Islamic State group.

....

But [al-Abadi] stressed that he sees no need for the U.S. or other nations to send troops into Iraq to help fight the Islamic State.

"Not only is it not necessary," he said, "We don't want them. We won't allow them. Full stop."

Instead, al-Abadi urged the international community to expand its campaign against the extremists in neighboring Syria, noting that militants coming under pressure in Iraq

are retreating back into Syria.

....

The Iraqi premier said that the Iraqi military will choose and approve targets, and that the U.S. will not take action without consulting with Baghdad first. Failure to do so, he warned, risks causing widespread civilian casualties as has happened in Pakistan and Yemen, where the U.S. has conducted drone strikes for years.

....

The U.S. has rejected cooperating with Syrian President Bashar Assad in the Obama administration's expanded campaign against the Islamic State. The White House has long called Assad's rule illegitimate and demanded he step aside.

Al-Abadi, however, said that Iraq doesn't have the luxury of refusing cooperation with Damascus, and instead pushed for some sort of coordination.

"We cannot afford to fight our neighbor, even if we disagree on many things," al-Abadi said of the Assad regime. "We don't want to enter into problems with them. For us, sovereignty of Syria is very important."

....

The U.S. hopes to pull together a broad coalition to help defeat the extremist group, but has ruled out cooperating with Iran or Syria, which both view the Islamic State group as a threat. Both countries were excluded from a conference this week in Paris that brought the U.S., France and other allies together to discuss how to address the militant threat, prompting al-Abadi to question their vision.

"I actually find it puzzling that we hold a conference in Paris to help Iraq and to fight terrorism and ... the biggest neighbor of Iraq — Iran — is excluded," he said. "That puts me as prime minister in a very difficult position."

Al-Abadi added that Iraq is caught in the middle of "a disagreement between the international allies — this international coalition — and Iran. ... For me, that is catastrophic."

Vivian Salama & Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Ap Interview: Iraq Premier Nixes US Ground Troops," [Associated Press](#), 23:24 GMT, 17 September 2014.

Earlier report: "Iraqi Prime Minister: Foreign Ground Troops Not Necessary Or Wanted In Fight Against Is Group," [Associated Press](#), 13:33 GMT, 17 September 2014.

On 4 Nov 1979, Iran illegally seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days. Iran became a supplier of munitions to the palestinians, North Korea, and other rogue nations. The USA ostracized Iran. Now that logic requires that the USA and Iran cooperate in fighting ISIL in Syria and Iraq, and Kerry seems open to the possibility of some limited cooperation, the Iranians are publicly refusing to cooperate with the USA.

The Associated Press reports on a speech by Iran's Foreign Minister to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City:

Iran's foreign minister on Wednesday [17 Sep] ruled out cooperating with the United States in helping Iraq fight Islamic State militants and warned that the terrorist group poses a much broader global threat that needs new thinking to eradicate.

Mohammad Javad Zarif said Iran has serious doubts about the willingness and ability of the United States to react seriously to the "menace" from the Islamic State group "across the board" and not just pick and choose where to confront it as it has just started doing in Iraq.

....

Zarif called the 24 participating nations at the Paris conference "a coalition of repenters" because most supported the Islamic State group "in one form or another" from its inception following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

....

Zarif said it's now time for the international community "and particularly the coalition of the repenters" to stop providing financing, military equipment and safe passage for the group and its fighters.

He didn't name any coalition members, but Saudi Arabia and Qatar provided financing to the al-Qaida breakaway group, and Turkey has not stopped thousands of foreign fighters from crossing into Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State group.

Zarif said the international community must begin to deal with the resentment and disenfranchisement that allows the Islamic State group to attract young people from the Middle East to Europe and the United States.

Edith M. Lederer, "Iran Rules Out Cooperating With US In Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 23:37 EDT, 17 September 2014.

Note that Zarif's statements are consistent with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who on 15 Sep announced he had refused to cooperate with the USA.

17 Sep: Obama speech

On 17 Sep, Obama visited the U.S. Central Command and gave a speech. A few paragraphs of Obama's speech disagreed with General Dempsey's statement on 16 Sep about a possible future role for U.S. troops on the ground in a combat role in Iraq.

But — and this is something I want to emphasize — this is not and will not be America's fight alone. One of the things we've learned over this last decade is, America can make a decisive difference, but I want to be clear: The American forces that have been deployed to Iraq do not and will not have a combat mission. They will

support Iraqi forces on the ground as they fight for their own country against these terrorists.

As your Commander-in-Chief, I will not commit you and the rest of our Armed Forces to fighting another ground war in Iraq. After a decade of massive ground deployments, it is more effective to use our unique capabilities in support of partners on the ground so they can secure their own countries' futures. And that's the only solution that will succeed over the long term.

....

But the point is we cannot do for the Iraqis what they must do for themselves. We can't take the place of Arab partners in securing their own region and a better future for their own people. We can't do it for them, but this is an effort that calls on America's unique abilities — and responsibilities — to lead.

Obama, "Remarks by the President at MacDill Air Force Base," [White House](#), 12:04 EDT, 17 Sep 2014.

My comments: I agree with Obama that the Iraqi army needs to fight on the ground to expel ISIL from cities that ISIL captured earlier in 2014. It is important that the Iraqi people see this as *their* war for freedom from terrorism, not something that Obama/Kerry imposed on Iraq. It is important that Iraqis invest in this war against ISIL, including dying in the fight for freedom from ISIL.

But the reality is that Iraq is in its current mess because the Iraqi army was too cowardly to engage ISIL during January-June 2014. It will take time to train and motivate the Iraqi army, but we need to expel ISIL *now*. I do *not* see any good solution to this problem.

The USA faces a similar problem in Syria, where we need a military on the ground to help guide airstrikes, and to capture former ISIL territory after U.S. airstrikes on ISIL. Instead of choosing to cooperate with Assad, who has the largest and best trained army, Obama/Kerry have chosen to partner with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the weakest of the insurgent groups. The FSA is in such dire condition that it will need at least six months of training before the FSA is ready to fight ISIL.

17-18 Sep: State Department Press Briefing

There were no Daily Press Briefings at the State Department on 17-18 Sep. Psaki was in New York City with Kerry, while Harf was in New York City with the negotiating team on Iranian nuclear weapons.

18-21 September 2014

On 17 Sep, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to approve Obama's plan to train and equip moderate Syrian rebels, as explained [below](#). On 18 Sep, the U.S. Senate voted to approve a continuing budget resolution that included the train/equip legislation, as explained

[below](#). Also on 18 Sep, voters in Scotland rejected independence from the United Kingdom, which dominated the news.

19 Sep: Kerry welcomes Iran (!)

On Friday, 19 Sep, Kerry chaired a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, plus a few additional foreign ministers, to discuss Iraq. Kerry said:

The fact is there is a role for nearly every country in the world to play, including Iran, whose foreign minister is here with us here today. ISIL poses a threat to all of us, and we're committed to working in close partnership with the new Iraqi Government and countries around the world to defeat it.

Kerry, "Statement as Chair of Ministerial Debate of the UN Security Council on Iraq," [State Dept.](#), 19 Sep 2014.

Iran must be confused by Kerry's inconsistency. On 12 Sep, Kerry strongly opposed inviting Iran to the Paris conference on Iraq. But one week later, Kerry seems to welcome Iran.

On 15 Sep, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appeared to reject any possible cooperation between Iran and the USA.

Iran *should* be included in the coalition of nations that are fighting against ISIL in Syria and Iraq. Indeed, Iran has been involved in sending military equipment to Syria and Iraq, as well as advising the governments of Syria and Iraq.

Kurds return to fight against ISIL

At international conferences on Syria and Iraq, everyone agrees that we need to stop the flow of foreigners from Europe and the USA to Syria, where they join jihadists, Al-Qaeda, or ISIL. This is partly (1) desire to impede ISIL, and partly (2) concern that trained terrorists will return to Europe or the USA and engage in attacks in Europe/USA.

But recently there have been reports of Kurds in Europe and Turkey who are returning to their homeland to fight *against* ISIL. [Associated Press](#), 16 Sep; [Associated Press](#), 20 Sep.

So how do authorities in Turkey and Jordan distinguish (1) bad foreigners who seek to join ISIL from (2) good foreigners who want to fight against ISIL?

19 Sep: Syrian National Coalition wants *more than 5000* rebels

On 19 Sep, the Syrian National Coalition issued coalition news:

Abdelahad Astepho, member of the political committee, said that the US Congress's vote in favor of President Obama's plan to train and equip the Free Syrian Army is "a step in the right direction though it was made late. Limiting the training and equipment program to 5,000 FSA fighters is not enough to counter the threat of the Assad regime and ISIS. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the number of trainees to solve the

whole problem of terrorism once and for all. Moreover, limiting the program to this small number may prolong the bloody conflict, thus prolonging the suffering of the Syrian people." Astepho calls on the US Senate "to back the training and equipment program and for its immediate implementation, as any delay will cost Syrians more lives. Any delay in the implementation of this plan will lead to further expansion of the terror practiced by the Assad regime and the terrorist group ISIS."

"Syrian Coalition Welcomes US House Approval of President Obama's Train and Equip Program," [SNC](#), 19 Sep 2014.

My comments: Does the Free Syrian Army currently have more than 5000 fighters? There seems to be no answer for this critical question. Further, why did the Coalition have a politician, instead of the commander of the Free Syrian Army, issue this statement? The Coalition seems to be reorganizing its relations with the Free Syrian Army, as explained [above](#).

On 26 Sep, as quoted below, General Dempsey in the Pentagon admitted that 15,000 fighters were needed to reclaim territory in Syria that had been captured by ISIL. Let's do the math. Assume it takes six months to establish the training center, and six months to train 5000 rebels. (That assumption was made by the Pentagon, and quoted [above](#).) That means 15,000 rebels will be ready to fight ISIL in Sep 2016. Can we afford to wait two years for boots on the ground to fight ISIL? What about the many tens of thousands of people in Syria who will be killed by ISIL during the next two years?

20 Sep: Turkish hostages freed in Iraq

On 11 June 2014, ISIL entered the Turkish Consulate in Mosul and kidnapped 49 people, 46 Turkish citizens and 3 Iraqis. Early in the morning of 20 Sep, the Turkish intelligence agency retrieved all 49 hostages, allegedly "without firing a shot, paying a ransom or offering a quid pro quo." [Associated Press](#).

See also [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#); [Today's Zaman](#) in Turkey.

On 21 Sep 2014, the Associated Press tersely reported:

Turkey had been reluctant to join a coalition to defeat the militant group, citing the safety of its 49 kidnapped citizens, but it was unclear that the release of the hostages would change Turkey's policy toward the militants.

[Aaron Stein, an associate fellow at the London-based Royal United Services Institute,] said he doubted that Turkey would suddenly adopt a much more muscular attitude toward the militants. "There will some changes, but not as much as people hope," he said.

Suzan Fraser & Raphael Satter, "Turkish Hostages Freed, But Questions Linger," [Associated Press](#), 01:12 GMT, 21 September 2014.

As ISIL threatened to seize Kurdish areas in Syria, including the city of Kobani, more than 100,000 refugees from Syria traveled to Turkey in the three days, 19-21 Sep. Turkey already has more than a million refugees from Syria. [AP](#), 22:01 GMT, 21 Sep. On 23 Sep, the recent

wave of refugees had reached 150,000. [AP](#). The refugee problem may help convince the Turkish government to actively participate in the coalition against ISIL in Syria.

Rumor that CIA created or trained ISIL

Occasionally in reading news from Iran or Iraq I see some ridiculous news story. My time is limited, so I normally ignore such implausible "news".

But I have repeatedly seen serious news stories from Iran and Iraq that assert that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency created or trained ISIL. For example:

- "Insanity of America responsible for all mayhem in Middle East: Report," [IRNA](#) in Iran, 2 July 2014 ("It has been widely reported that hundreds of ISIS members — likely including many of those now engaged in the offensive against Maliki in Iraq — received military training from CIA operatives at camps in Jordan.")
- "ISIL: Independent regional actor or CIA-Mossad proxy?" [IRNA](#) in Iran, 23 Aug 2014.
- "CIA-made ISIL monster spawns terrorism: Ex-US Marine," [PressTV](#) in Iran, 14 Sep 2014 ("[ISIL] is a creation, a monster, a Frankenstein created by [the CIA].")
- "US will lead fight against ISIL: Obama," [PressTV](#) in Iran, 20 Sep 2014 ("The ISIL terrorists, who were initially trained by the CIA in Jordan in 2012 to destabilize the Syrian government,")
- "Kerry: Iran Has 'A Role' in Campaign against ISIL," [Tasnim News](#) in Iran, 20 Sep 2014 ("The ISIL terrorists, who were initially trained by the CIA in Jordan in 2012 to destabilize the Syrian government,")
- "There is no parallel between ISIL and Viet Cong: Don DeBar," [PressTV](#) in Iran, 21 Sep 2014 ("The ISIL terrorists, who were initially trained by the CIA in Jordan in 2012 to destabilize the Syrian government,")

My citations above are to Iranian news sources, because there are few English-language news sources in Iraq.

U.S. news media are only beginning to recognize the problem of this propaganda from Iran and Iraq. See, e.g., David D. Kirkpatrick, "Suspicious Run Deep in Iraq That C.I.A. and the Islamic State Are United," [NY Times](#), 20 Sep.

I observe that sometimes what really matters is what the majority of people *believe*, as opposed to true facts. Falsehoods and rumors are difficult to dispel.

Gen. Dempsey wants more participation by Arabs in Iraq

On 21 Sep, General Dempsey was in Croatia, where he told reporters that he wanted more

Arab participation in the coalition in Iraq. [Associated Press](#).

Leon Panetta goes public

Leon Panetta, the U.S. Secretary of Defense from July 2011 to February 2013, blamed Obama for failing to arm the Free Syrian Army sooner.

Panetta: The real key was how can we develop a leadership group among the opposition that would be able to take control. And my view was to have leverage to do that, we would have to provide the weapons and the training in order for them to really be willing to work with us in that effort.

Pelley: But with virtually his entire national security team unanimous on this [i.e., Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the director of the CIA, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs], that's not the decision the president made.

Panetta: I think the president's concern, and I understand it, was that he had a fear that if we started providing weapons, we wouldn't know where those weapons would wind up. My view was, "You have to begin somewhere."

Scott Pelley: In retrospect now, was not arming the rebels at that time a mistake?

Leon Panetta: I think that would've helped. And I think in part, we pay the price for not doing that in what we see happening with ISIS.

Now ISIS has forced Mr. Obama to reverse himself. The new policy depends on local forces to win on the ground, but many of the available partners are dubious. Syrian rebels fight each other. And the Pentagon figures only about half the Iraqi army is reliable.

....

Scott Pelley: How long does it take to destroy ISIS?

Leon Panetta: I think it's going to take a long time. And I think the American people need to know it's going to take a long time.

Scott Pelley, "The Islamic State: Repercussions," [CBS News](#), 21 Sep 2014.
See also summary on [Fox News](#).

My comment: Even in hindsight, it is not clear what should have been done in 2011, 2012, and 2013. If the Free Syrian Army had been stronger because of U.S. support, then the FSA would have weakened Assad. After ISIL entered Syria in mid-2013, the FSA and Assad would still need to fight against ISIL. If the FSA were stronger and Assad were weaker, the overall situation might be the same as today in the fight against ISIL.

I do *not* know what should have been done in 2011 or 2012. Obama had a valid concern about weapons given to the FSA being acquired by jihadists or Al-Qaeda. And Obama had a valid concern about the USA *not* intervening in a sectarian civil war in Syria. But we can be

sure that it is too late now to revisit those past decisions.

For reasons given in my [conclusions](#) below, I believe we should now be partnering with Assad in the fight against ISIL.

22-28 September 2014

There were no Daily Press Briefings at the State Department on 20-28 Sep. Psaki was in New York City with Kerry, while Harf was in New York City with the negotiating team on Iranian nuclear weapons.

The United Nations is having their annual meeting of heads of state at the General Assembly. The big issues are:

- global warming
- fighting terrorism (e.g., ISIL)
- Ebola hemorrhagic fever in western Africa (e.g., Liberia and Sierra Leone), which has already killed approximately 2800 people. The U.S. Government forecasts between 0.5 and 1.4 million people infected by 20 Jan 2015, killing perhaps half of those infected.

On 23 Sep in Syria, the U.S. began airstrikes inside Syria, as discussed [below](#).

Also on 23 Sep, prime minister Abadi retired two Iraqi generals — Abboud Qanbar and Ali Ghaidan — who failed to prevent a recent ISIL victory in Anbar province. [Reuters](#).

23 Sep: White House Press Briefing

On 23 Sep, the U.S. and its allies began airstrikes inside Syria, as reported [below](#).

Ben Rhodes, Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor, gave a press briefing:

QUESTION: What was the imminent threat that prompted the bombings? Was it Khorasan?

MR. RHODES: So the Khorasan Group is a group of extremists that is comprised of a number of individuals who we've been tracking for a long time. It includes some former al Qaeda operatives, core al Qaeda operatives from Afghanistan and Pakistan who made their way to Syria, remain in our view affiliated with al Qaeda. And we have been monitoring over the course of many months the development of plotting against the United States or Western targets emanating from Syria.

So for some time now we've been tracking plots to conduct attacks in the United States or Europe. We believe that that attack plotting was imminent and that they had plans to conduct attacks external to Syria. And we also believe, of course, that the Syrian regime was not able to take action against that threat. So, in addition to the strikes against ISIL, we took action against the Khorasan Group to disrupt that plotting against the United States and Western targets.

QUESTION: How imminent, and where were they going to strike?

MR. RHODES: I'm not going to get into the specific details of plotting other than to say that we saw that they had very clear and concrete ambitions to launch external operations against the United States or Europe. And so this was actual plotting that was ongoing from Syria, and the strike that we took last night was aimed to disrupt that plotting.

QUESTION: And this morning was the first time that we heard the President discuss this group or this threat and it was not part of the pitch he made to the American public asking for their support in these strikes in Syria. So doesn't this mark a significant expansion of the military campaign that we're carrying out there?

MR. RHODES: Well, I think when the President gave his speech to the nation about his strategy against the threat from ISIL, he made clear that he'd be taking strikes in both Iraq and Syria —

QUESTION: ISIL, but not against —

MR. RHODES: Well, okay, so we see this very much as an extension of the threat posed by al Qaeda and their associated forces. These are individuals who have their origin, their history serving in al Qaeda. They're known to people who've been following this threat for years. They were in Afghanistan and Pakistan. So this, frankly, is a part of the ongoing effort against al Qaeda in which you've seen us take strikes in Yemen; you've seen us take strikes in Somalia. When there's an al Qaeda target we're going to take action against it.

What's unique about Syria is that the Assad regime was certainly unable to take action against this organization, the Khorasan Group, so therefore we felt the need to take action in our own defense.

MR. EARNEST: I'll just add that this is entirely consistent with the principle that the President did lay out in the address that Ben obviously worked on a lot, a core principle of this President's foreign policy that we're going to actively deny a safe haven to individuals or organizations that seek to establish a safe haven and use that safe haven to plot attacks against the U.S. homeland. So these strikes last night are entirely consistent with that core principle of this presidency.

MR. RHODES: And, similarly, consistent with the 2001 AUMF, which is the basis under which we take action against al Qaeda and associated forces.

QUESTION: Can you talk about coordination or notification there was to the Syrian government regarding what the U.S. and the other countries did last night?

QUESTION: Because Jen [Psaki at the State Dept.] has made it clear from State that there was sort of a vague, open-ended notice.

MR. RHODES: First of all, the President obviously declared publicly our intention to take military action in Syria. Subsequent to that, there was a direct contact to the Syrian regime to notify them of the fact that we would take direct action. That was undertaken at the United Nations by Samantha Power to the Syrian Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

I want to be very clear, though, that we did not coordinate with them, we did not provide them advance notice of the timing or of targets that the U.S. was going to strike. In fact, we warned them to not pose a threat to our aircraft. And again, going forward, there is no plan to have any coordination whatsoever with the Assad regime. Again, this was simply consistent with what the President had said — a notification that we would be taking this action; frankly, a warning to not pose a risk to our aircraft. And it was in no way an effort to coordinate or provide specific information about the types of targets or timing of targets that we would hit.

QUESTION: Did the Syrians give you a green light to do it?

MR. RHODES: I'm not going to characterize the Syrian response in a private diplomatic communication. Obviously, we have significant differences with the Syrian regime. We had been able to communicate with them on issues over the course of the last several years, for instance, when we needed to send a message about our concerns about chemical weapons. But it's obviously rare that we have that contact. This was simply a matter of notifying them that we'd be taking this action.

QUESTION: When did that take place?

MR. RHODES: I'm not going to provide a specific time. Obviously, it took place in recent days.

"Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes en route New York, NY, 9/23/2014," [White House](#), 10:55 EDT, 23 Sep 2014.

24 Sep: *The New York Times* editorial

On the morning of 24 Sep, the print edition of *The New York Times* contained an editorial that criticized Obama's plan.

President Obama has put America at the center of a widening war by expanding into Syria airstrikes against the Islamic State, the Sunni extremist group known as ISIS and ISIL. He has done this without allowing the public debate that needs to take place before this nation enters another costly and potentially lengthy conflict in the Middle East.

....

Mr. Obama has failed to ask for or receive congressional authorization for such military action. The White House claims that Mr. Obama has all the authority he needs under the 2001 law approving the use of force in Afghanistan and the 2002 law

permitting the use of force in Iraq, but he does not. He has given Congress notification of the military action in Iraq and Syria under the 1973 War Powers Resolution, but that is not a substitute for congressional authorization.

....

Meanwhile, Congress has utterly failed in its constitutional responsibilities. It has left Washington and gone into campaign fund-raising mode, shamelessly ducking a vote on this critical issue. That has deprived the country of a full and comprehensive debate over the mission in Syria and has shielded administration officials and military commanders from tough questions about every aspect of this operation — from its costs to its very obvious risks — that should be asked and answered publicly.

....

The military action early Tuesday [23 Sep] was quite different from what Mr. Obama explained in a televised speech on Sept. 10. For months the administration has focused on the ISIS threat, yet these strikes also targeted Khorasan, a group the government says is linked to Al Qaeda and engaged in “active plotting that posed an imminent threat to the United States and potentially our allies.”

....

These incongruities — two enemies [ISIL and Khorasan] now, instead of one [ISIL] — call into question whatever sense of purpose and planning the administration hopes to project. Mr. Obama has said airstrikes alone are not enough, and native ground troops in both Iraq and Syria will be relied on after the bombings. But it will be months before Americans can turn the mainstream opposition [in Syria] into a fighting force; in Iraq, after six weeks of American airstrikes, Iraqi Army troops have scarcely budged ISIS from its strongholds.

Editorial Board, "Wrong Turn on Syria: No Convincing Plan," [NY Times](#), 23 Sep 2014.

The Times has their facts wrong in the last quoted paragraph. As described [above](#), The Pentagon estimated it will take at least one year to train 5000 rebels in Syria. On 26 Sep, the Pentagon estimated that approximately 15,000 rebels will be needed to successfully recapture land from ISIL in Syria. So it will be approximately *two years* — *not* "months" — before the rebels in Syria are ready to push ISIL out of Syria. With the correct facts, *The Times* argument is even more forceful that Obama's plan is defective.

24 Sep: Friends of Syria

On 24 Sep, the Friends of Syria — London11 group (but without Egypt and Qatar) — met for 90 minutes on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meetings. [invitation](#). Is 90 minutes enough time to devote to this important problem? Moreover, [Kerry](#) attended for only a few minutes, because Obama asked him to do something else (i.e., chair the "foreign fighters forum" of Global Counterterrorism Forum). The Friends of Syria meeting was

chaired by the foreign minister of the U.K., Philip Hammond, who issued the [Communiqué](#) on 25 Sep. (Copy of Communiqué is at [rbs0.com](#).)

While I was updating my list of links to [documents](#) from Friends of Syria meetings, I noticed the Friends of Syrian People group had *only three* meetings during the first nine months of 2014. Although the monthly death tolls in Syria are higher than the death tolls in Iraq and Gaza combined, journalists gave the most coverage to Gaza, some coverage to Iraq, and ignored Syria. The U.S.-led coalition will probably solve the problem of ISIL in Iraq, but no one has a practical plan for how to end the Syrian civil war.

25 Sep: Krauthammer

On 25 Sep, Charles Krauthammer's editorial was published in *The Washington Post*:

Late, hesitant and reluctant as he is, President Obama has begun effecting a workable strategy against the Islamic State. True, he's been driven there by public opinion. Does anyone imagine that without the broadcast beheadings we'd be doing anything more than pinprick strikes within Iraq? If Obama can remain steady through future fluctuations in public opinion, his strategy might succeed.

But success will not be what he's articulating publicly. The strategy will not destroy the Islamic State. It's more containment-plus: Expel the Islamic State from Iraq, contain it in Syria. Because you can't win from the air. In Iraq, we have potential ground allies. In Syria, we don't.

....

As for what's left of the Free Syrian Army, Obama has finally come around to training and arming it. But very late and very little. The administration admits it won't be able to field any trained forces for a year. And even then only about 5,000. The Islamic State is already approximately 30,000 strong and growing.

....

Today jihadism is global, its religious and financial institutions ubiquitous and its roots deeply sunk in a world religion of more than a billion people. We are on a path — long, difficult, sober, undoubtedly painful — of long-term, low-intensity rollback/containment.

Containment-plus. It's the best of our available strategies. Obama must now demonstrate the steel to carry it through.

Charles Krauthammer, "Our real Syria strategy — containment-plus," [Washington Post](#), 25 Sep 2014.

26 Sep: Hagel/Dempsey press conference

On Friday, 26 Sep, Hagel and Gen. Dempsey gave a press conference at the Pentagon:

HAGEL: Along with France, we've conducted over 200 airstrikes in Iraq against ISIL and in support of Iraqi forces. With our Arab partners, we've conducted 43 airstrikes in Syria.

....

We also took action in Syria against the network of Al Qaida veterans known as the Khorasan group. We are still assessing the operational impact of these strikes. This was a critical operation. Members of this group were actively plotting attacks against the United States and our friends' allies.

In Syria there has been no coordination, nor will there be with the Assad regime. Nothing has changed about our position that has shifted our approach to Assad and his regime because this regime, President Assad, has lost all legitimacy to govern.

As we continue our operation from the air, I also want to emphasize that no one is under any illusions — under any illusions — that airstrikes alone will destroy ISIL. They are one element of our broader comprehensive campaign against ISIL, a campaign that has diplomatic, economic, intelligence and other military components, working with coalition partners and a new government in Iraq.

....

QUESTION: Chairman Dempsey, do you believe that it will take — in fact take some ground troops inside Syria to destroy ISIS?

And if they are not Americans, do you have enough faith in training 5,000 Free Syrian Army troops, the nonaggressive militants, to achieve that goal, to destroy ISIS?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Actually, first I never — I never heard the phrase "nonaggressive militants," but I mean, I suppose — (Laughter.) It sounds to me like an oxymoron, Jim.

But let me see if I can answer the question.

Air power alone — first of all, there is no military solution to ISIL. I have said military only solution, okay? Secondly there is no air power alone solution to ISIL, either in Iraq or in Syria.

And so the answer is, yes, there has to be a ground component to the campaign against ISIL in Syria, and we believe that the path to develop that is the Syrian moderate opposition.

Five thousand's never been the end state. It's — there's — there's — we've had estimates anywhere from 12,000 to 15,000 is what we believe they would need to recapture lost territory in eastern Syria.

And I am confident that we can establish their training if we do it right. We — we have to do it right, not fast. They have to have military leaders that bind them together. They have to be — have a political structure into which they can hook, and therefore be responsive to. And that's going to take some time.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Hagel and Gen. Dempsey in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 26 Sep 2014.

28 Sep: Obama interview

CBS television program "60 Minutes" interviewed Obama, who admitted mistakes in underestimating ISIL and overestimating the Iraqi army:

Steve Kroft: Two years ago, in the White House, in this building, you talked about al Qaeda being decimated. You talked about al Qaeda being back on its heels. Two years later, you've got al Qaeda affiliates and al Qaeda offshoots controlling huge chunks of both Iraq and Syria. And you have militias, Islamic radical militias in control of Libya.

President Obama: If you'll recall, Steve, you had an international network in al Qaeda between Afghanistan and Pakistan, headed by Bin Laden. And that structure we have rendered ineffective. But what I also said, and this was two years ago and a year ago, is that you have regional groups with regional ambitions and territorial ambitions. And what also has not changed is the kind of violent, ideologically driven extremism that has taken root in too much of the Muslim world. And this week, in my speech to the United Nations General Assembly, I made very clear we are not at war against Islam. Islam is a religion that preaches peace and the overwhelming majority of Muslims are peaceful. But in the Muslim world right now, there is a cancer that has grown for too long that suggests that it is acceptable to kill innocent people who worship a different God. And that kind of extremism, unfortunately, means that we're going to see for some time the possibility that in a whole bunch of different countries, radical groups may spring up, particularly in countries that are still relatively fragile, where you had sectarian tensions, where you don't have a strong state security apparatus. That's why what we have to do is rather than play whack-a-mole and send U.S. troops wherever this occurs, we have to build strong partnerships. We have to get the international community to recognize this is a problem. We've got to get Arab and Muslim leaders to say very clearly, "These folks do not represent us. They do not represent Islam," and to speak out forcefully against them.

Steve Kroft: I understand all the caveats about these regional groups. But this is what an army of 40,000 people, according to some of the military estimates I heard the other day, very well-trained, very motivated.

President Obama: Well, part of it was that...

Steve Kroft: What? How did they end up where they are in control of so much territory? Was that a complete surprise to you?

President Obama: Well I think, our head of the intelligence community, Jim Clapper,

has acknowledged that I think they underestimated what had been taking place in Syria.

Steve Kroft: I mean, he didn't say that, just say that, "We underestimated ISIL." He said, "We overestimated the ability and the will of our allies, the Iraqi army, to fight."

President Obama: That's true. That's absolutely true. And I...

Steve Kroft: And these are the people that we're now expecting to carry on the fight?

President Obama: Well, here's what happened in Iraq. When we left, we had left them a democracy that was intact, a military that was well equipped, and the ability then to chart their own course. And that opportunity was squandered over the course of five years or so because the prime minister, Maliki, was much more interested in consolidating his Shiite base and very suspicious of the Sunnis and the Kurds, who make up the other two-thirds of the country. So what you did not see was a government that had built a sense of national unity. And if you don't have...

Steve Kroft: Or an army.

President Obama: Or an army that feels committed to the nation as opposed to a particular sect.

....

Steve Kroft: You've said, that we need to get rid of Assad. And while we're saying we have to get rid of Assad, we are also bombing and trying to take out some of his most threatening opponents and the...

President Obama: I recognize...

Steve Kroft: And the beneficiary of this is Assad.

President Obama: I recognize the contradiction in a contradictory land and a contradictory circumstance. We are not going to stabilize Syria under the rule of Assad, because the Sunni areas inside of Syria view Assad as having carried out terrible atrocities. The world has seen them. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed. Millions have been displaced. So for a long-term political settlement, for Syria to remain unified, it is not possible that Assad presides over that entire process. On the other hand, in terms of immediate threats to the United States, ISIL, Khorasan group, those folks could kill Americans. And so...

Steve Kroft: They're more important than Assad at this point. That's what you're saying.

President Obama: What I'm saying is that they're all connected, but there's a more immediate concern that has to be dealt with.

Steve Kroft, "President Obama: What makes us America," [CBS News](#), 28 Sep 2014.

(three dot ellipses in original)

U.S. Airstrikes in Iraq & Syria, U.S. Military Policy

Escalation of U.S. Military Engagement in Iraq

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [list](#) of significant escalations of U.S. Military involvement in Iraq.

1 Sep 2014

On 1 Sep, Obama sent a letter to Congress informing them about the airstrikes on 30 Aug against ISIL surrounding Amiril, Iraq.

As I reported on August 8 and 17, 2014, U.S. Armed Forces have conducted targeted airstrikes in Iraq for the limited purposes of stopping the advance on Erbil by the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), supporting civilians trapped on Mount Sinjar, and supporting operations by Iraqi forces to recapture the Mosul Dam. U.S. Armed Forces have also provided humanitarian assistance to the civilians trapped on Mount Sinjar.

On August 28, 2014, I further authorized U.S. Armed Forces to conduct targeted airstrikes in support of an operation to deliver humanitarian assistance to civilians in the town of Amirli, Iraq, which is surrounded and besieged by ISIL. Pursuant to this authorization, on August 30, 2014, U.S. military forces commenced targeted airstrike operations in the vicinity of Amirli, Iraq. These additional operations will be limited in their scope and duration as necessary to address this emerging humanitarian crisis and protect the civilians trapped in Amirli.

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 and at the request of 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](#), 1 Sep 2014.

On 1 Sep, the Pentagon issued a press release about airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using fighter and attack aircraft to conduct three airstrikes yesterday and today near the Mosul Dam.

The strikes destroyed three ISIL trucks, severely damaged another, destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle, and destroyed a mortar position near the Mosul Dam. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

These 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 123 airstrikes across Iraq.

Running summary:

- Defense of Erbil: 24
- Support of Sinjar: 13
- Support of Mosul Dam: 82
- Support of Amirli: 4

"Military Airstrikes Hit ISIL Near Mosul Dam," [Pentagon](#), 1 Sep 2014.

At 10:20 EDT on 2 Sep, this story was not yet posted at the Central Command website. Later on Tuesday, 2 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported the 1 Sep airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using fighter and attack aircraft to conduct one airstrike Monday [1 Sep], near the Mosul Dam.

The strike destroyed or damaged 16 ISIL armed vehicles, near the Mosul Dam. All aircraft exited the strike area safely.

The strike was 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 124 airstrikes across Iraq.

"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrike Against ISIL near the Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 2 Sep 2014.

2 Sep 2014: more personnel to Iraq

On 2 Sep, Obama announced he was sending *an additional 350* U.S. military personnel to protect the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

Today [2 Sep], the President authorized the Department of Defense to fulfill a Department of State request for approximately 350 additional U.S. military personnel to protect our diplomatic facilities and personnel in Baghdad, Iraq. This action was taken at the recommendation of the Department of Defense after an extensive interagency review, and is part of the President's commitment to protect our personnel and facilities in Iraq as we continue to support the Government of Iraq in its fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). These additional forces will not

serve in a combat role.

The President has made clear his commitment to doing whatever is required to provide the necessary security for U.S. personnel and facilities around the world. The request he approved today will allow some previously deployed military personnel to depart Iraq, while at the same time providing a more robust, sustainable security force for our personnel and facilities in Baghdad.

In addition to our efforts to protect our personnel, we will continue to support the Government of Iraq's efforts to counter ISIL, which poses a threat not only to Iraq, but to the broader Middle East and U.S. personnel and interests in the region. The President will be consulting this week with NATO allies regarding additional actions to take against ISIL and to develop a broad-based international coalition to implement a comprehensive strategy to protect our people and to support our partners in the fight against ISIL. As part of this effort, Secretary Kerry, Secretary Hagel, and President Obama's counterterrorism advisor, Lisa Monaco, will be traveling separately to the region in the near-term to build a stronger regional partnership.

"Statement by the Press Secretary on Iraq," [White House](#), 2 Sep 2014.

Compare the situation in Iraq with the situation in Syria. When the security deteriorated for the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, Obama simply closed the U.S. Embassy in Syria on 6 Feb 2012. Similarly, the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli was closed on 26 July 2014, owing to lack of security in Libya. Those two Embassy closings were a cheap solution to the security problem.

4 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On 2-3 Sep 2014 neither the Pentagon nor Central Command announced any airstrikes.

On Thursday, 4 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using fighter aircraft to conduct three airstrikes Wednesday [3 Sep] and Thursday [4 Sep], in support of Mosul Dam operations.

The strikes destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles and an ISIL observation post. 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 127 airstrikes across Iraq. "Sept. 4: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL in support of Mosul Dam Operations," [Central Command](#), 4 Sep 2014.

5 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Friday, 5 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using a mix of fighter, attack, bomber and unmanned aircraft to conduct four airstrikes Thursday [4 Sep] and Friday [5 Sep] in support of Mosul Dam and defense of Irbil operations.

In total, the strikes destroyed an ISIL observation post, one ISIL Humvee, one ISIL armed vehicle, one ISIL truck, and three ISIL mortar positions. All aircraft exited the strike areas 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 131 airstrikes across Iraq.
"Sept. 5: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL," [Central Command](#), 5 Sep 2014.

6 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Saturday, 6 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using a mix of attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct two airstrikes Friday [5 Sep] and Saturday [6 Sep] in support of Defense of Irbil operations.

The strikes destroyed four ISIL Humvees, one ISIL armored personnel carrier, and two ISIL trucks, one of which carried a mounted machine gun; one ISIL Humvee and one ISIL truck were also damaged in the strikes. All aircraft exited the strike areas 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 133 airstrikes across Iraq.
"Sept. 6: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes in Support of Defense of Irbil Operations," [Central Command](#), 6 Sep 2014.

7 Sep 2014: airstrikes

Hagel was in the Republic of Georgia on Sunday morning, 7 Sep, where he told reporters that U.S. airstrikes on ISIL near Haditha Dam in western Iraq had protected the Dam from capture by ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Pentagon](#). Some commentators cited in the above news stories see today's airstrikes as an expansion of U.S. airstrikes, because they are the first airstrikes in Anbar province of Iraq. In my opinion, protecting the Haditha Dam is *not* different from protecting the Mosul Dam, so I do not see any expansion.

On Sunday, 7 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

At the request of the government of Iraq, U.S. military forces attacked ISIL terrorists near Haditha in Anbar province in support of Iraqi security forces and Sunni tribes protecting the Haditha dam.

A mix of fighter and bomber aircraft conducted four airstrikes Saturday. In total, the strikes destroyed five ISIL Humvees, one ISIL armed vehicle, an ISIL checkpoint and also damaged an ISIL bunker. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

Additionally, an attack aircraft conducted one airstrike against ISIL near Mosul Dam on Saturday in support of Iraqi security forces protecting Mosul Dam. The strike damaged an ISIL Humvee. The aircraft exited the strike area safely.

These 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 138 airstrikes across Iraq.
"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL in Support of Haditha Dam, Mosul Dam Operations," [Central Command](#), 7 Sep 2014.

Later, Central Command posted a second press release on Sunday, 7 Sep:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using a mix of attack, bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct five airstrikes Sunday in support of Iraqi security forces and Sunni tribes protecting the Haditha Dam.

The strikes destroyed four ISIL Humvees, four ISIL armed vehicles, two which were carrying antiaircraft artillery; one ISIL fighting position, one ISIL command post, and one ISIL defensive fighting position. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted at the request of the government of Iraq, 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 143 airstrikes across Iraq.
"Sept. 7: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL," [Central Command](#), 7 Sep 2014.

8 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Monday, 8 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using a mix of attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct five airstrikes yesterday and today in support of Iraqi Security Forces and Sunni tribes protecting the Haditha Dam, and in the defense of Irbil.

The strikes destroyed three ISIL armed vehicles, one of which was carrying anti-aircraft artillery, and a large ISIL ground unit near the Haditha Dam. Separately, an airstrike destroyed one ISIL Humvee near Irbil. All aircraft exited the strike areas 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 148 airstrikes across Iraq. "U.S. Military Airstrikes Hit ISIL," [Pentagon](#), 8 Sep 2014. Later, this news story was posted at the [Central Command](#) website.

9 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 9 Sep 2014, the Central Command website was not available. The Pentagon reported a Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq using a mix of attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct five airstrikes Monday [8 Sep] and Tuesday [9 Sep] in support of Iraqi Security Forces and Sunni tribes protecting the Haditha Dam.

In total, the strikes destroyed or damaged eight ISIL armed vehicles, two of which were transporting anti-aircraft artillery; five ISIL vehicles, and one ISIL transport vehicle.

All aircraft exited the strike areas 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 153 airstrikes across Iraq. "U.S. Airstrikes Support Haditha Dam Operations," [Pentagon](#), 9 Sep 2014. Later, this news story was posted at the [Central Command](#) website.

At 15 Sep at 04:00 EDT, I noticed that the Associated Press was no longer reporting U.S. airstrikes in Iraq. Airstrikes that happen every day are routine, and *not* news. On 15 Sep, the 9 Sep airstrikes near the Haditha Dam was the most recently reported airstrike by the [Associated Press](#).

10 Sep 2014: airstrikes and more personnel to Iraq

On Wednesday, 10 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command website was not available. The Pentagon reported a Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Iraq, using an attack aircraft to conduct one airstrike yesterday in support of Iraqi Security Forces' defense of Irbil operations.

The strike destroyed one ISIL armed vehicle in the vicinity of Irbil. The aircraft exited the strike area safely.

The strike was 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 154 airstrikes across Iraq. "U.S. Airstrike Hits ISIL Near Irbil," [Pentagon](#), 10 Sep 2014. Later, this news story was posted at the [Central Command](#) website.

Obama's speech about his new strategy against ISIL, including future airstrikes in Syria, is quoted [above](#).

On Wednesday night, 10 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported an increase in U.S. military personnel in Iraq:

The president also announced he is sending more U.S. service members to Iraq as part of the strategy.

"Over the next week or so, approximately 475 additional service members will be deployed to Iraq to conduct the following missions: advise and assist the Iraqi security forces in order to help them go on the offense against ISIL, conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance flights to increase U.S. capacity to target ISIL, and coordinate the activities of the U.S. military across Iraq," Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said in a statement.

Once these men and women arrive, 1,600 U.S. personnel will be in the country, Kirby added, not including service members serving in the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq.

Of the 475 new troops, about 150 will supplement those already in Iraq conducting assessments of Iraqi security forces. These forces primarily operate from the joint Operation Centers in Baghdad and Irbil.

"The assessment mission they have been conducting will now transition to one of advise and assist," Kirby said. "About a dozen teams will embed with Iraqi security forces at the Iraqi brigade level and above."

Another 125 service members will support the operation of manned and armed intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms from Erbil, Iraq. "These forces include aircrews and maintenance personnel," Kirby said. "Sending aircraft to Iraq will free up some of the unmanned assets we have been using to conduct additional operations in the region."

Finally, about 200 personnel will provide headquarters command and control for the mission in Baghdad and Irbil. "These forces expand the headquarters of the Joint Forces Land Component Command, which has operational control over activities in Iraq and reports to the U.S. Central Command commander," Kirby said. "U.S. Sending 475 More Service Members to Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 10 Sep 2014.

11 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 11 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using attack aircraft to conduct two airstrikes Wednesday and Thursday near the Mosul Dam in support of Iraqi Security Forces.

In total, the strikes destroyed two ISIL machine gun emplacements and an ISIL bunker. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

These 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 156 airstrikes across Iraq. "Sept. 11: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL near the Mosul Dam," [Central Command](#), 11 Sep 2014.

12 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On 13 Sep, the Central Command website was again not available. On Friday, 12 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Iraq, using attack aircraft to conduct two airstrikes yesterday and today in support of Iraqi Security Forces near the Mosul Dam and defending Irbil.

In total, the strikes destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles, U.S. Central Command officials said. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

These strikes were conducted, Centcom officials said, under authority to protect U.S. personnel and facilities, support humanitarian efforts, and support Iraqi forces that are acting in furtherance of these objectives.

Centcom has conducted a total of 158 airstrikes across Iraq. "U.S. Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL," [Pentagon](#), 12 Sep 2014. Later this news story was posted at [Central Command](#), 12 Sep 2014.

13 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On 11 Sep, Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, ordered the Iraqi air force *not* to bomb — and the Iraqi army artillery not to shell — cities containing civilians. The order was made public on 13 Sep. [All Iraq News](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 13 Sep, the Central Command website was again not available. On Saturday, 13 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:
U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, employing attack aircraft to conduct two airstrikes yesterday [12 Sep] in support of Iraqi security forces near the Mosul Dam.

In total, the strikes destroyed an ISIL mortar emplacement and an ISIL armed vehicle. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

These strikes were conducted under authority to protect U.S. personnel and facilities, support humanitarian efforts, and support Iraqi forces acting in furtherance of these objectives while defending their country against ISIL terrorists.

U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 160 airstrikes across Iraq. "Airstrikes Hit ISIL Near Mosul Dam," [Pentagon](#), 13 Sep 2014. Later this news story was posted at [Central Command](#), 13 Sep 2014.

14 Sep 2014: airstrikes

During 14-22 Sep, the Central Command website was offline, so I quote press releases from the Pentagon. When the U.S. Central Command website returned online on 23 Sep, they had no press releases for 14-18 Sep.

On Sunday, 14 Sep 2014, the Pentagon did *not* post a webpage with a press release about airstrikes in Iraq. The airstrikes on 14 Sep are in a Pentagon press release issued on 16 Sep, and quoted below.

15 Sep 2014: expanded airstrikes

On 15 Sep, French military aircraft based in the United Arab Emirates began flying reconnaissance missions over Iraq. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

On 16 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about expanded airstrikes southwest of Baghdad:

U.S. military forces continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Iraq, employing attack and fighter aircraft to conduct two airstrikes Sept. 14 and yesterday [15 Sep] in support of Iraqi Security Forces near Sinjar and southwest of Baghdad.

U.S. Central Command officials said the airstrike southwest of Baghdad was the first strike taken as part of the United States' expanded efforts, "beyond protecting our own people and humanitarian missions to hit ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on offense," as outlined in President Barack Obama's Sept. 10 speech.

In total, the strikes destroyed six ISIL vehicles near Sinjar and an ISIL fighting position southwest of Baghdad that was firing on Iraqi security force personnel. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

These strikes were conducted under authority to protect U.S. personnel and facilities, support humanitarian efforts, and help Iraqi forces on the offensive against ISIL terrorists.

U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 162 airstrikes across Iraq. "U.S. Military Airstrikes Hit ISIL," [Pentagon](#), 16 Sep 2014.

16 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 16 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using fighter aircraft to conduct five airstrikes Monday [15 Sep] and Tuesday [16 Sep] southwest of Baghdad and northwest of Irbil.

In total, two airstrikes northwest of Irbil destroyed an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant armed truck and an ISIL fighting position, while three airstrikes southwest of Baghdad damaged an ISIL truck and destroyed an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery piece, a small ISIL ground unit and two small boats on the Euphrates River that were re-supplying ISIL forces in the area, according to U.S. Central Command officials.

All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

These strikes were conducted under authority to protect U.S. personnel and facilities, support humanitarian efforts, and help Iraqi forces on the offensive against ISIL terrorists.

Centcom has conducted a total of 167 airstrikes across Iraq. "U.S. Airstrikes Target ISIL in Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 16 Sep 2014.

17 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On 17 Sep, the Central Command website was again not available. On 17 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted seven airstrikes against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Iraq yesterday and today, U.S. Central

Command officials reported today [17 Sep].

One airstrike destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle northwest of the Haditha Dam, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles northwest of Irbil, and four airstrikes southwest of Baghdad destroyed several small ISIL ground units and a small boat on the Euphrates River that was resupplying ISIL forces in the area, officials said. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely, they added.

Centcom has conducted a total of 174 airstrikes across Iraq, officials said.
"U.S. Aircraft Continue Strikes Against ISIL in Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 17 Sep 2014.

18 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On 18 Sep, the Central Command website was again not available. On 18 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:
U.S. military forces continued to attack Islamic State of Syria and the Levant terrorists in Iraq, using bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct airstrikes yesterday and today, U.S. Central Command officials reported.

One airstrike near an ISIL training camp southeast of Mosul destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle, two ISIL-occupied buildings and a large ISIL ground unit. Another airstrike southeast of Baghdad damaged an ISIL ammunition stockpile, officials added, noting that all aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

Centcom has conducted a total of 176 airstrikes across Iraq, officials said.
"Latest Airstrikes Target ISIL Assets, Ammunition," [Pentagon](#), 18 Sep 2014.

19 Sep 2014: airstrikes, French airstrike

On 19 Sep, the Central Command website was again not available. On 19 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:
U.S. fighter aircraft conducted more airstrikes against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant targets in Iraq yesterday and today, U.S. Central Command officials reported.

One airstrike southeast of Baghdad destroyed a boat on the Euphrates River conducting resupply of ISIL forces, and a second strike southwest of Baghdad struck a small ISIL ground unit. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely, officials said.

Centcom has conducted a total of 178 airstrikes across Iraq.
"Fighter Jets Target ISIL Boat, Ground Unit," [Pentagon](#), 19 Sep 2014.

At 09:23 GMT on 19 Sep, the Associated Press reported that the first French airstrike in Iraq destroyed an ISIL depot. [Associated Press](#). "Two French Rafale jets fired four laser-guided bombs to destroy a weapons and fuel depot" outside Mosul. Hollande has declared that the French will provide airstrikes in Iraq, but *not* in Syria. Further, there will be no French troops

on the ground in a combat role in either Iraq or Syria. [AP](#).

Four French airstrikes (compared with 178 airstrikes by the USA) were mostly symbolic, but these French airstrikes indicated the beginning of a coalition in Iraq.

The Associated Press reported that ISIL has infiltrated civilian areas in Iraq, making airstrikes more difficult.

The Army's top officer warned Friday [19 Sep] that it will become increasingly difficult to target and launch precision airstrikes against Islamic State militants hiding among the Iraqi population.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno told reporters that so far the targets American warplanes and drones have hit in Iraq have largely been out in the open and were "clearly identifiable."

Now, he said, the militant fighters are starting to infiltrate the population, and there are reports that they are using children and others as shields.

"When you target, you want to make sure you are targeting the right people," said Odierno. "The worst thing that can happen for us is if we start killing innocent Iraqis, innocent civilians."

Odierno, a veteran of several years in command in Iraq during the height of the war, knows well how civilian casualties could turn the population against the U.S.-led campaign against the Islamic State group.

Lolita C. Baldor, "General: Airstrikes Tougher As Militants Blend In," [Associated Press](#), 16:05 EDT, 19 Sep 2014.

20-21 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On 20-21 Sep, the Central Command website was again not available. On 21 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. fighter aircraft have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Iraq in recent days, U.S. Central Command officials reported today [21 Sep].

Two airstrikes conducted today destroyed an ISIL mortar position northeast of Sinjar and an ISIL semi-tractor trailer carrying munitions southwest of Sinjar, officials said.

In other airstrikes since Sept. 19, U.S. fighters destroyed an ISIL boat ferrying supplies across the Euphrates River and an ISIL fighting position southwest of Baghdad.

In addition, four airstrikes northwest of Haditha destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles, three ISIL checkpoints and two ISIL guard outposts.

All aircraft left the strike areas safely, officials said, adding that Centcom now has

conducted a total of 186 airstrikes across Iraq.
"Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL Targets in Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 21 Sep 2014.

**22-23 Sep 2014:
cumulative total of 194 U.S. airstrikes in Iraq
first 16 airstrikes in Syria**

On 22 Sep, the Central Command website was again not available. On Monday, 22 Sep 2014, the Pentagon reported a U.S. Central Command news release about more airstrikes in Iraq:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq today, using a mix of attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct four airstrikes near the city of Kirkuk.

In total, the airstrikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL tank, and damaged an ISIL Humvee, all west-southwest of Kirkuk. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 190 airstrikes across Iraq.
"U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL Near Kirkuk," [Pentagon](#), 22 Sep 2014.
Later this news story was posted at [Central Command](#), 22 Sep 2014.

At night on 22 Sep, the Pentagon reported the first airstrike inside Syria:

U.S. and partner nation forces have begun airstrikes inside Syria against terrorists from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Adm. John Kirby said in a statement today [22 Sep].

The strikes are being undertaken through a mix of fighter and bomber aircraft and Tomahawk Land Attack missiles, he said.

"Given that these operations are ongoing, we are not in a position to provide additional details at this time," Kirby noted.

"U.S. Begins Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria," [Pentagon](#), 22 Sep 2014.

Sometime before 06:30 EDT on 23 Sep, the Pentagon posted a Central Command press release:

U.S. military forces and partner nations, including Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, undertook military action against ISIL terrorists in Syria overnight, according to a U.S. Central Command news release.

A mix of fighters, bombers, remotely piloted aircraft and Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles conducted 14 strikes against ISIL targets.

The strikes destroyed or damaged multiple ISIL targets in the vicinity of the towns of

Ar Raqqa in north central Syria, Dayr az Zawr and Abu Kamal in eastern Syria and Al Hasakah in northeastern Syria. The targets included ISIL fighters, training compounds, headquarters and command and control facilities, storage facilities, a finance center, supply trucks and armed vehicles, the news release said.

The United States employed 47 Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles, launched from the USS Arleigh Burke and USS Philippine Sea, which were operating from international waters in the Red Sea and North Arabian Gulf. In addition, U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps fighters, bombers and remotely piloted aircraft deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of operations participated in the airstrikes.

Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates also participated in or supported the airstrikes against ISIL targets. All aircraft safely exited the strike areas.

Also, in Iraq yesterday [22 Sep], U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists, using attack aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. The airstrikes destroyed two ISIL Humvees, an ISIL armed vehicle and an ISIL fighting position southwest of Kirkuk. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely. To date, U.S. Central Command has conducted a total of 194 airstrikes across Iraq against ISIL.

The United States conducted these strikes as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL. Going forward, the U.S. military will continue to conduct targeted airstrikes against ISIL in Syria and Iraq as local forces go on the offensive against this terrorist group, the release said.

Separately, the United States also took action to disrupt the imminent attack plotting against the United States and Western interests conducted by a network of seasoned al-Qaida veterans known as the Khorasan Group. The group has established a safe haven in Syria to develop external attacks, construct and test improvised explosive devices and recruit Westerners to conduct operations, the release said. These strikes were undertaken only by U.S. assets.

In total, U.S. Central Command forces conducted eight strikes against Khorasan Group targets located west of Aleppo, to include training camps, an explosives and munitions production facility, a communication building and command and control facilities.

"U.S. Military, Partner Nations Conduct Airstrikes in Syria," [Pentagon](#), 23 Sep 2014.

Later this news story was posted at [Central Command](#), 23 Sep 2014.

There was a press briefing at the [Pentagon](#), with a link at the bottom to a PDF file containing a map and two images of damaged buildings.

Later on Tuesday, 23 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq and Syria, using a mix of bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct three airstrikes last night and today [23 Sep].

Two of the airstrikes were conducted last night as part of the operation over Syria and resulted in one damaged ISIL armed vehicle and one destroyed ISIL armed vehicle southwest of Dayr Az Zawr. In addition, a third airstrike in Iraq today [23 Sep] destroyed one ISIL armed vehicle northwest of Baghdad. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL.

To date, U.S. Central Command has conducted 194 airstrikes across Iraq against ISIL. Along with partner nations, U.S. Central Command has also conducted 16 airstrikes across Syria against ISIL.

"Sept. 23: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL in Iraq and Syria," [Central Command](#), 23 Sep 2014.

I do *not* understand why the "third airstrike in Iraq today" does not increase the total number of airstrikes from the previously reported 194.

Note that these airstrikes in Syria targeted three different terrorist organizations: (1) ISIL at multiple locations from Raqqa to Abu Kamal; (2) Khorasan Group (Al-Qaeda) west of Aleppo; and (3) Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda). [AP](#). Notice that this is an expansion of the U.S. airstrikes in Syria, which were previously claimed to be only against ISIL.

At 05:02 EDT on 23 Sep, the [Associated Press](#) reported the details in the Central Command press release. The AP adds that the U.S. military used: "Air Force B-1 bombers, F-15E attack planes, F-16 fighters, and F-22 fighters; Navy F/A-18 fighters; two types of drone aircraft."

At 10:18 EDT on 23 Sep, [Reuters](#) reports that more than 160 bombs and missiles were delivered to Syria. At night on 23 Sep, U.S. Central Command claims only 16 airstrikes in Syria, so one airstrike refers to targeting *one* location, even if multiple bombs or missiles were used at that one location.

On the morning of 23 Sep, the Syrian government's news agency, [SANA](#), posted a news article that says the Iraqi Foreign Minister delivered a letter from Kerry to the Syrian Foreign Minister on 22 Sep, informing the Syrian government of the airstrikes on ISIL, a few hours before the airstrikes began. Also the U.S. informed the Syrian ambassador to the U.N. in advance of the airstrikes against ISIL in Syria. While the Syrian press release grumbles about respecting "national sovereignty", the press release does *not* criticize the USA. The [Associated Press](#) reported this story at 11:04 GMT on 23 Sep, and added: "The U.S. and five Arab countries began their airstrikes on Islamic State group's targets in Syria around 8:30 p.m. EDT Monday [22 Sep] (00:30 GMT Tuesday [23 Sep])".

Reuters reports that the U.S. Government is justifying the airstrikes inside Syria as "self-defense":

The United States told the United Nations on Tuesday [23 Sep] it led airstrikes against Islamic State militants in Syria because President Bashar al-Assad's government had

failed to wipe out safe havens used by the group to launch attacks on Iraq.

In a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power wrote, "The Syrian regime has shown that it cannot and will not confront these safe havens effectively itself."

The strikes were needed to eliminate a threat to Iraq, the United States and its allies, she wrote, citing Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, which covers an individual or collective right to self-defence against armed attack.

"States must be able to defend themselves ... when, as is the case here, the government of the state where the threat is located is unwilling or unable to prevent the use of its territory for such attacks," Power wrote in the letter obtained by Reuters.

....

Ban circulated the letter to the U.N. Security Council, diplomats said. Under Article 51, the 15-member body must immediately be informed of any action that states take in self-defence against armed attack.

....

Iraq notified the Security Council in a letter on Saturday [20 Sep] of its request for the United States to lead efforts to strike Islamic State strongholds because, it said, a safe haven for the militants in Syria had made its border "impossible to defend."

In the letter, Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari wrote that the safe haven for the radical Sunni Muslim group outside Iraq's borders was "a direct threat to the security of our people and territory." He did not identify Syria by name.

....

Ban told reporters on Tuesday that Islamic State militants pose a serious threat to international peace and security, echoing language that the U.N. Security Council has used in the past to greenlight military interventions.

"I'm aware that today's strikes were not carried out at the direct request of the Syrian government but I note that the government was informed beforehand," he said.

"I also note that the strikes took place in areas no longer under the effective control of that government," he added. "It is undeniable and the subject of broad international consensus that these extremist groups pose an immediate threat to international peace and security."

Michelle Nichols, "Exclusive - United States defends Syria airstrikes in letter to U.N. chief," [Reuters](#), 15:32 EDT, 23 Sep 2014.

The Associated Press reports that Assad seems to be ignoring the lack of his permission for

the airstrikes inside Syria:

President Bashar Assad said Tuesday he supports any international effort against terrorism, apparently trying to position his government on the side of the U.S.-led coalition conducting airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Syria.

....

One rebel faction that has received U.S.-made advanced weapons, Harakat Hazm, criticized the airstrikes, saying they violate Syria's sovereignty and undermine the anti-Assad revolution.

....

In recent weeks, Syrian officials insisted that any international strikes on its soil must be coordinated with Damascus or else they would be considered an act of aggression and a breach of Syria's sovereignty. The United States has ruled out any coordination with Assad's government.

Still, Damascus appeared to want to show it was not being left out, vowing in a statement to fight extremist faction across Syria and pledging to coordinate "with countries that were harmed by the group, first and foremost Iraq."

Albert Aji & Ryan Lucas, "Assad Backs All Efforts To Fight Terrorism," [Associated Press](#), 15:39 EDT, 23 Sep 2014.

Normally, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, is a man of peace, who repeatedly demands an immediate cessation of hostilities, and who calls for restraint after some provocation. But, in response to the airstrikes on ISIL inside Syria, Ban seemed to approve:

For more than a year, I have sounded the alarm bells about the brutality of extremist armed groups in Syria and the critical threat they pose to Syria and to international peace and security. While the rise of these extremist groups in Syria is a consequence and not a cause of Syria's tragic civil war, there can be no justification for their barbarity and the suffering they impose on the Syrian people.

I welcome the international solidarity to confront this challenge, as demonstrated by the unanimous passage of Security Council Resolution 2170 just a few weeks ago.

Confronting terrorist groups operating in Syria requires a multi-faceted approach. This approach should be designed to address the immediate security risks, to stop atrocity crimes and, over the longer term, to eliminate the conditions in which these groups take root.

I urge the world leaders gathered in New York, especially those participating in tomorrow's Security Council Summit on foreign terrorist fighters, to come together decisively in support of efforts to confront these groups. As the custodian of the principles of the United Nations, I would like to underscore the importance that all measures must be fully in line with the Charter of the United Nations and need to

operate strictly in accordance with international humanitarian law.

I have placed the protection of civilians at the top of my agenda. In the case of Syria, there can be no genuine protection if extremist groups are permitted to act with impunity and if the Syrian Government continues to commit gross human rights violations against its own citizens. Protecting the Syrian people requires immediate action, but action that is rooted in the principles of the United Nations.

I regret the loss of any civilian lives as a result of strikes against targets in Syria. The parties involved in this campaign must abide by international humanitarian law and take all necessary precautions to avoid and minimize civilian casualties. I am aware that today's strikes were not carried out at the direct request of the Syrian Government, but I note that the Government was informed beforehand. I also note that the strikes took place in areas no longer under the effective control of that Government. I think it is undeniable — and the subject of broad international consensus — that these extremist groups pose an immediate threat to international peace and security.

Ban Ki-moon, "Full transcript of Secretary-General's remarks at Climate Summit Press Conference (including comments on Syria)," [U.N.](#), 23 Sep 2014.

On 23 Sep, Ben Rhodes, Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor, held a press conference that is reported [above](#).

On 23 Sep, Obama formally notified Congress that he had conducted airstrikes inside Syria, without the permission of the Syrian government, and in blatant violation of the sovereignty of Syria.

As I have repeatedly reported to the Congress, U.S. Armed Forces continue to conduct operations in a variety of locations against al-Qa'ida and associated forces. In furtherance of these U.S. counterterrorism efforts, on September 22, 2014, at my direction, U.S. military forces began a series of strikes in Syria against elements of al-Qa'ida known as the Khorasan Group. These strikes are necessary to defend the United States and our partners and allies against the threat posed by these elements.

I have directed these actions, which are in the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States, pursuant to my constitutional and statutory authority as Commander in Chief (including the authority to carry out Public Law 107-40) and as Chief Executive, as well as my constitutional and statutory authority to conduct the foreign relations of the United States. 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 Syria," [White House](#), 23 Sep 2014.

My comments: Despite Obama's statement that he would keep Congress "fully informed", Obama did *not* mention the airstrikes in Syria on 23 Sep against ISIL and the Nusra Front. And, as of 28 Sep, Obama has *not* informed Congress of airstrikes in Syria against oil refineries operated by ISIL on 24 Sep.

On 23 Sep, Obama sent another letter to Congress on the U.S. Military action in Iraq.

In my reports of August 8 and 17 and September 1 and 8, 2014, I described a series of discrete military operations in Iraq to stop the advance on Erbil by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), support civilians trapped on Mount Sinjar, support operations by Iraqi forces to recapture the Mosul Dam, support an operation to deliver humanitarian assistance to civilians in the town of Amirli, Iraq, and conduct airstrikes in the vicinity of Haditha Dam.

As I noted in my address to the Nation on September 10, with a new Iraqi government in place, and following consultations with allies abroad and the Congress at home, I have ordered implementation of a new comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy to degrade, and ultimately defeat, ISIL. As part of this strategy, I have directed the deployment of 475 additional U.S. Armed Forces personnel to Iraq, and I have determined that it is necessary and appropriate to use the U.S. Armed Forces to conduct coordination with Iraqi forces and to provide training, communications support, intelligence support, and other support, to select elements of the Iraqi security forces, including Kurdish Peshmerga forces. I have also ordered the U.S. Armed Forces to conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes and other necessary actions against these terrorists in Iraq and Syria. These actions are being undertaken in coordination with and at the request of the Government of Iraq and in conjunction with coalition partners.

It is not possible to know the duration of these deployments and operations. I will continue to direct such additional measures as necessary to protect and secure U.S. citizens and our interests against the threat posed by ISIL.

I have directed these actions, which are in the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States, pursuant to my constitutional and statutory authority as Commander in Chief (including the authority to carry out Public Law 107-40 and Public Law 107-243) and as Chief Executive, as well as my constitutional and statutory authority to conduct the foreign relations of the United States.

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](#), 23 Sep 2014.

24 Sep 2014: airstrikes in Iraq and Syria begin targeting ISIL oil refineries in Syria

On Wednesday, 24 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq and Syria, using a mix of attack, bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct five airstrikes Tuesday [23 Sep] and today [24 Sep].

- Two airstrikes west of Baghdad destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles and a weapons cache.
- Two airstrikes southeast of Irbil destroyed ISIL fighting positions.
- A fifth airstrike damaged eight ISIL vehicles in Syria northwest of Al Qa'im.

All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

To date, U.S. Central Command has conducted 198 airstrikes across Iraq against ISIL. Along with partner nations, U.S. Central Command has also conducted 20 airstrikes across Syria against ISIL.

"Sept. 24: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL in Iraq and Syria," [Central Command](#), 24 Sep 2014. (Bulleted list added by Standler.)

Similar press release posted at [Pentagon](#).

Later on 24 Sep, Central Command reported:

U.S. military forces and partner nations, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, attacked ISIL terrorists in Syria today, using a mix of fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 13 of airstrikes against 12 ISIL-controlled modular oil refineries located in remote areas of eastern Syria in the vicinity of Al Mayadin, Al Hasakah, and Abu Kamal and one ISIL vehicle near Dayr az Zawr, also in eastern Syria.

We are still assessing the outcome of the attack on the refineries, but have initial indications that the strikes were successful. The ISIL vehicle was destroyed. These small-scale refineries provided fuel to run ISIL operations, money to finance their continued attacks throughout Iraq and Syria, and an economic asset to support their future operations. Producing between 300-500 barrels of refined petroleum per day, ISIL is estimated to generate as much as \$2 million per day from these refineries. The destruction and degradation of these targets further limits ISIL's ability to lead, control, project power and conduct operations.

To conduct these strikes, the U.S. employed U.S. Air Force fighter aircraft deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of operations. In addition, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also participated in these airstrikes. All aircraft safely exited the strikes areas.

The U.S. conducted these strikes as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. Going forward, the U.S. and partner nations will continue to conduct targeted airstrikes against ISIL in Syria and Iraq and support Iraqi forces as they go on the offensive against this terrorist group.

"U.S. Military, Partner Nations Conduct Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria," [Central Command](#), 24 Sep 2014.

Similar press release posted at [Pentagon](#).

Reuters reported that apparent approval of airstrikes by the Syrian government:

A Syrian government minister said U.S.-led air strikes against militants are going in the "right direction" because the government had been informed before they started and they were not hitting civilians or Syrian military targets.

Syria is still watching all developments with caution, Ali Haidar, minister for national reconciliation, told Reuters on Wednesday [24 Sep] after U.S. warplanes pounded Islamic State positions in a second day of attacks.

"As for the raids in Syria, I say that what has happened so far is proceeding in the right direction in terms of informing the Syrian government and by not targeting Syrian military installations and not targeting civilians," he said.

Kinda Makieh, "Exclusive: Syrian minister says U.S.-led strikes going in 'right direction'," [Reuters](#), 13:05 GMT, 24 Sep 2014.

25 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 25 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using a mix of attack, bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct eleven airstrikes Wednesday [24 Sep] and today [25 Sep].

One airstrike west of Irbil struck ISIL fighters and damaged an ISIL armed vehicle. Five airstrikes south of Kirkuk struck ISIL fighters, destroyed an ISIL tank, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL Humvee, and damaged two ISIL armed vehicles. Five airstrikes west of Baghdad destroyed an ISIL Humvee, four checkpoints, a fighting position, two guard towers, and a command post.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL.

"Sept. 25: U.S. Military Conducts Airstrikes Against ISIL in Iraq," [Central Command](#), 25 Sep 2014.

Copy at [Pentagon](#).

At the Pentagon, Admiral Kirby held a press briefing:

As you know, U.S. military forces and partner nations, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, [on 24 Sep] attacked 12 ISIL-controlled modular oil refineries located in remote areas of eastern Syria in the vicinity of Al Mayadin, Al Hasakah, and Abu Kamal. We also hit an ISIL vehicle in the same general area of the country.

We are still assessing the outcomes of these attacks, but initially we believe they were successful. I'm going to show you some imagery in just a minute to demonstrate where that confidence comes from.

These small-scale refineries provide fuel to run ISIL operations, money to finance their

continued attacks throughout Iraq and Syria, and they are an economic asset to support future operations. Producing between 300 and 500 barrels of refined petroleum per day, ISIL is estimated by some regional organizations to generate millions of dollars of revenue from these refineries.

These were, as were the strikes we conducted earlier this week in Syria, strategic attacks meant specifically to get at the ways that this group sustains, leads, and controls itself. There will be more.

....

This is sort of a breakdown of how it went by the numbers. So 12 modular oil refineries, again, all in eastern Syria, 16 total fighter aircraft participated in this, 10 from coalition, from Saudi Arabia and UAE, as I said, six from the United States. So most of the aircraft that participated in these strikes were not U.S. aircraft.

Munitions, 41 total bombs were dropped, all precision-guided, again, the majority dropped by coalition aircraft, 23 for — split between Saudi Arabia and UAE, and 18 dropped by the U.S. I do not have the breakdown by country of what they dropped, and I'm not sure that that's all that relevant at this point.

....

It wasn't about obliterating the refineries off the face of the map. It was about degrading their ability to use these refineries, them themselves, and so we — we're still assessing, because 12 targets we still have to assess. But by and large, the goal was to get at their use of it. And so much of the parts of the refineries that we were going for were areas where they were berthing themselves, where their office spaces are, communications equipment, that kind of thing. But you can see the tower is still left standing. Actually, you can even see the tower itself right now.

....

QUESTION: What is ... the purpose of preserving the tower?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Well, because these refineries were in place before ISIL came along. And assuming that Syria gets to a point where it's better governed, you know, we'd like to preserve the flexibility for those refineries to still contribute to a stable economy in what we hope will be a stable country when the Assad regime is not in control anymore.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 25 Sep 2014.

Later in the briefing Admiral Kirby said each refinery had a *maximum* capacity between 300 to 500 barrels of oil per day, and there were 12 refineries that are now inoperative. A journalist said that refined oil sells on the black market for US\$ 20/barrel. So the total loss to ISIL is approximately US\$ 100,000/day, and less if the refineries were operating at less than maximum capacity.

25-27 Sep 2014: airstrikes

At 14:30 EDT on 27 Sep, the most recent press release at the Central Command website reports airstrikes on 25 Sep.

On 26 Sep, the Pentagon website reports:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq and Syria, using a mix of fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 10 airstrikes yesterday [25 Sep] and today [26 Sep].

In Iraq, five airstrikes south and southwest of Kirkuk destroyed three ISIL Humvees and one ISIL vehicle, disabled two ISIL-armed vehicles and damaged one ISIL mine-resistant ambush protected vehicle. One airstrike west of Baghdad destroyed an ISIL guard shack, an armed vehicle and a bunker. One airstrike near Al Qaim destroyed four ISIL armed vehicles, a command and control node and a checkpoint.

In Syria, three airstrikes south and southeast of Dayr Az Zawr destroyed four ISIL tanks and damaged another.

These strikes were conducted as part of the president's comprehensive strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL.

"Anti-ISIL Airstrikes Continue in Iraq and Syria," [Pentagon](#), 26 Sep 2014.

Later posted at [Central Command](#).

On 27 Sep, the Pentagon website reports:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Friday [26 Sep] and today [27 Sep], using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. military forces used attack aircraft to conduct three airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq.

In Syria, an ISIL vehicle was destroyed south of Al-Hasakah. Also near Al-Hasakah several buildings that were part of an ISIL garrison were destroyed. An ISIL command and control facility near Manbij was damaged. An ISIL building and two armed vehicles at the Kobani border crossing were destroyed. An ISIL held airfield, an ISIL garrison and an ISIL training camp near Ar Raqqa were damaged.

To conduct these strikes, the U.S. employed U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy attack and fighter aircraft deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of operations. In addition, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates also participated in these strikes. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

In Iraq, three airstrikes southwest of Irbil destroyed four ISIL armed vehicles and destroyed an ISIL fighting position. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

"U.S. Military, Partner Nations Conduct Airstrikes Against ISIL in Iraq and Syria," [Pentagon](#), 27 Sep 2014.

Later posted at [Central Command](#).

On the morning of 25 Sep, French aircraft flew a second set of airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq. [Reuters](#).

On 26 Sep, Reuters reported that ISIL was changing its behavior, to avoid airstrikes: Islamic State militants are changing tactics in the face of U.S. air strikes in northern Iraq, ditching conspicuous convoys in favor of motorcycles and planting their black flags on civilian homes, tribal sources and eyewitnesses say.

They reported fewer militant checkpoints to weed out "apostates" and less cell phone use since the air strikes intensified and more U.S. allies pledged to join the campaign that began in August, saying the militants had also split up to limit casualties.

....

"They don't move in military convoys like before. Instead they use motorcycles, bicycles, and if necessary, they use camouflaged cars," he said.

The militants have also taken to erecting their notorious black flag on the rooftops of several mostly empty residential houses and buildings, to create confusion about their actual presence.

Raheem Salman & Yara Bayoumy, "Wary of air strikes, Islamic State insurgents change tactics," [Reuters](#), 14:11 GMT, 26 Sep2014.

28-29 Sep 2014: airstrikes

At 09:35 EDT on 29 Sep, the most recent news release at the Central Command and Pentagon websites is dated 27 Sep.

On 29 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command posted a news release about more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Saturday [27 Sep] and today [28 Sep], using a mix of attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct eight airstrikes. Separately, in Iraq U.S. military forces used fighter and remotely piloted aircraft Saturday and today to conduct four airstrikes against ISIL.

In Syria, two airstrikes near Dayr ar Zawr destroyed one ISIL tank and damaged another. One airstrike in northeast Syria destroyed three ISIL armed vehicles and an ISIL Humvee. U.S. and partner nations conducted airstrikes on four ISIL-held modular refineries and an ISIL command and control node north of Ar Raqqa; although we continue to assess the outcome of these attacks, initial indications are that they were successful.

To conduct these strikes, the U.S. employed U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy fighter aircraft deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. In addition, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also participated in these strikes. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely.

In Iraq, one airstrike near Baghdad destroyed an ISIL safe house and damaged an ISIL checkpoint. Three airstrikes near Fallujah destroyed two ISIL checkpoints and an ISIL transport vehicle. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL.

"Sept. 28: U.S. Military, Partner Nations Conduct Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq," [Central Command](#), dated 28 Sep 2014.

On 29 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command posted a second news release:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Sunday [28 Sep] and today [29 Sep], using a mix of fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct eight airstrikes. Separately, U.S. military forces used attack and remotely piloted aircraft Sunday and today to conduct three airstrikes in Iraq.

In Syria, one airstrike near Dayr ar Zawr destroyed one ISIL armed vehicle while another destroyed an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery transport vehicle. U.S. and partner nations conducted two airstrikes on an ISIL compound and an ISIL-held airfield in northwest Syria near Aleppo. Two airstrikes were conducted on ISIL compounds near Ar Raqqa, while two other airstrikes struck an ISIL training camp and ISIL vehicles within a vehicle staging area adjacent to an ISIL-held grain storage facility near Manbij. The storage facility was being used by ISIL as a logistics hub and vehicle staging facility. Although we continue to assess the outcome of these attacks, initial indications are that they were successful.

To conduct these strikes, the U.S. employed U.S. Air Force aircraft deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. In addition, the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Jordan also participated in these strikes. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely.

In Iraq, one airstrike in the vicinity of Kirkuk destroyed two ISIL vehicles while another in the vicinity of Sinjar destroyed two ISIL armed vehicles. One strike against an ISIL armed vehicle in northwest Iraq was unsuccessful. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL.

"Sept. 29: U.S. Military, Partner Nations Conduct Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 29 Sep 2014.

Also at [Pentagon](#).

On 29 Sep, the Associated Press reported an interview with the Syrian foreign minister, Walid al-Moallem.

On Monday [29 Sep], al-Moallem said the Islamic State group, the Nusra Front and all Islamic groups fighting the Assad regime were on the same side and all should be hit.

Asked whether the strikes should include the loose umbrella rebel group known as the Free Syrian Army, which is backed by the U.S. and its allies, he said that group "does not exist anymore." In the interview, al-Moallem tried to position his country as being on the same side as the U.S.-led coalition. Asked whether Syria considered itself now aligned with the West because both were fighting the same enemy, al-Moallem replied: "This is the fact."

"We are fighting ISIS, they are fighting ISIS," he said, referring to the Islamic State group by one of its acronyms.

....

Last month, al-Moallem warned at a news conference in Damascus that any strike that was not coordinated with the Assad government would be considered as aggression.

But on Monday [29 Sep] he denied saying that coordination was necessary, adding that Damascus was satisfied with simply being informed of any U.S.-led action, which he said the Obama administration did before the start last week of the aerial campaign in Syria.

He said the U.S. government sent three separate messages to Syria 24 hours before it launched its first airstrike on Sept. 23. The messages were identical, he said: "We (the U.S.) are not after the Syrian army or the Syrian government."

He said there have been no further messages as the U.S.-led coalition has ramped up its bombing campaign, "but it's OK."

"Until today, we are satisfied. As long as they are aiming at ISIS locations in Syria and in Iraq, we are satisfied," he said.

Zeina Karam & Edith M. Lederer, "AP INTERVIEW: US Should Hit All Militants In Syria," [Associated Press](#), 19:11 EDT, 29 Sep 2014.

30 Sep 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 30 Sep 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Monday and today using a mix of attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 11 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. military forces used attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft today to conduct 11 airstrikes in Iraq.

In Syria, two airstrikes near Dayr ar Zawr destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL armed vehicle. Five strikes in northeast Syria near Sinjar destroyed one ISIL artillery piece, one ISIL tank, three ISIL armed vehicles, two ISIL facilities, an ISIL observation post and struck four ISIL fighting positions. Three strikes near Mazra al Duwud near the Syrian/Turkish border, destroyed one ISIL artillery piece, damaged another, and destroyed two ISIL rocket launchers. One strike northeast of Aleppo destroyed four ISIL-occupied buildings. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely.

In Iraq, seven airstrikes in northwest Iraq destroyed one ISIL armored vehicle, two ISIL transport vehicles, and four ISIL armed vehicles and damaged one. In the vicinity of Mosul Dam, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL armed vehicle. Northwest of Baghdad, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL armed vehicle while another strike in west Fallujah struck an ISIL checkpoint. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely.

The strikes were conducted as part of the President's comprehensive strategy to degrade and destroy ISIL. The destruction and degradation of ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq further limits the terrorist group's ability to lead, control, project power and conduct operations.

" Sept. 30: U.S. Military, Partner Nations Conduct Airstrikes Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq," [Central Command](#), 30 Sep 2014.

Also at [Pentagon](#).

U.S. Congress Reaction to Syria & Iraq

Introduction

The U.S. Congress was on vacation during August 2014. When the U.S. House of Representatives recessed on 4 Aug, the Syrian civil war was continuing unabated, with no reasonable possibility of peace in the foreseeable future. Iraq was a disaster: ISIL had captured 1/3 of Iraq, and the Iraqi Parliament — despite the existential crisis — was unable to form a new government after the elections on 30 April.

But when Congress adjourned in early August, the U.S. Military was *not* actively engaged in Syria and Iraq. There were *no* U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and *no* U.S. surveillance flights over Syria.

When Congress returned on 8 Sep, the U.S. Military had provided more than 143 airstrikes against targets in Iraq. Obama had apparently committed the USA to *many years* of war in Iraq, without any approval by Congress. Worse, senior government officials were openly discussing the possibility of airstrikes against ISIL inside Syria without the permission of Assad, which could drag the USA into the sectarian civil war in Syria.

To understand the evolving politics, read the speeches by Obama on 7, 9, 18, and 28 Aug, the

21 Aug Hagel-Dempsey press conference, and the 22 Aug statement by Ben Rhodes — all quoted in my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.

If Congress

1. believed that Obama's airstrikes in Iraq were undesirable,
2. believed Obama's surveillance of Syria was undesirable, or
3. was concerned about mission creep in Iraq,

then Congress *could* have convened during their August vacation. The fact that Congress remained on vacation indicates tacit approval of Obama's policies.

If Obama's policies in Iraq and/or Syria fail, then everyone will blame Obama. If Obama's policies are successful, then everyone will celebrate *our* victory. My reading about politics in Washington, DC since the mid-1960s has made me cynical about the ability of Congress to solve problems. Apparently, my cynicism is shared by Americans, because opinion polls during the last few years have shown only about 20% of Americans approve of the way Congress acts.

The U.S. Congress met only a few days during September, mostly focused on approving a federal government budget to avoid a shutdown of the government. After Congress fixes the budget crisis, Congress then intends to resume campaigning for re-election on 4 Nov. Getting mired in the highly complex Syria/Iraq problems is *not* welcome by Congress. On 14 Sep, [Politico](#) reports that Congress will debate ISIL *after* the elections. So I have spent most of my limited time on this project reading news from Iraq and Syria, as well as State Department, Pentagon, and White House press briefings, and ignoring Congress.

30 August 2014

The 30 Aug print edition of *The New York Times* contained an op-ed by U.S. Senators John McCain & Lindsey Graham, two conservative Republicans:

[¶1] After more than three years, almost 200,000 dead in Syria, the near collapse of Iraq, and the rise of the world's most sinister terrorist army — the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, which has conquered vast swaths of both countries — President Obama's admission this week [28 Aug] that "[we don't have a strategy yet](#)" to deal with this threat is startling. It is also dangerous.

....

[¶5] It is a truism to say there is no military solution to ISIS. Any strategy must, of course, be comprehensive. It must squeeze ISIS' finances. It requires an inclusive government in Baghdad that shares power and wealth with Iraqi Sunnis, rather than pushing them toward ISIS. It requires an end to the conflict in Syria, and a political transition there, because the regime of President Bashar al-Assad will never be a reliable partner against ISIS; in fact, it has abetted the rise of ISIS, just as it facilitated the terrorism of ISIS' predecessor, Al Qaeda in Iraq. A strategy to counter ISIS also requires a regional approach to mobilize America's partners in a coordinated,

multilateral effort.

[¶6] But ultimately, ISIS is a military force, and it must be confronted militarily. Mr. Obama has begun to take military actions against ISIS in Iraq, but they have been tactical and reactive half-measures. Continuing to confront ISIS in Iraq, but not in Syria, would be fighting with one hand tied behind our back. We need a military plan to defeat ISIS, wherever it is.

[¶7] Such a plan would seek to strengthen partners who are already resisting ISIS: the Kurdish pesh merga, Sunni tribes, moderate forces in Syria, and effective units of Iraq's security forces. Our partners are the boots on the ground, and the United States should provide them directly with arms, intelligence and other military assistance. This does not, however, mean supporting Iranian military forces, whose presence only exacerbates sectarian tensions that empower ISIS.

John McCain & Lindsey Graham, "Stop Dithering, Confront ISIS," [NY Times](#), 29 Aug 2014. (most links omitted here)

My comments: McCain and Graham clearly do not like Assad. In paragraph 5, they say "the regime of President Bashar al-Assad will never be a reliable partner against ISIS; in fact, it has abetted the rise of ISIS". I dispute that Assad "abetted" the rise of ISIL. Assad simply concentrated his military resources in heavily populated western Syria, and temporarily ignored ISIL in northern and eastern Syria. Assad probably hoped to liberate Aleppo, then turn his attention to ISIL. Assad did not foresee that ISIL would capture U.S.-supplies from the Iraqi army in Mosul in June 2014, rob banks in Mosul, and become a more formidable military.

How do McCain and Graham know that Assad "will never be a reliable partner against ISIS"? [¶5] Assad might be very grateful for cooperation by the USA, Iraq, and a coalition of nations in exterminating ISIL in both Syria and Iraq. At the moment, ISIL is a much larger threat to Assad than to either Western Europe or the USA.

McCain and Graham make an unsupported assertion in paragraph 5 that Assad "facilitated the terrorism of ISIS' predecessor, Al Qaeda in Iraq." More facts are necessary, but all we get is a conclusion.

McCain and Graham call for "an end to the conflict in Syria" [¶5]. That will happen soon after the coalition of nations, including Syria, defeats ISIL and Al-Qaeda (Nusra Front) in Syria. Assad can then defeat the jihadists in the Islamic Front.

In paragraph 6, McCain and Graham say "ISIS is a military force, and it must be confronted militarily." I agree, but Islamic terrorism (e.g., jihadists, Al-Qaeda, *and* ISIL) is also an idea, and we need Islamic clerics and Islamic leaders to repeatedly condemn terrorism in name of Islam.

In paragraph 7, McCain and Graham suggest "strengthen ... moderate forces in Syria" to defeat ISIL there. The so-called "moderate forces" (do they mean the Free Syrian Army?) had some potency in the year 2011. But since August 2013, journalists and commentators have described the FSA as fragmented, disorganized, and disillusioned. The FSA is now the

weakest of the groups fighting against Assad in Syria. Clearly, the FSA — together with jihadists and Al-Qaeda — have been unable to defeat Assad in more than three years of fighting. If we want to defeat ISIL in Syria it would be a better strategy to partner with Assad's military, because Assad's military is the best equipped and best trained fighting force in Syria, with the possible exception of ISIL.

In paragraph 7, McCain and Graham take a swipe at Iran. The world is confronted with a significant terror threat from ISIL. We can not be afford to exclude nations (e.g., Syria and Iran) from a coalition against ISIL just because the USA considers them rogue nations. Syria and Iran both have a valuable role to play in a coalition against ISIL.

In my opinion, the coalition should have *only one* goal: to defeat ISIL. If defeating Assad in Syria were added as a second goal, then (1) Syria, Iran, and Russia would *not* join the coalition and (2) the coalition would be sucked into Syria's sectarian civil war.

31 August 2014

Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, spoke on the NBC program "Meet the Press" on Sunday, 31 Aug.

ANDREA MITCHELL: The fact is, [ISIS and other related groups] have been on the march now for months, if not years. So why does the president still say we don't have a strategy yet? Doesn't that project weakness from the White House?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN: Well, I mean, I know what you want me to say. But I'm not going to say it in that sense. I think I've learned one thing about this president, and that is he's very cautious. Maybe in this instance, too cautious. I do know that the military, I know that the State Department, I know that others have been putting plans together.

And so hopefully, those plans will coalesce into a strategy that can encourage that coalition from Arab nations,

.....

FEINSTEIN: [ISIL] crossed the border into Iraq before we even knew it happened.

....

ANDREA MITCHELL: Was that an intelligence failure, or was the White House not listening to the community?

DIANNE FEINSTEIN: Well, I think our intelligence in Syria has not been good for a number of reasons. But I do know that the breaking through of the borders was not known ahead of time. I think a lot of that hopefully has been repaired now. And I think the intelligence community is well aware of the need to get up and running in a major way, both in Iraq and in Syria.

"Meet the Press" transcript, [NBC](#), 31 Aug 2014.

This interview was summarized in news stories by the [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).

My comments: Feinstein is a Democrat, the same political party as Obama, but she shows little loyalty to Obama. Feinstein says Obama is "too cautious". Feinstein avoided the question about Obama projecting weakness when he admitted the U.S. had *no* strategy for defeating ISIL in Syria. Feinstein admitted an intelligence failure in not predicting that ISIL would cross the Syrian/Iraq border into Iraq. Feinstein also agreed with the McCain/Graham 30 Aug op-ed in *The New York Times*, quoted above, which is critical of Obama.

text of Congressional authorization

The legal name of the bill to authorize the training and equipping of moderate rebels in Syria was "McKeon of California Part B Amendment", House Amendment 1141 to House Joint Resolution 124. The text of this Amendment says:

(a) The Secretary of Defense is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustainment, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

- (1) Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.
- (2) Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.
- (3) Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria.

(b) Not later than 15 days prior to providing assistance authorized under subsection (a) to vetted recipients for the first time—

(1) the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees and leadership of the House of Representatives and Senate a report, in unclassified form with a classified annex as appropriate, that contains a description of—

- (A) the plan for providing such assistance;
- (B) the requirements and process used to determine appropriately vetted recipients; and
- (C) the mechanisms and procedures that will be used to monitor and report to the appropriate congressional committees and leadership of the House of Representatives and Senate on unauthorized end-use of provided training and equipment and other violations of relevant law by recipients; and

(2) the President shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees and leadership of the House of Representatives and Senate a report, in unclassified form with a classified annex as appropriate, that contains a description of how such assistance fits within a larger regional strategy.

(c) The plan required in subsection (b)(1) shall include a description of—

- (1) the goals and objectives of assistance authorized under subsection (a);
- (2) the concept of operations, timelines, and types of training, equipment, and supplies to be provided;
- (3) the roles and contributions of partner nations;
- (4) the number of United States Armed Forces personnel involved;
- (5) any additional military support and sustainment activities; and
- (6) any other relevant details.

(d) Not later than 90 days after the Secretary of Defense submits the report required in subsection (b)(1), and every 90 days thereafter, the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, shall provide the appropriate congressional committees and leadership of the House of Representatives and the Senate with a progress report. Such progress report shall include a description of—

- (1) any updates to or changes in the plan, strategy, vetting requirements and process, and end-use monitoring mechanisms and procedures, as required in subsection (b)(1);
- (2) statistics on green-on-blue attacks and how such attacks are being mitigated;
- (3) the groups receiving assistance authorized under subsection (a);
- (4) the recruitment, throughput, and retention rates of recipients and equipment;
- (5) any misuse or loss of provided training and equipment and how such misuse or loss is being mitigated; and
- (6) an assessment of the effectiveness of the assistance authorized under subsection (a) as measured against subsections (b) and (c).

(e) For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) The term “appropriately vetted” means, with respect to elements of the Syrian opposition and other Syrian groups and individuals, at a minimum, assessments of such elements, groups, and individuals for associations with terrorist groups, Shia militias aligned with or supporting the Government of Syria, and groups associated with the Government of Iran. Such groups include, but are not limited to, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Jabhat al Nusrah, Ahrar al Sham, other al-Qaeda related groups, and Hezbollah.

(2) The term “appropriate congressional committees” means—

(A) the Committee on Armed Services, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the House of Representatives; and

(B) the Committee on Armed Services, the Committee on Foreign Relations, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Select Committee on Intelligence of the Senate.

(f) The Department of Defense may submit a reprogramming or transfer request to the congressional defense committees for funds made available by section 101(a)(3) of this joint resolution and designated in section 114 of this joint resolution to carry out activities authorized under this section notwithstanding sections 102 and 104 of this

joint resolution.

(g) The Secretary of Defense may accept and retain contributions, including assistance in-kind, from foreign governments to carry out activities as authorized by this section which shall be credited to appropriations made available by this joint resolution for the appropriate operation and maintenance accounts, except that any funds so accepted by the Secretary shall not be available for obligation until a reprogramming action is submitted to the congressional defense committees: Provided, That amounts made available by this subsection are designated by the Congress for Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985: Provided further, That such amounts shall be available only if the President so designates such amounts and transmits such designations to the Congress.

(h) The authority provided in this section shall continue in effect through the earlier of the date specified in section 106(3) of this joint resolution or the date of the enactment of an Act authorizing appropriations for fiscal year 2015 for military activities of the Department of Defense.

(i) Nothing in this section shall be construed to constitute a specific statutory authorization for the introduction of United States Armed Forces into hostilities or into situations wherein hostilities are clearly indicated by the circumstances.

(j) Nothing in this section supersedes or alters the continuing obligations of the President to report to Congress pursuant to section 4 of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. § 1543) regarding the use of United States Armed Forces abroad.
160 Congressional Record H7556-H7557 (16 Sep 2014), 113th Congress.

**17 Sep 2014:
House of Representatives approves
training and arming Syrian rebels**

In his 28 May 2014 speech at West Point, Obama proposed spending U.S. taxpayer's money to train and arm so-called moderate Syrian rebels. But the U.S. Congress did very little with Obama's proposal during four months. On 17 Sep 2014, the Associated Press reported:

The Republican-controlled House [of Representatives] lined up half-heartedly to give the U.S. military authority to train and arm Syrian rebels on Wednesday [17 Sep] as President Barack Obama emphasized that American forces "do not and will not have a combat mission" in the struggle against Islamic state militants.

Officials in both parties predicted approval of the plan Obama requested last week, about two months before midterm elections for control of Congress.

But even supporters of the plan found little to trumpet. "This is the best of a long list of bad options," said Rep. Jim Moran, D-Va.

....

Across the political aisle from the president and Pelosi, Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California swung behind the plan. Yet many members of their rank and file expressed concerns that it would be insufficient to defeat militants who have overrun parts of Syria and Iraq and beheaded two American journalists.

GOP lawmakers took solace in the short-term nature of the legislation. It grants Obama authority only until Dec. 11, giving Congress plenty of time to return to the issue in a postelection session set to begin in mid-November.

David Espo & Donna Cassata, "Wary House Set To Approve Arms For Syrian Rebels," [Associated Press](#), 15:44 EDT, 17 September 2014.

At 17:10 EDT on 17 Sep the Associated Press reports that the House of Representatives approved the training of moderate Syrian rebels by a vote of 273 to 156. Only 6 members did not vote. [AP](#).

At 20:56 EDT, the Associated Press reports:

In all, 85 Democrats and 71 Republicans voted to deny Obama the authority he sought. The measure passed on the strength of 159 votes from Republicans and 114 from Democrats.

David Espo & Donna Cassata, "HOUSE GRUDGINGLY APPROVES ARMS FOR SYRIAN REBELS," [Associated Press](#), 20:56 EDT, 17 September 2014.

18 Sep 2014: U.S. Senate approves continuing budget

The current U.S. Government budget expires on 30 Sep, but the dysfunctional U.S. Congress is *not* ready to vote on a budget for the next fiscal year. To avoid a shutdown of the Government, Congress needs to pass a bill to provide money for the Government for a few months (until 11 Dec), a so-called "continuing resolution".

The provision to provide training and equipment to moderate Syrian rebels is one new item included in this massive budget bill. The leaders of the House of Representatives permitted a vote on just this one item, and when it passed the House, it was included in the continuing resolution for funding the U.S. Government, which also passed the House. At that point, the Senate must pass the continuing resolution that is identical to the version passed by the House, to allow Congress to adjourn and the Government to avoid shutdown. That is why the leaders of the U.S. Senate only allowed a vote on the *entire* budget bill, including the Syrian rebels. Because Senators want to adjourn, return home, and campaign for their re-election, quick passage of the bill is assured. This expediency means there is *no* thoughtful debate, and Senators can avoid taking a position on a controversial issue.

The Washington Post followed the Obama party line with its headline: "Senate votes to

approve Obama's plan to fight Islamist militants". What actually happened was that Senators voted to approve the continuing budget resolution. Obama's plan to train and arm Syrian rebels was a tiny part of that massive budget resolution. Despite my disagreement with the *Post's* headline, their article is insightful and accurate.

President Obama's plan to train and equip moderate Syrian rebels exposed a deep rift Thursday among Democrats over waging war, with a large bloc of liberals staunchly opposed to the modest mission, fearing another long-term engagement in Iraq.

While the Senate sent the measure Thursday [18 Sep] to the White House for Obama's signature, votes this week demonstrated the tenuous support he has from his own party in carrying out the mission to "degrade and destroy" Islamic State forces. Several of the party's rising stars, including Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, rejected the proposal, while in the House, Obama's proposal won approval only because a vast majority of Republicans backed him.

....

Senators voted 78 to 22 to approve the strategy as part of a measure meant to keep the federal government operating through mid-December. Support came from 45 Democrats and 33 Republicans, while 10 members of the Senate Democratic caucus and 12 Republicans voted against the bill.

....

[Elizabeth] Warren said in a statement that she is "not convinced that the current proposal to train and equip Syrian forces adequately advances our interests." She added, "I do not want American to be dragged into another ground war in the Middle East."

While [Kirsten] Gillibrand said in a statement that she supports "aspects" of Obama's plans, she said that "previous history leads me to conclude that arming Syrian rebels would be an ineffective solution."

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), a potential presidential candidate, voted no and used a combative floor speech to blast Obama and congressional colleagues for not holding a fuller war debate before the elections.

"The people in this body are petrified — not of ISIS — but of the American voter," he said, using an acronym for another name for the Islamic State. Lawmakers are "afraid to come forward and vote on war now."

....

The House and Senate planned to adjourn Thursday [18 Sep] night, capping a two-week congressional session [beginning 8 Sep] held primarily to ensure the federal government won't shut down when the new fiscal year begins Oct. 1. Neither chamber is scheduled to reconvene until after Election Day [4 Nov].

Paul Kane & Ed O'Keefe, "Senate votes to approve Obama's plan to fight Islamist militants," [Washington Post](#), 21:18 EDT, 18 Sep.

The New York Times had the same kind of misleading headline as the *Post*. The *Times's* headline said: "Senate Approves Training And Arming Syrian Rebels", when the vote was actually about a continuing resolution to fund the U.S. Government.

The Senate gave overwhelming approval on Thursday to the training and arming of Syrian rebels, then fled the Capitol with the House for the fall campaign, sidestepping the debate over the extent of American military action until the lame-duck session of Congress later this year.

The training measure was pushed hard by President Obama, who will now sign it into law. It was tucked into a larger Senate bill to keep the government funded past Sept. 30, a maneuver that leaders of both parties favored to ensure as few defections as possible. The Senate's 78-22 vote, a day after the House passed the measure, masked the serious doubts that some senators had.

Jonathan Weisman & Jeremy W. Peters, "Senate Approves Training And Arming Syrian Rebels," [NY Times](#), 18 Sep 2014.

At noon EDT on Friday, 19 Sep, I looked at Senator Eliabeth Warren's website, but she had neither a press release nor a news item about her displeasure with Obama's proposed training of Syrian rebels. The [Associated Press](#) quotes a statement by Senator Warren: "I remain concerned that our weapons, our funding, and our support may end up in the hands of people who threaten the United States. I do not want America to be dragged into another ground war in the Middle East."

At 13:00 EDT on Friday, 19 Sep, I looked at Senator Kristen Gillibrand's website, but she had no press release about her displeasure with Obama's proposed training of Syrian rebels.

Amongst the 22 Senators voting against the continuing resolution (probably to express disapproval of training/equipping moderate Syrian rebels) were the following 9 prominent Senators:

- Coburn (R-OK)
- Gillibrand (D-NY)
- Leahy (D-VT)
- Manchin (D-WV)
- Markey (D-MA)
- Paul (R-KY)
- Sanders (I-VT)
- Sessions (R-AL)
- Warren (D-MA)

On 18 Sep, after the vote in the Senate, Obama issued a statement in which he remarked on the congressional approval of the train and equip of moderate Syrian rebels:

Here at home, I'm pleased that Congress — a majority of Democrats and a majority of Republicans, in both the House and the Senate — have now voted to support a key

element of our strategy: our plan to train and equip the opposition in Syria so they can help push back these terrorists. As I said last week, I believe that we're strongest as a nation when the President and Congress work together. And I want to thank leaders in Congress for the speed and seriousness with which they approached this urgent issue — in keeping with the bipartisanship that is the hallmark of American foreign policy at its best.

Obama, "Statement By the President on Congressional Authorization to Train Syrian Opposition," [White House](#), 18 Sep 2014.

My comments: Obama was gleeful that his plan to train/equip Syrian rebels had been approved by Congress.

Obama ignored that the Senators did *not* have the opportunity to vote on the train/equip authorization as an individual item. As mentioned above, the Senate was only allowed to vote on the *entire* budget continuing resolution, of which the train/equip authorization was a small part. No one noticed that of 55 Senators who caucus with Democrats, 10 of them (18%) voted against the continuing resolution, probably to express disapproval of training Syrian rebels. In the House of Representatives, 43% of Democrats voted against the authorization to train/equip moderate Syrian rebels. So Obama is facing significant disagreement in his own political party.

The authorization to train and equip Syrian rebels — like everything else in the continuing resolution — expires on 11 Dec 2014, so there will be more debate in Congress on this issue later in 2014.

I see four problems with training and equipping the moderate Syrian rebels (e.g., the Free Syrian Army):

1. The Free Syrian Army is relatively small, militarily weak, and disorganized. The FSA is *not* a good source of soldiers to defeat the more formidable ISIL, Al-Qaeda, the jihadists, *and* Assad's military. The USA seems to be supporting the FSA because the FSA is the *only* acceptable military force in Syria.
 2. The Pentagon says it will take at least a year to train 5000 soldiers from the FSA. (See [above](#).) But we need soldiers on the ground in Syria *now*, to coordinate with our airstrikes.
 3. The continually shifting alliances amongst insurgents in Syria mean that it is impossible to vet moderate rebels, so that U.S.-supplied equipment is not acquired by terrorists. There is a history of Islamic Front, ISIL, and Nusra Front stealing weapons from the FSA, the Iraqi army, and from U.N. observers.
 4. The primary goal of the FSA is to defeat Assad. The U.S. support of the FSA is intervening in a nasty sectarian civil war. The USA does *not* have a legitimate interest in the sectarian civil war in Syria. Worse, if Assad is defeated, then the terrorists will assume control of Syria in the anarchy that follows the removal of Assad.
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17-18 Sep: Speeches from *Congressional Record*

I looked at the *Congressional Record* for speeches on 17-18 Sep that mention Syria. I was impressed by the articulate reasoning of three of those speeches, and I decided to extensively quote them in this chronicle of the U.S. involvement in the Syrian civil war.

Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV)

Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) is opposed to supporting any of the insurgents in Syria.
... but I cannot and will not support arming or training the Syrian opposition forces.

....

In Iraq alone, we spent the better part of 8 years training the Iraqi police and military force of a 280,000-person army at the cost of \$20 billion to the American people — \$20 billion. The first time they had to step up and defend their country, their people, and their way of life, what did they do? They folded in the face of ISIS, abandoning their equipment and facilities to the enemy.

I ask my colleagues and the President, why do we think that training the rebels would turn out any differently?

....

.... But I strongly believe that if our military arms and trains Syrian rebels, we will be involving ourselves in a ground conflict that we cannot resolve where potentially everyone involved is our enemy.

To my mind, the reasons not to arm Syrian rebels today are very clear. No. 1, first, the weapons we give to moderate opposition may not remain in their hands. If my colleagues have seen the videos of ISIS shipping U.S. Army humvees and MRAPs out of Iraq that we gave to the Iraqi Army, they will understand what I mean.

No. 2, I have seen no evidence that the Syrian rebels we plan to train and arm will remain committed to American goals or our interests. The vast majority of national level Syrian rebel groups are Islamist, none of whom are interested in allying with the United States. This is not to their best interests — and not in their interest — and none of whom we should be associating with.

Further, the opposition fighters we will train care more about overthrowing Assad's regime than they do about defeating ISIS. Assad is evil, make no mistake about it, but he is not a threat to America. If the moderate opposition has to choose between defeating Assad and defeating ISIS, why do we believe — think about this — they will choose our priority over their own? Why would we even think that? How do we know they won't join forces with ISIS if it helps them overthrow Assad, their main objective?

No. 3, authorizing military support for Syrian rebels will inextricably draw us into a

civil war we have no way to end — and we have seen this picture unfold before. Our fight is against ISIS and the Islamist terrorist groups that threaten the United States. [9] I would ask my colleagues to consider America's history of intervention in the Middle East. It has not been a successful one. Interventions have failed in Lebanon, Somalia, Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan is on the brink of failure.

....

.... Again we trained in Iraq a military of 280,000 persons at a cost of \$20 billion, and when they faced their first test, they folded.

.... The total cost of our recent wars [in Afghanistan and Iraq]: \$1.6 trillion, and that is growing. That doesn't include the cost of long-term care of wounded veterans, over 50,000.

.... It is my understanding that the same vote we make to train and fund the Syrian opposition forces will also be one to pass a CR [continuing resolution] to fund our government. I do not believe we should be forced to decide between funding our government and arming Syrian rebels in the same vote.

We should be ashamed for failing to pass appropriations bills to finance government operations for the fiscal year that starts 2 weeks from now, and more ashamed that for the sake of expediency — expediency because of an election coming up — that we are using a stopgap continuing resolution as a vehicle for authorizing major military activity that will have repercussions for generations to come.

....

.... I believe these votes should be separate and debated. We owe that to the American people. We have this time to do it. I believe with all my heart we have more than enough time to do this. I am prepared, as some of my colleagues, to stay in session so we can give the American people the debate and transparent transition they deserve.

Joe Manchin, 160 Congressional Record S5657-S5658 (17 Sep 2014).

Rep. David Jolly (R-FL)

Representative David Jolly from Florida opposed the limited nature of the debate in Congress on how to confront ISIL.

Mr. Speaker, we will be asked as a Congress later today to vote on authorization of the President's request to arm Syrian rebels.

I rise this morning to oppose the President's request, and I do so with a heart of conviction that says we must do more to combat, confront, defeat, and destroy ISIS, but also with the conviction, respectfully, that the President's request is simply wrong.

....

We should be here today as a Congress debating whether we are a Nation at war, whether ISIS constitutes a direct threat to the national security of the United States, and if we are at war, we as a Congress should be asking the question: Are we fully engaged as a Nation to defeat ISIS, and are we fully committed to accepting the consequences and the casualties required to do so? But that is not what today's vote is about.

Today's vote is whether we as a Nation put our reliance on Syrian rebels, and that leaves far too many unanswered questions. We tried this in Iraq, to mixed results. We know Syrian rebels — we know this — some will cooperate with ISIS and, in fact, contribute to the additional killings of Syrian Christians and religious minorities. Are we prepared as a body to accept those collateral casualties of terror?

We know training will take months. What will we be doing tomorrow? We know Russia has declared this will be an act of aggression. What is our Nation's response, and what is this body's response? And how does today's debate contribute to our Article 1, Section 8 authority under the Constitution? Are we quietly allying with the Syrian Government, a regime that 18 months ago we said we wanted to topple, or is this an act of aggression against Syria's sovereignty? And where is this Congress in this debate?

The final question is: Do we seriously think, as the President portends, that this will not require a single pair of boots of our Special Operations community to touch Syrian soil? Do we truly rely on Syrian rebels to lay the targets for our elite air assets?

There are boots on the ground today. We can call them military advisers, but the fact is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff yesterday said, if necessary, he would recommend putting them in a combat role. We are not having that debate here on the floor of the House.

....

So my request of my colleagues in this House is that we have a full debate on what we face as a Nation. The President has brought us this very limited request merely out of statutory convenience, not out of constitutional conviction. We should not accept that.

My request of the President is this: very respectfully, do not trample on the constitutional authority of this Congress as you reluctantly march to the drumbeat of war that you are rightfully hesitant to engage in and with an elusive strategy that leaves so many unanswered questions today.

This body should have a full debate. The American people deserve to know that the President has requested full authorization and this Congress has had an opportunity to deliberate on it. I reluctantly oppose the request today, knowing we must do so much more to confront ISIS. I ask my colleagues to do the same.

David Jolly, 160 Congressional Record H7622-23 (17 Sep 2014).

Senator Rand Paul (R-KY)

On 18 Sep, Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) made an impassioned plea to have the bill on training and equipping moderate Syrian rebels be considered separately in the Senate from the continuing resolution on Government funding. Then Senator Paul explained why it was a bad idea to give more weapons to the moderate rebels in Syria:

So, yes, we must now defend ourselves from these barbarous jihadists. But let's not compound the problem by arming feckless rebels in Syria who seem to be merely a pit stop for weapons that are really on their way to ISIS. Remember clearly that the President and his Republican allies have been clamoring for over a year for airstrikes against Assad. Assad was our enemy last year. This year he is our friend. Had all of those air strikes, though, occurred last year in Syria, today ISIS might be in Damascus. Realize that the unintended consequences of involving ourselves in these complicated, thousand-year-long civil wars lead to unintended consequences. Had we bombed Assad last year, ISIS would be more of a threat this year. ISIS may well be in Damascus had we bombed Assad last year.

Had the hawks been successful last year, we would be facing a stronger ISIS, likely in charge of all Syria and most of Iraq.

Intervention is not always the answer and often leads to unintended consequences.

But some will argue no, no, it is not intervention that led to this chaos, we didn't have enough intervention. They say if we had only given the rebels more arms, ISIS wouldn't be as strong now. The only problem is the facts argue otherwise.

We did give arms and assistance to the rebels through secret CIA operations, through our allies, through our erstwhile allies. We gave 600 tons — let me repeat that — we gave 600 tons of weapons to the Syrian rebels in 2013 alone. We gave 600 tons of weapons and they cry out and say we haven't done enough?

Perhaps they are giving them to people who don't want to fight. Perhaps the fighters from ISIS are taking the weapons we give to the so-called moderate rebels. It is a mistake to send more arms to the Syrians.

According to the U.N. records, Turkey alone, in the space of a 4-month period, sent 47 tons in addition to the 600 tons of weapons. They sent 29 tons in 1 month. But there are rumors that the Turks are not quite that discriminating, that many of these weapons either went directly or indirectly to the very radical jihadists who are now threatening us.

If you want to know are there any weapons over there, are there enough weapons, is it a lack of weapons that causes the moderate Syrian rebels to be not very good at fighting, well, there are videos online of the Free Syrian Army, the army our government wants to give more arms to. We see them with Mi-8 helicopters, we see them with shoulder-launched missiles, and yet we see them lose battle after battle.

We see American-made TOW antitank weapons in the hands of Harakat al-Hazm, a so-called moderate group. The Wall Street Journal reported that Saudi Arabia has been providing weapons such as this to the rebels. It also detailed millions of dollars in direct U.S. aid to the rebels.

We have not been sitting around doing nothing. Six hundred tons of weapons have already been given to the Syrian rebels. What happened during the period of time we gave 600 tons of weapons to the moderate rebels in Syria? ISIS grew stronger.

They say the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different result. We gave 600 tons of weapons to the rebels and they got weaker and weaker and ISIS grew stronger.

Rand Paul, 160 Congressional Record S5739-40 (18 Sep 2014.)

My comments: The above-quoted comments show that there were Representatives and Senators who clearly understood what was happening in Syria, yet they were unable to stop the majority of Congress from endorsing Obama's mistake to train and equip the moderate Syrian rebels. Senator Manchin comes close to endorsing cooperation with Assad when Manchin said: "Assad is evil, make no mistake about it, but he is not a threat to America." Senator Paul recognizes that opposing Assad helps ISIL.

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.").

- Rajeev Syal, "David Cameron must 'consider cooperating with Syria' to crush Isis," [The Guardian](#), 5 Sep 2014 (Lord Richards, former chief of the U.K. defence staff, urged the current U.K. prime minister to cooperate with Assad in defeating ISIL.).
- Ahmad Samih Khalidi, op-ed, "To Crush ISIS, Make a Deal With Assad," [NY Times](#), 15 Sep 2014 ("... the West appears to be primarily appeasing Arab Persian Gulf allies that have turned the overthrow of Mr. Assad into a policy fetish that runs against any rational calculation of how to defeat Islamist terrorism. the only real 'boots on the ground' capable of destroying ISIS are the Syrian Army and its local allies, including Hezbollah.").

Conclusion for Syria

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).
5. it will be at least a year before we can train 5000 moderate Syrian rebels, while we would not need to train Assad's army — so we can attack ISIL in Syria sooner if we partner with Assad instead of the rebels.
6. 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, — after ISIL threatened genocide of the Yazidis — Obama decided to help defeat ISIL in Iraq, by ordering airstrikes in Iraq. But eastern Syria is now a safe haven for ISIL, so Obama realized sometime around 21 Aug 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 with Assad, Obama's military campaign in Syria will be less effective, as explained in the previous paragraph. Ironically, *both Assad and Obama* need help from each other, but Obama is too stubborn to ask Assad, and it would be futile for Assad to ask Obama for help in defeating ISIL.

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 30 September 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion for Iraq

The Syrians have an effective government and an effective military. In contrast, the Iraqi Parliament slowly formed a new government (during an existential crisis) and the Iraqi army is unable to expel ISIL from towns and cities. Iraq — like Somalia and Libya — is a failed nation. These facts make the Iraqi government weaker than the Syrian government.

In my [webpage](#) on Iraq, I summarized the delays, infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. Clearly, the Iraqi Parliament made the problems in Iraq worse by failing to promptly form a new, inclusive, and competent government.

The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable to prosecute army officers for desertion at Mosul on 10 June (see [above](#)), unable to find bodies of victims of a massacre by ISIL at Speicher Air Base on 11-14 June, and unable to determine who killed 70 people at a Sunni mosque on 22 Aug.

I conclude that the government of Iraq is dysfunctional and unworthy of assistance. But the Iraqi people do *not* deserve to suffer at the hands of the barbaric ISIL terrorists. Furthermore, ISIL in Iraq and Syria must be annihilated to protect neighboring nations from future invasion by ISIL terrorists, as ISIL expands their caliphate.

this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria13.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

[my homepage](#)