

Syria & Iraq: November 2014

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 12 essays on Syria. That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

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

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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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 2 November, the USA was on Standard Time. Beirut is +2 hours from GMT. Baghdad is +3 hours from GMT.

Every day, I checked the websites of [All Iraq News](#), [The Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, the U.S. Central Command, and the Associated Press for news to summarize in this essay. When I found significant news, I attempted to find and cite the original source.

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

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.

There was no new information from this investigation during November 2014.

Alleged Use of Chlorine by ISIL in Iraq

On 23 Oct journalists reported that Iraqi officials alleged that ISIL had released chlorine gas on 15 September in an attack on Iraqi police in Duluiyah, 75 km north of Baghdad. *The Washington Post* says 11 policemen were taken to a hospital in Balad. The Associated Press says "about 40 troops and Shiite militiamen were slightly affected by the chlorine". [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#). I am suspicious of why Iraqi authorities waited more than one month to announce this use of chemical weapons, an announcement that has enormous propaganda value. Delaying for more than one month makes it very difficult to independently verify that chlorine gas was actually used by ISIL.

Alleged Use of Chlorine by ISIL in Syria

On 21 Oct, ISIL allegedly used chlorine gas to attack Kurds in Syria. Details are sparse. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#).

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 eight major problems in the world that divert attention and resources from the civil war in Syria:

1. 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.
2. a continuing civil war in the Central African Republic
3. more violence in South Sudan, as ceasefires are violated
4. On 14 April, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists in Nigeria, kidnapped more than 230 girls from a boarding school. On 20 May, an Islamic bomb in Jos, Nigeria killed at least 130 people. Approximately ninety people were kidnapped by Islamic terrorists on 21 June in Nigeria. On 10 Nov, a suicide bomber killed at least 48 pupils at a high school in Nigeria. On 28 Nov, Boko Haram attacked a mosque in Kano, killing more than 102 people.
5. 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.
6. On 10 June 2014, ISIL — an Al-Qaeda inspired group that operates in both Iraq and Syria — captured Mosul, the second-largest city in Iraq. On 11 June, ISIL captured Tikrit. (See my essays for [June](#), [July](#), and [August](#).) 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.
7. 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. On 26 August, a ceasefire of indefinite duration was arranged in Gaza.

8. Ebola hemorrhagic fever in western Africa (e.g., Liberia and Sierra Leone), which had killed approximately 2800 people by 23 Sep 2014. On 23 Sep 2014, the U.S. Government forecasts between 0.5 and 1.4 million people infected by 20 Jan 2015, killing perhaps half of those infected.

Death Toll in Syria

On 17 Nov, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported it documented the execution of 1432 people in Syria by ISIL, since ISIL declared a caliphate on 29 June 2014. This death toll includes 882 civilians (62%) and 483 Assad's military (34%). [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

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 1 Dec, SOHR reported the death toll for November 2014:

SOHR documented the death of 4220 people, who were killed in November 2014, and they are as following:

- 869 civilians (152 children under the age of 18 and 103 women) including 385 (65 children, 61 women) killed by regime air strikes and 16 killed by coalition air strikes[,] in addition to 14 were executed by the IS and 111 tortured to death in regime prisons
- 533 Syrian fighters from rebels and Islamic battalions and YPG, including 26 were executed by ISIS.
- 12 dissident soldiers, 10 of them were tortured to death in regime prisons.
- 1343 Non-Syrian fighters from the IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Mohajrin wa al-Ansar army, and Jund al-Aqsa.
- 689 soldiers from regime forces.
- 612 NDF, peoples committees and regime spies.
- 13 Hezbollah.
- 49 Non-Syrian fighters allied to regime forces, including Shiaa fighters.
- 80 unknown people.

We, in SOHR, believed that the real number of casualties on the fighting parties is

more than our number with 900, because there is absolute secrecy on casualties and due to the difficulty of access to many areas and villages that have witnessed violent clashes and bombardment by all sides.

[SOHR](#), 1 Dec 2014. (Bulleted list added by Standler.)

When I add the numbers at the left edge of the bulleted list, I obtain 4200, *not* 4220.

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.

Rebels in Syria

Defeat of FSA by Nusra Front

The month of November began with an Associated Press news report that Nusra Front had defeated "moderate rebels" who were supported by Western governments. This story was buried in an article about the Iraqi peshmerga entering Kobani, an unrelated news story.

... Syria's al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front scored a major victory against a moderate rebel faction, capturing their headquarters as well as the mountainous strategic region of Jabal al-Zawiya in the northwestern province of Idlib. Jabal al-Zawiya was one of the first areas to fall out of President Bashar Assad's control after the uprising against his government began in March 2011.

The push in Idlib against the moderate rebel faction could be a blow to the U.S. as it plans to work with moderate rebel factions in the future to fight jihadis and Assad's forces.

....

In Idlib, the Nusra Front captured wide areas in Jabal al-Zawiya after five days of clashes with the moderate rebel Syrian Revolutionaries Front, the [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights] and Idlib-based Kanjo said. Among the areas capture was the village of Deir Sinbul that is home to the rebel faction headquarters, they said.

The Observatory said "tens" of fighters with the Syrian Revolutionaries Front have defected and joined the Nusra Front.

Elena Becatoros And Bassem Mroue, "Iraqi peshmerga fighters prepare for Syria battle," [Associated Press](#), 14:54 GMT, 1 Nov 2014.

On 2 Nov, Agence France-Presse reported:

Al-Qaeda affiliate Nusra Front seized a town and several villages in Syria's Idlib province overnight, in another blow to Western-backed rebel fighters in the northwestern region, an activist group said Sunday [2 Nov].

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Nusra fighters captured the town of Khan al-Subul after the withdrawal of the Hazm movement, a moderate opposition

group.

....

The advance comes a day after the Britain-based Observatory reported Nusra fighters had seized the Idlib bastion of the Syria Revolutionaries Front, another Western-backed opposition group.

....

The advance of the Al-Qaeda affiliate is seen as a setback to U.S. efforts to create and train a moderate rebel force as a counterweight to jihadists and the forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The Observatory said some members of the SRF even deserted the group during the fighting and joined Nusra's ranks.

The Hazm movement is among the rebel groups that have received limited supplies of U.S.-made weapons, including TOW anti-tank missiles.

The Observatory said Nusra had seized weapons during its advance in Idlib province, but it was not immediately clear if U.S.-made weapons were among those captured. "Nusra takes Syria town from U.S.-backed rebels," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 09:02 GMT, 2 Nov 2014.

Liz Sly, the Beirut bureau chief for *The Washington Post*, wrote:

The Obama administration's Syria strategy suffered a major setback Sunday after fighters linked to al-Qaeda routed U.S.-backed rebels from their main northern strongholds, capturing significant quantities of weaponry, triggering widespread defections and ending hopes that Washington will readily find Syrian partners in its war against the Islamic State.

Moderate rebels who had been armed and trained by the United States either surrendered or defected to the extremists as the Jabhat al-Nusra group, affiliated with al-Qaeda, swept through the towns and villages the moderates controlled in the northern province of Idlib, in what appeared to be a concerted push to vanquish the moderate Free Syrian Army, according to rebel commanders, activists and analysts.

Other moderate fighters were on the run, headed for the Turkish border as the extremists closed in, heralding a significant defeat for the rebel forces Washington had been counting on as a bulwark against the Islamic State.

....

Fleeing rebel fighters said they feared the defeat would spell the end of the Free Syrian Army, the umbrella name used by the moderate rebel groups that the United States has somewhat erratically sought to promote as an alternative both to the Assad regime and

the extremist Islamic State.

Among the groups whose bases were overrun in the assault was Harakat Hazm, the biggest recipient of U.S. assistance offered under a small-scale, covert CIA program launched earlier this year, including the first deliveries of U.S.-made TOW antitank missiles. The group's headquarters outside the village of Khan Subbul was seized by Jabhat al-Nusra overnight Saturday, after rebel fighters there surrendered their weapons and fled without a fight, according to residents in the area.

Liz Sly, "U.S.-backed Syria rebels routed by fighters linked to al-Qaeda," [Washington Post](#), 01:25 GMT, 3 Nov 2014.

On 3 Nov, Nusra Front began to choke off the supply route from Turkey to FSA ("rebel") fighters. The Associated Press reported:

Al-Qaida-linked militants pressed an offensive Monday [3 Nov] against Western-backed rebels in northern Syria, closing in on a vital border crossing with Turkey and exposing the weakness of mainstream opposition groups that the U.S. hopes to forge into a fighting force to take on Islamic extremists.

The Nusra Front's recent surge has overrun strongholds in Syria's Idlib province of two prominent rebel factions that proved unable to repel the assault despite getting arms and training from the U.S. The opposition groups' collapse marks a significant setback to Washington's plan of partnering with more moderate brigades to fight the Islamic State group and other radicals.

The Nusra Front — a bitter and bloody rival of the Islamic State group despite their shared extremist ideology — was massing its fighters Monday in the town of Sarmada near the Bab al-Hawa border crossing after sweeping through rebel-held towns and villages over the weekend. As the extent of the rout became apparent, reports also emerged that some rebels had pledged allegiance to the al-Qaida affiliate.

....

The two primary targets of the Nusra Front's attack are the Syria Revolutionaries Front and Harakat Hazm. While both rebel groups have received U.S. support, it never reached the levels that either deemed necessary to make significant advances against President Bashar Assad's forces in Syria's 3□-year-old civil war. At the same time, the link to the Americans also earned them the enmity of radical groups.

Diaa Hadid & Ryan Lucas, "Al-Qaida fighters push offensive in northern Syria," Not posted at Associated Press website. [WRAL](#), [MyWay](#), 19:20 GMT, 3 Nov 2014.

On Friday, 7 Nov, the Associated Press reported:

Al-Qaida-linked fighters captured at least three villages from Western-backed rebels in northwestern Syria on Friday as the militants continued their push to assert control over an area once held by more moderate groups.

The Nusra Front's recent advances have exposed the weakness of more moderate factions, which the U.S. hopes to forge into an effective fighting force against President

Bashar Assad's troops.

Underscoring their strength, the al-Qaida militants seized the three villages just a day after U.S. airstrikes hit one of their major weapons storage compounds in northwestern Idlib province.

In the past week, the al-Qaida affiliate has been overrunning strongholds in Idlib once held by two prominent rebel factions armed and trained by the United States, the Syrian Revolutionaries Front and Harakat Hazm.

....

[An anonymous "local activist"] told The Associated Press over Skype that Nusra's advances were a sinister development and could spell "the end of the Free Syrian Army," the Western-backed moderate rebels fighting to topple Assad.

Diaa Hadid & Bassem Mroue, "Al-Qaida group seizes villages from Syrian rebels," [Associated Press](#), 17:23 GMT, 7 Nov 2014.

My comments: If ISIL and Nusra Front continues to attack and defeat the Free Syrian Army (FSA), they may be able to obliterate the FSA *before* the USA can train and equip the FSA. No one should be surprised at the failure of the FSA, since journalists have been reporting for more than one year about the weaknesses and disorganization in the FSA. I have chronicled many of these reports in my previous essays on Syria.

Equally important in my view is the fact that, despite alleged vetting of who receives weapons from the USA, ISIL and Nusra Front continue to capture U.S.-supplied weapons. In effect, giving weapons to the FSA ultimately means that some of those weapons will be acquired by ISIL and Nusra Front — a result that should end donations of weapons from the USA to the FSA.

For previous reports of Islamic terrorists stealing U.S.-supplied weapons, see my

- [second essay](#) and [third essay](#) (Islamic Front stealing from FSA warehouse in Dec 2013);
- [eighth essay](#) (ISIL stealing huge amount of U.S.-supplied weapons from Iraqi army in Mosul in June 2014);
- [eleventh essay](#) (Nusra Front stole from U.N. soldiers in Golan Heights in Aug 2014);
- [twelfth essay](#) (ISIL terrorist packs explosives in U.S.-supplied Humvee that was captured from Iraqi army, then detonates on 27 Oct, killing at least 24 people.)

On 13 Nov, Reuters reported that the "moderate rebels" in northeast Syria were facing defeat by Nusra Front, but another group of rebels in southeast Syria was gaining prominence.

With moderate rebels facing defeat by al Qaeda in Syria's north, groups holding a corner of the south are seeking a higher profile and more help, as the last Western-

backed forces holding out against both President Bashar al-Assad and the jihadists.

The southern rebels [who call themselves the "Southern Front"], described by Western officials as the best organized of the mainstream opposition, say they are the last hope for a revolution hijacked by jihadists. In recent days they have laid out a transition plan for a Syria without Assad, taking on a political role that in the past they left to others.

....

Last week, 15 groups in the Southern Front drew up a political program, a step which separates them from the exile-led opposition [Syrian National Coalition?] widely seen across Syria as a failure.

....

The effort [by Southern Front] presents a challenge to the Western-backed opposition coalition based in Turkey, which has little sway on the ground but claims political authority over the "Free Syrian Army" (FSA) uniting mainstream rebel fighters.

The southern rebels "want to present themselves as a viable alternative to the Free Syrian Army in the north and the coalition, which was stillborn," said Fayez al-Dweiri, a retired Jordanian general who follows the Syrian war closely.

Apart from in the south and pockets in Aleppo, "the FSA has been effectively decimated and no longer effectively exists," Dweiri said.

Tom Perry, "Syria rebels in south emerge as West's last hope as moderates crushed elsewhere," [Reuters](#), 13:22 GMT, 13 Nov 2014.

On 13 Nov, the Associated Press reported that Nusra Front and ISIL met on 2 Nov and they reached two agreements. First, stop fighting each other. Second, cooperate on fighting against Assad and cooperate on fighting against groups supported by Western governments.

Such an accord could present new difficulties for Washington's strategy against the IS group. While warplanes from a U.S.-led coalition strike militants from the air, the Obama administration has counted on arming "moderate" rebel factions to push them back on the ground. Those rebels, already considered relatively weak and disorganized, would face far stronger opposition if the two heavy-hitting militant groups now are working together.

....

[A Syrian opposition official speaking in Turkey] said IS and the Nusra Front agreed to work to destroy the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, a prominent rebel faction armed and trained by the United States and led by a fighter named Jamal Maarouf. They agreed to keep fighting until all of the force, estimated to be 10,000 to 12,000 fighters, was eliminated, the official said.

During the meeting, IS also offered to send extra fighters to Nusra Front for an assault

it launched last week on Western-backed rebels from the Hazm Movement near the town of Khan al-Sunbul in northern Syria, the official said. IS sent about 100 fighters in 22 pickup trucks but Nusra ended up not needing the assistance, he said, because Hazm decided not to engage in the fight. Sixty-five Hazm fighters defected to Nusra, he said.

Deb Riechmann, "AP sources: IS, al-Qaida reach accord in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 20:24 GMT, 13 Nov 2014.

On 15 Nov, the Associated Press reported:

During a key battle in the rugged mountains of a northern province earlier this month, U.S.-backed Syrian rebels collapsed before an assault by al-Qaida fighters. Some surrendered their weapons. Others outright defected to the militants.

A detailed account of the battle in Idlib, from a series of interviews with opposition activists by The Associated Press, underscores how the moderate rebels that Washington is trying to boost to fight the Islamic State group are instead hemorrhaging on multiple fronts.

They face an escalated assault by Islamic extremists, which activists say are increasingly working together to eliminate them. At the same time, a string of assassinations has targeted some of their most powerful commanders.

"This is the end of the Free Syrian Army," said Alaa al-Deen, an opposition activist in Idlib, referring to Western-backed rebel groups. "It's the beginning of an Islamic emirate."

Thousands of rebels have died fighting the Islamic State group this year, a war that has overshadowed and undermined the struggle to topple President Bashar Assad. Now the Nusra Front — al-Qaida's branch in Syria, which previously was also fighting against the Islamic State group — has turned on more moderate factions. Two opposition figures told AP this week that Nusra Front and the Islamic State group have gone so far as to agree to work together against their opponents, though so far their forces have not been seen together on the ground.

....

In the fighting earlier this month, the Nusra Front drove U.S.-backed factions almost completely out of the northwestern province of Idlib, where they had been the predominant force. During the battles, two of the strongest Western-backed forces — the Hazm Movement and the Syrian Revolutionaries Front — were defeated and several other allied groups simply vanished.

Diaa Hadid & Bassem Mroue, "West-backed Syria rebels shaken on multiple fronts," [Associated Press](#), 16:23 GMT, 15 Nov 2014.

On 28 Nov, the Associated Press reported:

Syrian rebels backed by the United States are making their biggest gains yet south of

the capital Damascus, capturing a string of towns from government forces and aiming to carve out a swath of territory leading to the doorstep of President Bashar Assad's seat of power.

The advances appear to be a rare visible success story from efforts by the U.S. and its allies to train and arm moderate rebel fighters.

The rebel forces are believed to include fighters who graduated from a nearly 2-year-old CIA training program based in Syria's southern neighbor Jordan. The group known as the Friends of Syria, including Jordan, France the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, are backing the rebels with money and weapons, said Gen. Ibrahim Jbawi, the spokesman for the Free Syrian Army's southern front.

The gains are a contrast to northern Syria, where U.S.-backed rebels are collapsing in the face of an assault by Islamic militants. Notably, in the south, the rebels are working together with fighters from al-Qaida's Syria branch, whose battle-hardened militants have helped them gain the momentum against government forces. The cooperation points to the difficulty in American efforts to build up "moderate" factions while isolating extremists.

....

But few are under the illusion that the offensive in the south can loosen Assad's grip on power in the near future. The Syrian leader has benefited from the U.S.-led coalition's war against the Islamic State group, which has had the side effect of freeing up Assad's forces to focus on more moderate rebels elsewhere in the country. Government forces have seized several key areas around the capital.

Jbawi said the international support for the assault "is not enough to let the rebels win the battle militarily. They are backing (us) to pressure Bashar Assad's regime to bring him to the negotiating table."

Bassem Mroue, "Rebels push forward in southern Syria," [Associated Press](#), 17:55 GMT, 28 Nov 2014.

Reorganization by Syrian National Coalition

On 27 June 2014, the president of the interim Syrian government, Ahmad Tohme, disbanded the Supreme Military Council (SMC) of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and sacked the head of the FSA. Later the same day, the president of the Coalition (i.e., Jarba) reversed Tohme's two decisions. See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria.

On 22 July, the Coalition sacked the entire interim Syrian government, including Tohme. See my [ninth essay](#) on Syria.

But on 15 Oct, Tohme was re-elected as head of the interim Syrian government. [SNC](#).

This kind of inconsistency, petty bickering, and failure to address the major issues while concentrating on partisan fights makes the Syrian National Coalition unfit to lead Syria. As one example of a major issue that is being ignored is a reorganization of the Free Syrian Army and Supreme Military Council.

On 23 Sep, the Syrian National Coalition announced that it had dissolved the Supreme Military Council, and that a new Council would be formed "within a month." [SNC](#). The FSA, notoriously fragmented for more than one year, is now also leaderless for more than one month.

On 3 Nov 2014, the Syrian National Coalition posted a strange press release at its website: The Syrian Coalition signed today an agreement with FSA's Supreme Military Council (SMC) aimed at unifying the FSA factions under one umbrella and a central command structure. The SMC has recognized the Syrian Coalition's bylaws, including Article 31, provided they do not conflict with its own bylaws. Nasr al-Hariri, Secretary General of the Syrian Coalition, who presided over the meeting with heads of the military councils, hails the agreement reached with the SMC, stressing that Syria's national interests require the unification of the FSA factions and the creation of a unified command structure. "Any delay in taking these steps would leave the FSA factions with no other choice but joining other militant factions whose ideologies are extremely inconsistent with the goals of the Syrian Revolution. Failing to achieve this goal would impose on us giving way for other leaderships capable of safeguarding the principles of the revolution," Hariri said. Ahmed Tomeh, interim Prime Minister who also attended the meeting, stresses the importance of overcoming the difficulties and obstacles that impede the progress of the FSA, pointing to the need to create a unified military command that can gain the confidence of the supporting countries. Hariri calls for "carefully setting the goals and tactical plans that lead to victory that will be achieved only when we put aside our differences and correct the mistakes. The failure to unite in the battle against the Assad regime and ISIS means a betrayal of the blood of the fallen heroes and of the goals of the revolution. The revolution is now going through its most crucial stage, and its course can only be set by the FSA which has proved itself as the sole force capable of defeating Assad and the terrorist groups. The Syrian revolution has laid bare the ineffectiveness of the international community's efforts in dealing with the Syrian conflict as it is still insist on excluding the Iranian and Hezbollah militias from the list of terrorist groups." Hariri concluded his remarks stressing that "with the start of the international airstrikes against ISIS, we have sent a very clear warning that the Assad regime would considerably benefit from these airstrikes if the FSA did not receive the support it needs to take on ISIS positions that will be targeted by these strikes. The international anti-ISIS coalition needs to offer a viable alternative for the youth who are joining ISIS as they would not have done so had it not been for the lack of support given to the moderate rebel factions."

Coalition News, "Syrian Coalition Signs Agreement with the FSA's Supreme Military Council," [SNC](#), 3 Nov 2014.

After reading this strange press release it is still not clear that the Coalition has created "a unified military command that can gain the confidence of the supporting countries." There is no mention of who will command this new FSA. There is no mention of which rebel groups

will participate in this new FSA. My feeling is that the meeting described in this press release is *more than one year* too late. I call this press release "strange" because it reports desirable goals and intentions, rather than actual accomplishments.

Training of Free Syrian Army

Previous plans, chronicled in my [September 2014 essay](#) on Syria, is that it will take *one year* to train the first 5000 rebels, and that a total of at least 15,000 rebels will be needed in Syria.

On 14 Nov, Turkey agreed to allow the USA to train 2,000 Syrian rebels inside Turkey, beginning in late Dec 2014. The USA will train Syrian Kurds inside Iraq. [Hurriyet](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). Other Syrian rebels may be trained in Saudi Arabia.

Assad May Lack Resources to Win 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 7 May 2014, the rebels and jihadists withdrew from Homs. Assad then moved to take control of the city of Aleppo. But Assad's assault on Aleppo has stalled during recent months, raising the possibility that Assad is now unable to take control of Aleppo.

Syria was never a wealthy nation. Prior to the civil war that began in 2011, Syria exported agricultural products (e.g., vegetables, dried fruits, wheat) and exported a small amount of petroleum. Now the insurgents have destroyed the Syrian transportation system, which disrupted exports. Further, ISIL has captured most of the Syrian oil-producing areas. On 29 Nov, *The Washington Post* reports:

Syria's economy is in a tailspin, and the regime of President Bashar al-Assad is increasingly struggling to find resources to quash the four-year-old rebellion, analysts say.

The government has had to scale back subsidies for citizens for goods ranging from water to heating oil over the last six months. That has angered Syrians, who already face crippling inflation, 50-percent unemployment and wide-scale damage to industry caused by the civil war. In addition, power outages have worsened recently and food shortages loom.

With the opposition weakened, the Syrian military should be able to deal knockout blows to the rebels. But Assad's forces are too short on funds, analysts say.

....

Jihad Yazigi, editor-in-chief of the Syria Report, an economic news Web site, said Syrian gross domestic product has fallen to half of its pre-war level of roughly \$60 billion.

With local industry battered by the fighting, the Syrian government must rely more on imports of items such as oil and wheat. But the Syrian pound has lost three-quarters of its value in the past four years, making those goods increasingly expensive to bring in.

Once the imports arrive, it can be difficult to get them to market. Rebels regularly ambush supply routes, contributing to periodic shortages of flour for bread and natural gas for electricity. In both rebel- and regime-held areas, power outages now last as long as 23 hours a day.

Hugh Naylor, "Syria's Assad regime cuts subsidies, focuses ailing economy on war effort," [Washington Post](#), 18:38 EST, 29 Nov 2014.

U.N. Peace Negotiations 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 9-13 Sep when he appeared in Damascus, Syria.

On 21 Oct, de Mistura met in Moscow with Russian Foreign Minister, Lavrov. [RIA-Novosti](#) and [TASS](#) reported that Lavrov wanted *all* of Syria's neighbors (e.g., Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq) present at negotiations.

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 30 Oct Mistura briefed the U.N. Security Council and he said that the Geneva1 communiqué — including the TGB — was "still valid". [Associated Press](#).

de Mistura's proposal

On 9 Nov, de Mistura met in Damascus with the Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Moallem, to discuss Mistura's proposal for ceasefires in Aleppo and other cities. [SANA](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP). On 10 Nov, de Mistura met with Assad in Damascus, and Assad said Mistura's proposal was "worth studying" or "merits consideration". [SANA](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 11 Nov, Mistura told journalists that Syrian officials had given him "positive signals" about the local ceasefires. [Reuters](#). Also on 11 Nov, the [Associated Press](#) said "traction is growing" for the local ceasefires.

On 14 Nov, the Syrian National Coalition rejected Mistura's proposal, according to a press release at the Coalition website:

Bahra [president of the Syrian Coalition] also made clear his opposition to ceasefire proposals being explored by the UN envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, which have been discussed in recent days in a flurry of unofficial reports and leaks. He said local ceasefires would only benefit the regime unless they were part of a comprehensive, negotiated political solution to a conflict that has cost 200,000 Syrian lives and

displaced half the population since March 2011.

Coalition News, "Syrian Coalition: Defeating ISIS Requires Toppling the Assad Regime," [SNC](#), 14 Nov 2014.

On 17 Nov, the Syrian government agreed "in principle" with Mistura's proposal, but the Syrian government wanted to see more details. [Associated Press](#). However, Mistura's proposal seems unacceptable to the rebels and terrorists. *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported: The Syrian government has agreed "in principle" to the U.N. envoy's call for local cease-fires to try to ease the worst fighting in the country's civil war but needs more details before it can make a final decision, [Syrian national reconciliation minister, Ali Haidar,] said Monday [17 Nov].

....

Haidar said the U.N. envoy needs to sort out the details, the most important of which for the Syrian government is that halting fighting in any community "should be the start of a process of local reconciliation."

"Freezing should be an introduction to cleaning this area of armed groups and weapons and their exit from this area to turn it into a safe zone in a way that allows the government to bring in humanitarian aid and services to this area," he said.

Haidar also said de Mistura "has to make sure that the armed groups on the ground and their backers are ready to accept this initiative."

Officials from the opposition-in-exile Syrian National Coalition were unavailable for comment on Haidar's remarks, but they and leading rebel commanders in Aleppo have either rejected the initiative by De Mistura or laid down a set of conditions that must be met by the regime beforehand — one of them is the handover of "war criminals" responsible for chemical weapons attacks, which is almost certainly a nonstarter.

The coalition has criticized De Mistura's initiative as a "partial solution," while a number of pro-opposition politicians and rebel figures have said local truces would only help the government, unless they were part of a comprehensive political solution to the civil war.

"Syria agrees 'in principle' to De Mistura freeze," [Daily Star](#) 22:35 GMT, 17 Nov 2014.

On 17 Nov, the *Middle East Eye* published a news story with a pessimistic headline: "UN envoy's 'freeze' plan for Syria will quickly melt".

... Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad has [expressed](#) his willingness to study Mistura's plan, while the opposition Free Syrian Army has [on 12 Nov] [rejected](#) it. "We learned not to trust the Assad regime because they are cunning and only want to buy time," said Zaher al-Saket, Free Syrian Army (FSA) military commander in Aleppo.

This is a major blow to Mistura, given that he wanted Aleppo to be the first "freeze zone." If the FSA rejects the plan, it is highly likely that other rebel forces will follow suit, if they even bother to respond. Assad could well view the proposal as a means to

buy time, waiting for IS to be weakened or defeated before his forces renew and refocus their fight against other groups.

Sharif Nashashibi, "UN envoy's 'freeze' plan for Syria will quickly melt," [Middle East Eye](#), 19:50 GMT, 17 Nov 2014. (links in original)

On 18 Nov, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon reported:

The U.N. envoy to Syria has in effect ditched the Geneva negotiation framework and is pursuing a bottom-up approach that will leave the fate of Syrian President Assad to the end of a two-year “decentralized” political process, a newspaper [Al-Hayat] report maintained Tuesday [18 Nov].

Al-Hayat said that Steffan de Mistura’s team had sounded out Hadi Bahra, the head of the opposition-in-exile National Coalition, who said his group was ready to “deal positively” with the proposal, provided that it was a “part of a series of steps based on arriving at a transitional stage.”

....

De Mistura and his team are expected to hold meetings in Geneva next week to produce a detailed plan on “Aleppo First,” or the initiative to freeze fighting in the divided northern city, Al-Hayat said.

"De Mistura ditches Geneva agenda for bottom-up approach," [Daily Star](#), 22:53 GMT, 18 Nov 2014.

My comments on 19 Nov: Instead of saying "NO!", diplomats respond to a proposal with conditions that are *not* acceptable to the opposition, thereby killing the proposal. Another polite way of killing a proposal is to refuse to discuss small solutions, and instead demand *one* grand solution to *all* problems (i.e., a "comprehensive political solution").

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 all consistently refuse to negotiate with Assad.

At 22:00 GMT on 19 Nov, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters had reported *The Daily Star* story on 18 Nov that is quoted above. This is the most exciting development in the Syria peace process since negotiations collapsed on 15 February 2014, but mainstream journalists have ignored it.

On 25 Nov, the Syrian National Coalition issued a press release about de Mistura's proposal: Commenting on the ceasefire proposal put forward by the UN special envoy to Syria[,] Staffan de Mistura, the Syrian Coalition stated that “the goal of any UN move should guarantee the right of the Syrian people to self-determination, to choose their political system, to preserve the unity of Syria and to reject any foreign intervention, especially Iran’s military and political intervention.

“Any political process must be based on the Security Council resolutions, including

resolutions No. 2118, 2165, 2170, the Geneva I protocols, and the clauses related to the establishment of a transitional governing body with full powers, and accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The starting points for Mistura's plan must include the establishment of protected safe zones, a no-fly zone north of latitude 35, and south of latitude 33, and in the Qalamoun region, and taking tangible measures to expel the terrorist foreign militias imported by the Assad regime. The plan must also ensure the delivery of relief aid to the areas under siege, the prevention of the Assad regime from using civilians as hostages in exchange for political gains, the release of detainees and the disclosure of Assad's secret prisons."

Moreover, the statement stresses that the proposed local ceasefires in some areas must be based on the Geneva protocols and the UN Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2165." The Syrian Coalition, as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, confirms it is open to any efforts aimed at helping the Syrian people get rid of tyranny, stressing that it is the only party mandated to respond to the UN initiatives that should not affect the unity of the Syrian opposition, rehabilitate the Assad regime or its head, or fuel fears of a taking Syria toward fragmentation and division.

"Syrian Coalition Outlines its Position of de Mistura's Ceasefire Plan," [SNC](#), 25 Nov 2014. (Paragraphs added by Standler.)

My comment is that the Syrian National Coalition's list of conditions and demands on 25 Nov — especially the "transitional governing body" and trying Assad for war crimes — is enough to sink de Mistura's proposal. The U.S. Government endorses neither the "no-fly zone" nor the "protected safe zones".

On 27 Nov, Syrian foreign minister Walid Moallem and Russian president Putin agreed with de Mistura's proposal to freeze fighting in Aleppo. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2139 and 2165

On 22 Feb 2014, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139, which required parties in Syria to allow humanitarian aid and to stop targeting civilians. Although this Resolution was effective immediately, *all* of the parties in Syria ignored it. The U.N. Secretary General, Ban, issued Reports in March, April, May, June, and July 2014, each of which recognized that Resolution 2139 had failed.

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

21 Nov: Report

On 21 Nov, Ban issued his monthly report required by Resolutions 2139 and 2165. As noted in my previous essays, the U.N. document delivery system has been nonfunctional since 16 May 2014. On 27 Nov, I downloaded a copy of Ban's Report from [ReliefWeb](#).

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

9. Armed opposition and designated terrorist groups continued to shell government-controlled areas, including in civilian-populated areas, using mortars and small rockets, causing civilian deaths and casualties. Mortar fire on different government-held areas continued on a large scale, including in Damascus, Homs, Hama and Quneitra. For example, on 20 October, mortar shelling was reported on a university in Quneitra, which resulted in many injured students. Two attacks on or near schools in government-controlled Aleppo city on 27 October killed nine people, including four children. In Hama, on 12 November, two mortars hit a school, killing seven children and injuring four.

....

12. Parties to the conflict continued to target civilian facilities and objects, including vital services and infrastructure. For example, at the end of October, the water supply to Idlib city was cut for six days and the electricity supply was disrupted for three days following a Nusra Front offensive on Idlib city and western areas. Some 1.3 million people were affected by the cuts in supply, which was restored after switching to an alternative pumping station.

....

14. During the reporting period, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra Front, both listed terrorist groups, increased efforts aimed at recruiting domestic and foreign fighters. On 4 November, the leader of the Nusra Front, Abu Mohammed al-Julani, stated that foreign fighters constituted “30 to 35 per cent” of his group’s total force. It was reported that a number of Syrian fighters had defected from other groups, including the Islamist Front and groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army, to join the Nusra Front and ISIL.

....

20. During his briefing to the Security Council on 30 October, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, laid out an action plan that included opportunities for an incremental, strategic de-escalation of violence in locations that could have an impact at the national level. In contrast to previous ceasefire agreements, the action plan focuses on select pockets or zones of stability that would be anchored on a “freezing of the fronts” between government and opposition forces, starting with Aleppo. These would not be a substitute for a national political process but could constitute building blocks towards one. Expressing concern that Aleppo could be the next theatre of operations for ISIL, the Special Envoy stressed the importance of averting a major humanitarian disaster and of building a credible alternative to conflict with demonstrable benefits for the average Syrian.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014)," United Nations Security Council, S/2014/840, 21 Nov 2014.

ISIL beheads Peter Kassig

On 16 Nov, ISIL released video showing Peter Kassig — together with between 12 and 18 of Assad's military officers — being beheaded by ISIL in Syria. Kassig was a 26 y old citizen of the USA who formed an aid organization to deliver food and medical supplies to civilians in Syria. Kassig was captured by insurgents in Syria on 1 Oct 2013 when he was traveling in an ambulance. ISIL says they beheaded Kassig in retaliation for the U.S. support of moderate rebels and Kurds in Syria, and for airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

As with each of the previous beheadings of U.S. or U.K. citizens by ISIL, there was an emotional reaction in the USA and U.K. [The Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [White House](#); [U.S. State Dept.](#).

My comments: ISIL proudly boasts of their Islamic beheading of innocent people who were delivering humanitarian aid. Not only does ISIL murder innocent people, but also ISIL openly boasts of their murders — which is strong evidence of the Evil of ISIL.

ISIL badly misunderstands the USA when ISIL apparently believes that beheadings of a few U.S. citizens will motivate the U.S. Government to stop intervening in the Syrian civil war. These beheadings by ISIL are actually increasing the motivation for the U.S. Government to exterminate ISIL.

In reading news stories, notice that journalists focus on Kassig, one dead U.S. citizen, when at least one dozen Syrian military officers were also beheaded. Executing unarmed military personnel is a war crime that should *not* be ignored.

As with each of the previous beheadings of U.S. citizens by ISIL, I urge that we *not* make foreign policy on the basis of one dead American, a few dead Americans, or even a thousand dead Americans. Getting involved in the civil war in Syria is a huge undertaking that could involve the USA for many years (remember Iraq during 2003-2011), cost many hundreds of billions of dollars, and kill many thousands of American military. On the other hand, the beheading of Kassig is *not* an isolated mistake by ISIL, but is entirely consistent with years of continuing atrocities and crimes by ISIL. Therefore, ISIL needs to be stopped. But Assad and Abadi, with aid from Western and other Arab nations, should stop ISIL.

Debacle in Iraq

November 2014 Death Toll in Iraq

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) released the casualty figures for Iraq during **November**: "a total of 1,232 Iraqis were killed and another 2,434 were wounded in acts of terrorism and violence", excluding Anbar province. The 1232 dead included 936 civilians and 296 Iraqi security forces. Note that these numbers include *neither* Anbar province *nor* areas controlled by ISIL. [UNAMI](#).

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of monthly death tolls announced by UNAMI in 2013-2014.

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.

My [eleventh essay](#) chronicles more atrocities during September 2014.

My [twelfth essay](#) chronicles more atrocities during October 2014, including bombings of civilians by ISIL and executions of unarmed people by ISIL.

ISIL bombings in Iraq

On 2 Nov, three car bombs in Baghdad killed a total of 37 people, mostly Shiite pilgrims. [Associated Press](#).

On 8 Nov, the Associated Press reported: "Meanwhile on Saturday [8 Nov], a series of bombings in and around the capital Baghdad killed at least 43 people, with the deadliest blast hitting the city's sprawling Shiite district of Sadr City, where a car bomb tore through a commercial area, killing 11 people and wounding 21." [Associated Press](#).

On 14 Nov, the Associated Press reported: "... five separate bombings in and around Baghdad, all bearing the hallmarks of Sunni militants, killed 38 people and wounded nearly 100 on Friday [14 Nov]." [Associated Press](#).

On 23 Nov, the Associated Press reported: "In Saadiya, a suicide bomber drove a bomb-laden Humvee into a security checkpoint, killing seven Iraqi soldiers and Shiite militiamen and wounding 14, police said. A separate car bombing at an outdoor market south of Baghdad killed seven people and wounded 16, police said." [Associated Press](#).

My comments: Such attacks have become an almost routine part of life in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. Not only are there attacks, but also there seems to be no effort by the Iraqi government to find and punish the attackers — an indication that civilization has collapsed in Iraq.

ISIL execution of captured fighters

On 2 Nov, ISIL lined up 50 members of the Al Bu Nimr tribe in the town of Ras al-Maa, and publicly executed them. During 30 Oct to 2 Nov, the Associated Press says a total of 150 members of this tribe have been executed by ISIL. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) reports a total of 322 members killed by ISIL.

On 3 Nov, ISIL publicly executed another 36 members of the Al Bu Nimr tribe "in the village of Ras al-Maa, north of Ramadi in Anbar province." [Associated Press](#).

On 17 Nov, [Reuters](#) reports that Sunni tribes in Iraq are *not* joining the Iraqi government in the fight against ISIL. Perhaps the Sunni tribes got the message that the Iraqi government failed to provide weapons and ammunition to the Albu Nimr tribe, failed to send reinforcements to the Albu Nimr tribe, and failed to request airstrikes to help the Albu Nimr tribe. As a result of these failures, ISIL not only defeated the Albu Nimr tribe, but also executed several hundreds of surviving tribe members. In my opinion, the indifference of the Iraqi government to the plight of the Abu Nimr tribe was just as bad as ISIL.

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.) But in September and October 2014, muslim clerics dropped the ball, and stopped publicly denouncing terrorism. There needs to be a consistent and continuing condemnation of terrorism by muslim clerics, in part to discourage young muslims from joining Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

On 3 Nov, Saudi Arabia announced it would encourage clerics and media to publicly oppose ISIL. [Reuters](#).

On 30 Nov, Pope Francis ended his three-day trip to Turkey. The Associated Press reported: Specifically, Francis told reporters on the way home from Istanbul that all Islamic leaders — political, religious, academic — should clearly condemn terrorism so that their people hear it directly from their mouths.

"We need a global condemnation — including from Muslims — who say 'This isn't who we are. This isn't the Quran,'" he said.

Nicole Winfield & Suzan Fraser, "Pope, patriarch demand end to IS attacks," [Associated Press](#), 21:26 GMT, 30 Nov 2014.

The Vatican also reported the same press conference aboard the airplane:

The Pope said that during his meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, he suggested that a clear condemnation from all religious and political leaders, as well as scholars, clerics and intellectuals should be done.

"There needs to be an international condemnation from Muslims across the world. It needs to say, 'No, this is not what the Quran is about!' There should also always be a distinction between what a religion proposes and the concrete use of that proposal by a

concrete government," he said.
"Pope Francis: 'Our Martyrs Are Crying Out: We Are One'," zenit.org, 1 Dec 2014.

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 and 19 Oct, 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.

On 21 Oct, the Iraqi defense minister promised to investigate the failing of the Iraqi army and

hold them accountable. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

On 12 Nov, Iraqi prime minister sacked 36 Iraqi army officers, as reported [below](#). Note there was *no* attempt to punish these corrupt officers.

Meetings of Iraqi Parliament

I have posted a [table](#) of meetings of the Iraqi Parliament during July-October 2014, which shows infrequent meetings, low attendance, and failure to meet constitutional deadlines in approving the new prime minister and his cabinet.

1 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

At 12:41 Baghdad time on 1 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 195 members (60%) present.

At 16:22, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 4 Nov.

I looked on 4 Nov, but failed to find any news about a meeting of Parliament.

11 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

At 12:55 Baghdad time on 11 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 184 members (56%) present.

At 19:20, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 13 Nov.

13 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

At 12:04 Baghdad time on 13 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 180 members (55%) present.

At 14:10, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 15 Nov. The political blocs still have *not* nominated chairmen of committees in Parliament, but the nominations might occur on 15 Nov. [All Iraq News](#)

15 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

At 12:50 Baghdad time on 15 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 206 members (63%) present.

At 14:42, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 17 Nov.

17 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

At 14:31 Baghdad time on 17 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 180 members (55%) present.

At 19:43, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 25 Nov.

During 16-17 Nov, several committees in Parliament elected their chairmen. On 16 Nov, Ahmed Al-Chalabi was elected head of the Finance Committee. [All Iraq News](#).

On 19 Nov, the government of Iraq finally paid US\$ 0.5 billion to Kurdistan for oil. [All Iraq News](#); [Reuters](#).

25 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

At 13:52 Baghdad time on 25 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 227 members (69%) present.

At 19:56, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 27 Nov.

27 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

[All Iraq News](#) did not report when Parliament convened on 27 Nov and did not report how many members were present. They did say that at 13:22 Baghdad time a preliminary report was read in Parliament on the massacre by ISIL of Iraqi air force cadets at Speicher Air Base.

At 15:14 Baghdad time on 27 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 29 Nov.

29 Nov 2014: Parliament meets

At 14:07 Baghdad time on 29 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 225 members (69%) present.

At 15:25, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 30 Nov.

**30 Nov 2014:
Parliament meets for last time in 2014**

At 14:12 Baghdad time on 30 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 175 members (53%) present.

At 20:55, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until sometime in early Jan 2015.

Note that Parliament has *not yet* passed a budget for the Iraqi federal government.

Daily News About Iraq & Syria

Kobani

Kobani — also spelled Kobane, and known in Arabic as Ayn al-Arab — is a Kurdish town in northern Syria, near the border with Turkey. Sometime around 18 Sep 2014, ISIL threatened to capture Kobani. By 2 Oct, more than 160,000 refugees had fled from Kobani into Turkey.

On the night of 31 Oct, 150 peshmerga from Iraq entered Kobani. These peshmerga began to fight against ISIL on the night of 1 Nov. [Reuters](#).

On 6 Nov, the Associated Press reported ISIL was facing "a prolonged stalemate" in Kobani and ISIL "is bogged down in an increasingly entrenched and costly battle." [Associated Press](#).

On the night of 7 Nov, [Reuters](#) reported that the peshmerga "have blunted but not broken the siege of the Syrian border town of Kobani".

On 9 Nov, the 1300 Free Syrian Army soldiers that Erdogan promised on 24 Oct have still *not* arrived in Kobani. *If* this large force had arrived, we might not have the current stalemate in Kobani.

On 12 Nov, [Reuters](#) reports that the Kurds captured some land in Kobani from ISIL, but the Kurds had *not* yet seized control of Kobani. [Reuters](#) also reported that the Kurds closed one road that ISIL was using for supplies to Kobani.

On 21 Nov, the head of the Associated Press Beirut bureau wrote:

More than two months into its assault on Kobani, the Islamic State group is still pouring fighters and resources into trying to capture the besieged Syrian Kurdish town, but the drive has been blunted.

Helped by more than 270 airstrikes from a U.S.-led coalition, the border town's unwavering Kurdish defenders are gaining momentum — a potentially bruising reversal for the extremists who only a few weeks ago appeared to be unstoppable.

....

Retired Marine Gen. John Allen, the U.S. envoy for the international coalition fighting the Islamic State militants, said the group continues to mass around Kobani, creating more targets for the U.S. and its allies.

"ISIL has, in so many ways, impaled itself on Kobani," he said in an interview Wednesday [19 Nov] in Ankara with the Turkish daily Milliyet, using an acronym for the Islamic State group.

....

The more than 270 airstrikes in and around Kobani by the U.S. and its allies since Sept. 23 are far more than have been carried out on any other target in Syria or Iraq, according to the U.S. Central Command. The area around the Mosul Dam in Iraq is a distant second, with 156 airstrikes since Aug. 8.

Allen said the air attacks have killed "well over 600" IS fighters — a casualty figure believed to be the group's biggest losses in Syria or Iraq.

Zeina Karam, "Islamic State group's drive for Kobani is blunted," [Associated Press](#), 19:54 GMT, 21 Nov 2014.

On 28 Nov, the Associated Press reported that Kobani had been devastated by more than two months of artillery and mortar fire.

Blocks of low-rise buildings with hollow facades, shattered concrete, streets strewn with rubble and overturned, crumpled remains of cars and trucks. Such is the landscape in Kobani, where the sounds of rifle and mortar fire resonate all day long in fighting between Islamic State extremists and the Syrian town's Kurdish defenders.

....

Kurdish fighters backed by small numbers of Iraqi peshmerga forces and Syrian rebels, are locked in what they see as an existential battle against the militants, who swept into their town in mid-September as part of a summer blitz after the Islamic State group overran large parts of Syria and neighboring Iraq.

Helped by more than 270 airstrikes from a U.S.-led coalition and an American airdrop of weapons, the Kurds have succeeded in halting the militants' advance and now believe that a corner has been turned.

Several fighters with the YPG, the main Kurdish fighting force, spoke confidently of a coming victory. Jamil Marzuka, a senior commander, said the fighting has "entered a new phase" in the last week.

anonymous, "INSIDE KOBANI: Devastation mixed with optimism," [Associated Press](#), 19:06 GMT, 28 Nov 2014.

Daily News

3 Nov 2014: Hollande criticizes Iraqi army

On 3 Nov 2014, Reuters reported that the president of France publicly said the Iraqi army needed to do more:

The Iraqi army must do more to show it can fight Islamic State militants who have taken over a third of the country, French President Francois Hollande said on Monday

[3 Nov].

The Iraqi army, riven by sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, put up little resistance earlier this year as the Islamic State fighters mounted a major offensive.

Hollande pointed to the peshmerga fighters from Iraq's northern Kurd region, who have had recent success against the Islamic State and who on Monday helped bombard Islamic State positions in the northern Syrian town of Kobani. Western nations have been training and equipping the peshmerga for months.

Hollande made his remarks at a news conference in Ottawa, and France, like Canada, is part of the U.S.-led campaign of air strikes against Islamic State fighters in Iraq that Hollande said is inflicting losses and boosting morale.

"These strikes won't be enough. They have to be accompanied by movements on the ground and in Iraq it is up to the Iraq army and the Iraqi Kurd peshmerga to ensure the land can be taken back," Hollande said.

"This is what the Iraqi peshmerga are doing and what the Iraqi armed forces aren't doing yet. We have encouraged them - as we have asked the Iraqi government - to make the broadest gathering (of forces) possible so this army can be respected enough by all communities that it is effective."

David Ljunggren, "Hollande says Iraq army must do more; bombing won't end ISIS crisis," [Reuters](#), 14:16 EST, 3 Nov 2014.

Later version: [Reuters](#), 18:59 EST.

Also at [Al-Arabiya](#) (Reuters).

Hollande could have said that the Iraqi army was incompetent, corrupt, and cowardly, but instead Hollande politely noted that the Iraqi army was *not* reclaiming land seized by ISIL. But the Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, got his knickers in a twist by Hollande's remarks.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Tuesday [4 Nov] criticized the recent remarks of the French President as inappropriate and could only serve the enemy of the terrorists Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) militant group, which seized large parts of the country.

....

"Such comments are not only incorrect, but also inappropriate because it only contribute to psychological war against our forces and people. It would only serve the enemy," the statement [by Abadi's office] said.

"Abadi criticizes Hollande's statements over Iraqi Army," [All Iraq News](#), 16:51 GMT, 5 Nov 2014.

Accusing a critic of assisting the enemy is weak propaganda. It is absolutely certain that ISIL has noticed they are receiving little resistance from the Iraqi army. Hollande is *not* telling ISIL something they did not already know. Instead of criticizing Hollande for speaking the Truth, Abadi should be purging corrupt officers from the Iraqi military, arranging for training

of his soldiers, ending sectarian abuses by Shiite militia, and inspiring his soldiers to engage ISIL in battle.

3 Nov: proposed Arab military cooperation

On 3 Nov, it was suddenly announced that four Sunni Arab nations — Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait — are holding secret negotiations to create a military force that can intervene to defeat terrorists. The Associated Press reports:

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait are discussing the creation of a military pact to take on Islamic militants, with the possibility of a joint force to intervene around the Middle East, The Associated Press has learned.

The alliance would also serve as a show of strength to counterbalance their traditional rival, Shiite-dominated, Iran. Two countries are seen as potential theaters for the alliance to act, senior Egyptian military officials said: Libya, where Islamic militants have taken over several cities, and Yemen, where Shiite rebels suspected of links to Iran have seized control of the capital.

The discussions reflect a new assertiveness among the Middle East's Sunni powerhouses, whose governments — after three years of post-Arab Spring turmoil in the region — have increasingly come to see Sunni Islamic militants and Islamist political movements as a threat.

.... The officials said the alliance under consideration was not intended to intervene in Iraq or Syria but to act separately to address other extremist hot spots.

Hamza Hendawi, "Egypt, Gulf Arab allies eye anti-militant alliance," [Associated Press](#), 21:22 GMT, 3 Nov 2014.

My comments: Later in November, nothing further was reported on this story. I conclude it was just floating an idea, which was rejected.

The above-quoted Associated Press story makes clear that the current intent is *not* "to intervene in Iraq or Syria". But if the Syrian civil war continues for several more years, and either ISIL or Nusra Front controls the majority of Syria, it *may* be desirable for foreign troops to invade Syria to defeat the radical Islamic terrorists. Indeed, a more desperate Assad might even invite Sunni troops to fight against ISIL and Nusra Front.

6 Nov 2014: Obama communicated with Iran Supreme Leader

Holy Cow! Sometime in mid-October 2014, Obama sent a letter to Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. *The Wall Street Journal* first reported this story:

President Barack Obama secretly wrote to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in the middle of last month and described a shared interest in fighting Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria, according to people briefed on the correspondence.

....

Jay Solomon & Carol E. Lee, "Obama Wrote Secret Letter to Iran's Khamenei About Fighting Islamic State," [WSJ](#), 6 Nov 2014. (Subscription required to read this article.)

CNN reported:

President Barack Obama's administration is trying to open channels of communication with Iran regarding the war on ISIS.

Amid revelations that Obama sent a letter to Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei last month pointing out the countries' shared interest in beating ISIS, a senior U.S. official and a Western diplomat tell CNN that Washington has gone through the Iraqis to communicate with Iran.

The conversations do not include taking joint military action against ISIS targets, the sources said, but are seen as necessary to avert conflict in U.S. and Iranian operations.

Senior White House adviser Dan Pfeiffer wouldn't address specific outreach efforts in an interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer, but said: "We work very closely with the Iraqis and the Iraqis have a relationship with the Iranians."

The discussions through the Iraqis are informal and conducted on a case-by-case basis via the Iraqi military, the sources said. The channels have become necessary, the U.S. military official said, because the United States and Iran are now operating in the same spaces. As a result, "accommodations must be made indirectly," this official said. This includes airspace management, so U.S. and Iranian forces do not conflict while carrying out military operations in the same airspace, CNN was told.

The revelation of the communications channel comes even as the military and administration continue to insist it is not cooperating with the Iranians on strategy or intelligence.

Elise Labott & Jim Sciutto, "U.S. opens channels with Iran over ISIS," [CNN](#), updated 19:58 EST, 6 Nov 2014.

At the 6 Nov press briefing at the White House, the presidential spokesman was uninformative:

QUESTION: Thanks, Josh. The Wall Street Journal is reporting that the President sent a letter last month to Iran's Supreme Leader talking about the shared interests that the U.S. and Iran has in the fight against the Islamic State. Can you confirm that that letter was sent?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not in a position to discuss private correspondence between the President and any world leader. I can tell you that the policy that the President and his administration have articulated about Iran remains unchanged. The United States is engaged in conversations with Iran in the context of the P5-plus-1 talks to resolve the international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear program, and we have also

discussed on the sidelines of those talks on at least a couple of occasions the ongoing campaign that is being conducted against ISIL by the United States and 60 members of — or now more than 60 members who are part of this broader coalition.

The United States will not cooperate militarily with Iran in that effort; we won't share intelligence with them. But their interests in this outcome is something that's been widely commented upon and something on a couple of occasions has been discussed on the sidelines of other conversations.

QUESTION: But since we know that there has been communication between the U.S. and Iran, why can't you say if that communication happened at the level of the President and the Supreme Leader?

MR. EARNEST: Just because I'm not in a position to talk about private correspondence that may or —

QUESTION: Is it wrong that there was a letter sent?

MR. EARNEST: I'm not going to be in a position to talk about private correspondence between the President and another world leader.

"Press Briefing by the Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 11/6/2014," [White House](#), 6 Nov 2014.

On 12 Nov 2014, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iran had responded to Obama's letters. The content and author of the reply was not publicly revealed.

My comments: This communication to Iran was long overdue, but I am glad that Obama finally made the effort. Iran is involved in both Syria and Iraq, so Iran should be included in discussions about how to fight ISIL.

However, Iran is still a rogue nation:

- Recently, we had the 35th anniversary of illegally seizing the U.S. Embassy on 4 Nov 1979 and holding U.S. citizens hostage.
- Iran has shipped weapons to other rogue nations, such as North Korea.
- Iran continues to develop nuclear weapons. In the past, the government of Iran has threatened to obliterate Israel. Iran must not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons, not only because of genocide in Israel, but also because such weapons would alter the balance of power in the middle east and create an arms race.

7 Nov 2014: Obama decides to send more U.S. troops to Iraq

On Friday afternoon, 7 Nov, the White House announced that Obama authorized sending an additional 1500 U.S. troops to Iraq "in a non-combat role to train, advise, and assist Iraqi Security Forces, including Kurdish forces." The entire press release says:

One of the pillars of the United States' counter-ISIL strategy is building the capacity of local forces to take the fight to ISIL. We have been providing this support for Iraqi

Security Forces through advise and assist programs; through the provision of weapons, equipment, and intelligence; and through airstrikes with our coalition partners to enable our Iraqi partners' success. As a part of our strategy for strengthening partners on the ground, President Obama today authorized the deployment of up to 1500 additional U.S. military personnel in a non-combat role to train, advise, and assist Iraqi Security Forces, including Kurdish forces. The President also authorized U.S. personnel to conduct these integral missions at Iraqi military facilities located outside Baghdad and Erbil. U.S. troops will not be in combat, but they will be better positioned to support Iraqi Security Forces as they take the fight to ISIL.

The President took these decisions at the request of the Iraqi Government and upon the recommendation of Secretary Hagel and his military commanders based upon the assessed needs of the Iraqi Security Forces. This mission will be undertaken in coordination with multiple coalition partners and will be funded through the request for an Iraq Train and Equip fund that the Administration will submit to Congress.

In recent weeks ISIL has suffered a series of defeats in Iraq against the Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga, with the support of U.S. and coalition air strikes and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, as well as U.S. military advice. The United States and its coalition partners will continue to confront the threat of ISIL with strength and resolve as we seek to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism campaign. The President values the dedication and valor of the American servicemen and women whom he asks to carry out this mission on behalf of the American people.

Josh Earnest, "Statement by the Press Secretary on the Deployment of Additional U.S. Military Personnel to Iraq," [White House](#), 7 Nov 2014.

In a separate statement, the White House announced Obama would ask Congress for an additional US\$ 5.6 billion for the fight against ISIL. This request includes \$ 1.6 billion to train and equip the Iraqi army. [White House](#).

The Pentagon estimated that it would take "two months to prepare the training sites" and then seven months to train the Iraqi army to engage ISIL. [Pentagon](#). This means *if* Congress approves the money in December 2014, then the Iraqi army might be trained by the end of September 2015.

My comment is that the Iraqi army was in good condition when the U.S. military pulled out in Dec 2011. Corruption and cowardice in the following two years squandered nearly all of our previous investment of more than twenty billion dollars in the Iraqi army. What assurance do we have that the Iraqis will not again waste resources and opportunities provided by the USA? Why doesn't Obama seek funding from the Iraqi government, with repayment guaranteed by the United Nations, instead of again making U.S. taxpayers pay for mistakes by Iraqis?

On 9 Nov, Iraq already refuses to pay for the proposed training, when a spokesman for Albadi's office whined: "US knows that Iraq is facing a financial crisis due to the decrease of the prices of the oil. So we think that we are unable to pay the expenses of the US trainers." [All Iraq News](#). Let's be honest here. The USA is also in a financial crisis owing to the

corruption, sectarianism, and stupidity of the Iraqi government since 2011. The training of the Iraqi army is primarily for the benefit of Iraq, although neighboring nations may receive some benefit from the defeat of ISIL in Iraq.

On 23 Nov 2014, the Associated Press reported:

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has ordered more aerial support and weapons for both soldiers and Sunni militiamen battling the Islamic State group in Anbar province, where Ramadi is the provincial capital.

The U.S. and Iraqi governments have been working to woo Sunni tribesmen to support the fight, proposing the establishment of a national guard program that will include arming and paying loyal tribesmen.

The Pentagon plans to buy a range of arms for Iraq's tribesmen, including 5,000 AK-47s, 50 rocket-propelled grenade launchers, 12,000 grenades and 50 82 mm mortars. The arms supply, described in a document that will be sent to Congress [for] its approval, said the estimated cost to equip an initial Anbar-based force of tribal fighters is \$18.5 million, part of a \$1.6 billion request to Congress that includes arming and training Iraqi and Kurdish forces.

....

Already, the Islamic State group fighters has lined up and shot several men from the al-Bu Fahd tribe, which is taking part in the fight against them. They also have killed more than 200 men, women and children from Anbar's Sunni Al Bu Nimr tribe in recent weeks, apparently in revenge for the tribe's siding with Iraqi security forces and, in the past, with U.S. forces.

Vivian Salama, "Iraqi premier, US look to aid Islamic State battle," [Associated Press](#), 11:02 GMT, 23 Nov 2014.

10 Nov 2014: another Friends of Syria meeting

On 10 Nov 2014, the Core Group of the Friends of Syria met in London and issued a [Communiqué](#). I posted a copy at [rbs0.com](#).

My comments: In general, this Communiqué is a relic from June 2012, when the Geneva ad hoc conference was held. Paragraph 2 says: "The Core Group underscored their commitment to a genuine political transition based on the Geneva Communiqué." and calls for "a political settlement in accordance with the Geneva Communiqué". This stubborn insistence on the Geneva Communiqué is despite the fact that the Geneva Communiqué was responsible for the failure of negotiations in Jan/Feb 2014, as I explained in my [essay](#). de Mistura must have the freedom to find *new* way(s) to end the Syrian civil war, instead of following the Geneva Communiqué.

In Nov 2014, journalists reported (see my summary [above](#)) that Nusra Front in Syria defeated the moderate rebels, who the USA hoped to train and equip someday. The London11

group says in Paragraph 3: "We also condemn the attacks against moderate groups in Idlib by Jabhat Al-Nusra...." Does anyone really believe that this condemnation will have any effect on the Syrian civil war? The Friends of Syria nations failed to train-and-equip the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in 2012 and 2013, and now the FSA is ceasing to exist.

Despite *saying* "We agreed to strengthen further the National Coalition, the Interim Government and affiliated groups,...." (paragraph 5), the Friends of Syria nations have failed to adequately support the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) and their Free Syrian Army (FSA). See the [\(SNC\)](#) news release on 12 Nov 2014. But I think there were good reasons to refuse to fund the SNC and FSA. The SNC is a bunch of Syrian expatriates who are unable to make decisions, have petty squabbles, and are not taken seriously by the Syrian people — as documented in my essays. The FSA is fragmented, disorganized, and ineffective. Any weapons or ammunition given to the FSA has a serious risk of being acquired by terrorists, as shown by the examples [above](#).

Instead of fighting a two-front war against (1) Assad's military and (2) terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front, etc.), the London11 group ought to cooperate with Assad in the fight against terrorism.

Neither the Associated Press nor Reuters mentioned this meeting of the Friend of Syria. The neglect by mainstream journalists indicates to me that the Friends of Syria meeting is *not* taken seriously by independent observers. I became aware of this Friends of Syria meeting while browsing the Syrian National Coalition website and seeing their 14 Nov [press release](#).

12 Nov 2014: Abadi terminates Iraqi army generals

On 12 Nov, it was announced that Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, had "dismiss[ed] 26 security leaders" and involuntarily retired 10 others. [All Iraq News](#). The Iraqi Army Chief of Staff was amongst those dismissed. [All Iraq News](#). The commander of the Iraqi army in Anbar province, which is being overrun by ISIL, was also amongst those dismissed. [All Iraq News](#).

Agence France-Presse reported that Abadi "sacked 36 army officers in an anti-corruption drive". [Daily Star](#). [Reuters](#) noted that the Iraqi army had been the "recipient of \$25 billion in U.S. training and funding".

The Associated Press reported:

[An anonymous] government official said the shake-up followed the findings of a probe ordered last month by al-Abadi on corruption in the military.

Al-Maliki, in the final months of his administration, had spoken at length about corruption in the military — particularly in the wake of an embarrassing rout of Iraqi forces which saw the Islamic State militants capture about a third of the country in a few months. He cited cases where soldiers paid half their salary to their commanders so they could stay away from their units and work a second job. He also relieved several top commanders from their command and ordered others investigated for dereliction of duty.

Hamza Hendawi & Ryan Lucas, "Iraq's premier shakes up his military," [Associated Press](#), 18:41 GMT, 12 Nov 2014.

On 26 Nov, Abadi gave orders to end salaries for 4000 "ghost soldiers" who never report for duty. Journalists report that each ghost soldier pays part of his army salary to his commanding officer as a bribe for not reporting the fraud. [All Iraq News](#). Also see: [NY Times](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 30 Nov, a statement from Abadi said that an investigation had found 50,000 "ghost soldiers" on the payroll of the Iraqi army. *The Washington Post* reported:

The Iraqi army has been paying salaries to at least 50,000 soldiers who don't exist, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said Sunday, an indication of the level of corruption that permeates an institution that the United States has spent [more than \$20] billion on equipping and arming.

A preliminary investigation into so-called "ghost soldiers" — whose salaries are being drawn but who are not in military service — revealed the tens of thousands of false names on Ministry of Defense rolls, Abadi told parliament Sunday. Follow-up investigations are expected to uncover "more and more," he added.

....

With entry-level soldiers in Iraq drawing salaries of about \$600 a month, the practice of "ghost soldiers" is likely costing Iraq at least \$380 million a year — though officials say that's probably only a fraction of the true expense.

"It could be more than triple this number," said Hamid al-Mutlaq, a member of the parliamentary defense and security committee, pointing out that more thorough on-the-ground investigations are planned. "The people who are responsible for this should be punished. Iraq's safe has been emptied."

Loveday Morris, "Investigation finds 50,000 'ghost' soldiers in Iraqi army, prime minister says," [Washington Post](#), 19:46 GMT, 30 Nov 2014.

The Daily Star in Lebanon reported:

"There are two kinds of 'fadhayin,'" one experienced officer in the security forces said, using a word which, literally translated, means "space men," and refers to the fictitious soldiers crowding the payroll.

"The first kind: Each officer is allowed, for example, five guards. He'll keep two, send three home and pocket their salary or an agreed percentage," he told AFP.

"Then the second and bigger group is at the brigade level. A brigade commander usually has 30, 40 or more soldiers who stay at home or don't exist," the officer said.

"The problem is that he too, to keep his job as a brigade commander, has to bribe his own hierarchical superiors with huge amounts of money," he said.

The officer explained that, for those reasons, the thousands of soldiers who defected or were killed across Iraq this year were rarely declared as such.

"Iraq graft probe finds 50,000 ghost soldiers," [Daily Star](#); 22:25 GMT, 30 Nov 2014.
See also [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

14-26 Nov 2014: Iraqi army claims to capture Baiji

After an intermittent battle that began in June 2014, the Iraqi army claimed to have captured all of the town of Baiji, which is near the largest oil refinery in Iraq.

Agence France-Presse reports that the Iraqi army is in "complete control of the town of Baiji".

Iraqi forces recaptured the strategic oil town of Baiji Friday [14 Nov] in a significant victory over the ISIS, as the U.N. accused the jihadists of crimes against humanity in neighboring Syria.

Baiji is the largest town to be retaken by government troops since ISIS-led militants overran much of Iraq's Sunni Arab heartland in June in their bid to create an Islamic "caliphate."

The northern town, which had been out of government control for months, is located near Iraq's main oil refinery on the main highway to the ISIS-held second city of Mosul.

Marwan Ibrahim, "Iraq retakes strategic oil town from jihadists" [Daily Star](#), 17:50 GMT, 14 Nov 2014.

But Reuters does *not* report victory in Baiji on 14 Nov:

Iraqi government forces got within a kilometre (half a mile) of the country's biggest refinery on Friday [14 Nov], the closest they have come to breaking an Islamic State siege of the facility in months of fighting, two army officers and a witness said.

Fighting raged in a village between the complex and the nearby town of Baiji, near a deserted area believed to contain roadside bombs planted by the militants that have been preventing an advance, they said.

Raheem Salman, "Iraqi government forces close to Baiji refinery — officers," [Reuters](#), 18:34 GMT, 14 Nov 2014.

The Associated Press reported victory in Baiji:

Iraqi forces drove Islamic State militants out of a strategic oil refinery town north of Baghdad on Friday [14 Nov], scoring their biggest battlefield victory since they melted away in the face of the terror group's stunning summer offensive that captured much of northern and western Iraq.

.....

Iraqi security officials said government forces backed by allied militiamen took control of Baiji and also lifted a monthslong Islamic State siege on its refinery — Iraq's largest. However, two military officials reached by telephone in Baiji late Friday said there was still some fighting going on at the refinery, but reinforcements had been sent in and Iraqi forces were poised to retake it.

Hamza Hendawi & John Heilprin, "Iraq's forces drive IS militants from key town," [Associated Press](#), 21:54 GMT, 14 Nov 2014.

On 15 Nov, Reuters reported that ISIL had fled from positions surrounding the oil refinery, north of the town of Baiji.

[ISIL] withdrew on Saturday [15 Nov] from the perimeter of Iraq's biggest oil refinery after months fending off government troops seeking to retake the strategic complex, said an army officer and Al-Hadath television station.

The officer, speaking to Reuters from the Baiji refinery, said the Sunni insurgents removed roadside bombs they had planted and fled. Al-Hadath said security forces had entered the compound. It was not immediately possible to confirm either account. anonymous, "Islamic state militants withdraw from area around Iraq refinery," [Reuters](#), 10:40 GMT, 15 Nov 2014.

On 15 Nov, Agence France-Presse reported:

Iraqi forces broke a months-long siege by jihadist fighters of the country's largest oil refinery Saturday [15 Nov]

Ousting IS fighters from around the refinery would mark another significant achievement for Baghdad, a day after pro-government forces retook the nearby town of Baiji.

"Iraqi forces... reached the gate of the refinery," the governor of Salaheddin province, Raad Al-Juburi, told AFP.

Three officers confirmed that Iraqi forces had reached the refinery, 200 kilometers (120 miles) north of Baghdad, where security forces have been encircled and under repeated attack since June.

The new success for Iraqi forces came a day after they recaptured nearby Baiji, the largest town they have taken back since IS-led militants swept across Iraq's Sunni Arab heartland in June.

Marwan Ibrahim, "Iraqi forces break IS siege of main oil refinery," [Arab News](#), 15 Nov 2014.

On 18 Nov, [All Iraq News](#) reported that "the security forces entered Baiji refinery after dismantling many of Improvised Explosive Devices which were emplaced by" ISIL. See also [Reuters](#): "Security forces entered Iraq's largest refinery for the first time on Tuesday [18 Nov] after [five] months of battling Islamic State militants who had surrounded it...."

On 25 Nov, ISIL had infested "4 of Baiji's 12 neighbourhoods" and fighting resumed in that town. [Reuters](#).

16 Nov 2014: Obama trash talks Assad again

At the G20 Summit press conference in Brisbane Australia on 16 Nov Obama again criticized Assad:

QUESTION [by Kristen Welker]: ... does that include plans to remove President Bashar al-Assad? And was it a miscalculation not to focus on the removal of Assad initially?

OBAMA:

Certainly no changes have taken place with respect to our attitude towards Bashar al-Assad. And I've said this before, but let me reiterate: Assad has ruthlessly murdered hundreds of thousands of his citizens, and as a consequence has completely lost legitimacy with the majority of the country. For us to then make common cause with him against ISIL would only turn more Sunnis in Syria in the direction of supporting ISIL, and would weaken our coalition that sends a message around the region this is not a fight against Sunni Islam, this is a fight against extremists of any stripe who are willing to behead innocent people or kill children, or mow down political prisoners with the kind of wanton cruelty that I think we've very rarely seen in the modern age.

And so we have communicated to the Syrian regime that when we operate going after ISIL in their air space, that they would be well-advised not to take us on. But beyond that, there's no expectation that we are going to in some ways enter an alliance with Assad. He is not credible in that country.

Now, we are looking for a political solution eventually within Syria that is inclusive of all the groups who live there — the Alawite, the Sunni, Christians. And at some point, the people of Syria and the various players involved, as well as the regional players — Turkey, Iran, Assad's patrons like Russia — are going to have to engage in a political conversation.

And it's the nature of diplomacy in any time, certainly in this situation, where you end up having diplomatic conversations potentially with people that you don't like and regimes that you don't like. But we're not even close to being at that stage yet.

QUESTION: But just to put a fine point on it — are you actively discussing ways to remove him as a part of that political transition?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: No. [complete answer]

"Remarks by President Obama at G20 Press Conference, November 16, 2014," [White House](#), 16:19 Brisbane time, 16 Nov 2014.

My comments: Obama said: "Assad has ruthlessly murdered hundreds of thousands of his citizens". The official death toll in the Syrian civil war is approximately 200,000. It is unfair to blame Assad for *all* of these fatalities, when probably half of the fatalities are due to ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front, other jihadists, and moderate rebels. Assad is ruthless, but ISIL is much worse than Assad.

There are only a few actors in the Syrian civil war and each of them is *not* a desirable ally of the USA:

1. ISIL and their caliphate, Nusra Front and their emirate, and the jihadists in the Islamic Front are all obviously unacceptable.
2. The moderate rebels (e.g., Free Syrian Army) are disorganized, fragmented, and ineffective. Earlier in November 2014, Nusra Front blasted the moderate rebels in northeast Syria, seriously damaging the credibility of the rebels.
3. Assad has a history of overreacting to protests, and brutally suppressing the rebellion that began in 2011. But Assad is the lawful ruler of Syria, and has a strong military that fights terrorism.

As explained in my conclusion [below](#), there are advantages in cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL and Al-Qaeda in Syria. As stated in previous essays, Assad is clearly the least worst of these three alternatives. As Obama continues his invective that began in 2011 (e.g., "lost his legitimacy"), Obama makes it impossible to partner with Assad in fighting terrorists in Syria.

17-30 Nov 2014: Syria and Iraq have lower profile in news

During 17-30 Nov, journalists ignored Syria and Iraq, and devoted more news coverage to other events, such as the failure of negotiations to end Iran's nuclear weapons program. The public may have tired of a steady stream of bad news from Syria and Iraq (e.g., ISIL atrocities, siege of Aleppo, ISIL victories, incompetent Iraqi government, etc.). There is *not* a fixed date that this lower news profile began, but rather something that was gradually occurring. Beginning on 10 Nov, the U.S. Military published press releases about airstrikes only on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

24 Nov: Hagel resigns

On the morning of Monday, 24 Nov 2014, Obama and Hagel held a press conference at the White House, where it was announced that Hagel had resigned as Secretary of Defense. The Associated Press reported:

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced Monday he is stepping down, leaving under pressure following a rocky tenure in which he has struggled to break through the White House's insular team of national security advisers.

During a White House ceremony, Obama said he and Hagel had determined it was an "appropriate time for him to complete his service."

....

Hagel has had his own frustrations with the White House. In recent weeks, he sent a letter to national security adviser Susan Rice in which he said Obama needed to articulate a clearer view of the administration's approach to dealing with Syrian

President Bashar Assad. The letter is said to have angered White House officials. Julie Pace & Robert Burns, "Under pressure, Hagel steps down as Pentagon chief," [Associated Press](#), 12:43 EST, 24 Nov 2014.

The Washington Post reported:

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel bowed to pressure from the White House and submitted his resignation Monday [24 Nov] after less than two years in the job, a casualty of the Obama administration's infighting over national-security policy, especially regarding the Middle East.

....

Afterward [i.e., after the White House announcement on the morning of 24 Nov], White House officials said Obama had lost confidence in Hagel's ability to oversee the war against the Islamic State and U.S. military operations in Iraq and Syria.

....

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who is slated to take over as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee in January, acknowledged that he did not always agree with Hagel and voted against his nomination. But he said Hagel "was frustrated with aspects of the administration's national security policy and decision-making process," citing "excessive micro-management" on the part of the White House.

McCain noted that Hagel's predecessors as defense secretary — Robert M. Gates and Leon E. Panetta — had both likewise complained in their memoirs about excessive political interference from White House aides. "Ultimately, the president needs to realize that the real source of his current failures on national security more often lie with his administration's misguided policies and the role played by his White House in devising and implementing them," he said.

Craig Whitlock & Missy Ryan, "Defense Secretary Hagel, under pressure, submits resignation," [Washington Post](#), 13:00 EST, 24 Nov 2014.

The [Pentagon](#) posted a press release on Hagel's resignation, and later the [White House](#) posted remarks by Obama on Hagel's resignation. Glenn Thrush wrote an article for [Politico](#) Magazine on Hagel's inadequacies. Jena McGregor wrote an article for [The Washington Post](#) on the failure of Obama's leadership: "Yet making personnel changes and recruiting fresh talent won't do much good if those outsiders can't penetrate the president's circle and aren't given the freedom and authority to implement new ideas." And the editorial board of [The New York Times](#) characterized "the core of Obama[s] ... military problem" as Obama's "national security policy that has too often been incoherent and shifting at a time of mounting international challenges, especially in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan." Con Coughlin, defense editor of [The Telegraph](#) wrote: "And while Mr Obama will be glad to see the back of a defence secretary who opposed [Obama's] non-confrontational policy, there will be many who will see it a further sign of the President's impotence on the world stage."

My comments: While the formal statement says Hagel resigned, journalists are reporting that Obama's advisers in the White House were unhappy with Hagel, which hints that Obama

may have asked for Hagel's resignation.

Hagel's predecessor, Leon Panetta, served as Secretary of Defense from July 2011 until February 2013, less than two years. It was the same for Hagel as Secretary of Defense, less than two years. This is rapid turnover in an important position that requires stability and consistent leadership. In recognition of that fact, Obama asked the Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush, Robert Gates, to continue serving until July 2011, although Obama took office in January 2009. Both Gates and Panetta were subsequently highly critical of Obama.

As *The Washington Post* reported, Hagel was hired in early 2013, to reduce the cost of the U.S. Military, and to supervise the end of the war in Afghanistan. Now Obama needs a Secretary of Defense to support a growing war in Iraq and Syria. Hagel — often described as "quiet" and "self-effacing" — simply was no longer a good choice for Secretary of Defense. Alternatively, it may be that Hagel was *never* a good choice for a high-profile leadership job at a major government bureaucracy.

The Associated Press story noted that Hagel recently wanted public clarification of the U.S. police toward Assad. Obama and his Secretary of State (Hillary Clinton, then John Kerry) regularly vilified Assad from June 2011 (see my [first essay](#) on Syria), up to June 2014. As I remarked beginning in July 2014 in the [Conclusion](#) of this essay, the conquest of Mosul by ISIL in June 2014 was a game changer. Since the U.S. Military began airstrikes inside Syria on 22 Sep 2014, criticism of Assad by Obama and Kerry has been muted, although they continue to occasionally say that Assad has "lost legitimacy" and Assad needs to be replaced through a political process.

Obama is going to have a difficult time recruiting an experienced senior leader in military policy to take the Secretary of Defense job for the remaining two years of Obama's term, given he will be:

- blamed for the failure of Obama's military policy (i.e., failure to remove Assad, failure to defeat ISIL, failure to defeat Al-Qaeda, failure to defeat Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, failure to destroy Iran's nuclear weapons program, etc.),
- micromanaged by incompetent professional politicians in the White House, and
- given inadequate resources to solve difficult problems.

25 Nov: Assad bombs Raqqa

On 25 Nov, Assad's air force bombed ISIL in the town of Raqqa. [Reuters](#), A total of 95 people were killed by the airstrikes, including 52 civilians. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). I mention this airstrike, because sometimes the U.S. Government falsely accuses Assad of supporting ISIL.

U.S. Airstrikes in Iraq & Syria

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 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Saturday, 1 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Friday [31 Oct] and today [1 Nov] using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted five airstrikes in Iraq Friday and today using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, five airstrikes conducted near Kobani suppressed or destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions and struck one ISIL building.

In Iraq, one airstrike southwest of the Mosul Dam destroyed one ISIL vehicle. Four airstrikes near Al Qaim, Iraq, heavily damaged or destroyed four ISIL vehicles and struck four ISIL buildings. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Nov. 1: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 1 Nov 2014.

Not posted at the Pentagon, but see 3 Nov.

2 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Sunday, 2 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Saturday [1 Nov] and today [2 Nov] using attack, fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted two airstrikes in Iraq Saturday and today using fighter and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, five airstrikes conducted near Kobani struck five small ISIL units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles. Southeast of Dayr Az Zawr, Syria, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tank and two vehicle shelters.

In Iraq, one airstrike near Bayji struck a small ISIL unit. Southeast of Fallujah, Iraq, coalition aircraft also struck a small ISIL unit. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Nov. 2: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 2 Nov 2014.

Not posted at the Pentagon, but see 3 Nov.

3 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Monday, 3 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Sunday [2 Nov] and today [3 Nov] using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted nine airstrikes in Iraq Sunday and today using fighter, bomber and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, four airstrikes conducted near Kobani that struck an ISIL fighting position, a small ISIL unit and destroyed two buildings. One airstrike near Dayr Az Zawr damaged an ISIL building.

In Iraq, two airstrikes near Bayji struck an ISIL fighting position, a small ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle. Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed five ISIL bulldozers and one ISIL dump truck involved in creating obstructions and berms. Three airstrikes near Ar Rutbah damaged one ISIL vehicle and destroyed four ISIL vehicles. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Nov. 3: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 3 Nov 2014.

On 3 Nov, the Pentagon summarized airstrikes since 31 Oct:

U.S. and partner-nation military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria and Iraq, and U.S. Central Command officials have provided details of airstrikes conducted from Oct. 31 through today [3 Nov].

In Syria:

- Four airstrikes near Kobani struck an ISIL fighting position, a small ISIL unit and destroyed two buildings.
- An airstrike near Dayr Az Zawr damaged an ISIL building. Ten airstrikes near Kobani struck five small ISIL units, destroyed three ISIL vehicles, suppressed or destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions and struck one ISIL building.
- Southeast of Dayr Az Zawr, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tank and two vehicle shelters.

In Iraq:

- Two airstrikes near Bayji struck an ISIL fighting position, a small ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed five ISIL bulldozers and an ISIL dump truck involved in creating obstructions and berms.
- Three airstrikes near Rutbah damaged an ISIL vehicle and destroyed four ISIL vehicles.
- An airstrike near Bayji struck a small ISIL unit.

Southeast of Fallujah, coalition aircraft struck a small ISIL unit.

- An airstrike southwest of the Mosul Dam destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Four airstrikes near Qaim, heavily damaged or destroyed four ISIL vehicles and struck four ISIL buildings.

All aircraft left the strike areas safely, officials said, noting that airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Inherent Resolve Strikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 3 Nov 2014.

5 Nov 2014: airstrikes

Central Command did *not* post a press release on 4 Nov.

On Wednesday, 5 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 3-5 using attack and fighter aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted ten airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 3-5 using fighter, attack and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, three airstrikes conducted near Kobani struck a small ISIL unit, two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL dump truck used to construct fighting positions. One airstrike in Syria north of Sinjar destroyed an ISIL fighting position used to launch mortar attacks and struck a small ISIL unit manning the position.

In Iraq, an airstrike near Mosul destroyed ISIL-occupied buildings, to include one housing a generator used for oil production and another used to manufacture explosive devices such as IEDS [improvised explosive devices] and VBIEDs [vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (i.e., car bombs)]. Three airstrikes near Bayji struck two small ISIL units, destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL-occupied bunker and an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery piece. One airstrike near Fallujah struck a small ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle. Three airstrikes in the vicinity of Ramadi damaged an ISIL vehicle and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint. Two airstrikes north of Sinjar, Iraq, struck a small ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.

All aircraft departed the strike areas safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Nov. 5: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 5 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 5 Nov 2014.

6 Nov 2014: airstrikes against Khorasan Group

Early on 6 Nov, the Associated Press reported the first U.S. airstrike in Syria against Ahrar Al-Sham.

U.S. airstrikes hit the compound of a powerful hard-line rebel group that is not affiliated to the Islamic State extremist organization early Thursday [6 Nov], activists said, in an apparent widening of targets that could further strain relations between Washington and the Western-backed opposition.

The Syrian rebels have complained that the aerial campaign against the extremist group is indirectly aiding President Bashar Assad's forces, and have been infuriated by the U.S. willingness to attack other Islamic militant groups that the rebels view as allies while refraining from targeting the government.

At least one strike hit a compound belonging to Ahrar al-Sham in the town of Babsalqa in the northwestern province of Idlib, according to local activist Ahmad Kaddour and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Ahrar al-Sham is a rebel group that follows an extremely conservative interpretation of Islam.

....

Ahrar al-Sham is part of the Islamic Front, an alliance of seven powerful conservative and ultraconservative rebel groups that merged in November [2013]. The Islamic Front wants to create an Islamic state in Syria governed by Shariah law and rejects the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition, but cooperates with some of its fighters on the ground.

....

Many Syrian rebels view the Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham as important allies against both Assad and the Islamic State, and are likely to view U.S. strikes on the two groups as an attack on their nearly four-year-old uprising.

Diaa Hadid, "Activists: US strike hits Syrian rebel compound," [Associated Press](#), 08:21 GMT, 6 Nov 2014.

Neither U.S. Central Command nor the Pentagon mentioned airstrikes on Ahrar al-Sham, which makes one wonder what *really* occurred. At 22:59 GMT on 6 Nov, the Associated Press was still reporting airstrikes on Ahar al-Sham. [Reuters](#) reported a statement by Ahrar al-Sham on 6 Nov that claimed it had been attacked by a U.S.-led coalition.

On Thursday, 6 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported airstrikes in Syria:

U.S. military forces conducted airstrikes last night against five Khorasan Group targets in the vicinity of Sarmada, Syria, using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. All aircraft exited the strike areas safely.

We are still assessing the outcome of the attack, but have initial indications that it resulted in the intended effects by striking terrorists and destroying or severely damaging several Khorasan Group vehicles and buildings assessed to be meeting and staging areas, IED-making facilities and training facilities. These strikes were undertaken only by U.S. assets.

The Khorasan Group is a term used to refer to a network of Nusrah Front and al-Qa'ida core extremists who share a history of training operatives, facilitating fighters and money, and planning attacks against U.S. and Western targets. These strikes were not in response to the Nusrah Front's clashes with the Syrian moderate opposition, and they did not target the Nusrah Front as a whole. They were directed at the Khorasan Group whose focus is not on overthrowing the Assad regime or helping the Syrian people. These al-Qa'ida operatives are taking advantage of the Syrian conflict to advance attacks against Western interests.

This network was plotting to attack in Europe or the homeland, and we took decisive action to protect our interests and remove their capability to act. We will continue to take any action necessary to disrupt attack plotting against U.S. interests.

"U.S. Military Forces Conduct Airstrikes Against Khorasan Group Terrorist Network in Syria," [Central Command](#), 6 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 7 Nov 2014.

The USA previously had airstrikes against the Khorasan Group on 23 Sep 2014.

Reuters explained why the airstrikes targeted the Khorasan group.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said a target of the strike was David Drugeon, a French-born militant and convert to Islam who some U.S. officials say is a bomb maker for the [Khorasan] group.

....

The U.S. military made clear the attacks were specifically aimed at Khorasan and not more broadly at Nusra Front. "There were no strikes conducted against al Nusra," [General Lloyd] Austin said.

Mark Hosenball & Phil Stewart, "U.S. launches fresh strikes on Khorasan group in Syria," [Reuters](#), 20:24 GMT, 6 Nov 2014.

At 22:59 GMT on 6 Nov, the Associated Press also quoted an anonymous "senior U.S. official" as saying "one of the targets [in the Khorasan group] was a French militant and bomb-maker, David Drugeon." [Associated Press](#).

7 Nov 2014: airstrikes

At 08:50 EST on 9 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command had *not* posted to its website a press release for 7 Nov, so I used the Pentagon's press release:

U.S. and partner-nation military forces continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria and Iraq over the last three days [5-7 Nov], U.S. Central Command officials reported today [7 Nov].

Fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft have conducted eight airstrikes in Syria since Nov. 5, officials said. Seven strikes near Kobani struck three small ISIL units, seven ISIL fighting positions and destroyed an ISIL artillery piece, and an airstrike

near Tall Abyad destroyed an ISIL weapons stockpile.

Meanwhile, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft have conducted six airstrikes in Iraq since Nov. 5. A strike near Fallujah destroyed two ISIL bulldozers that were building obstructions. An airstrike near Bayji struck a small ISIL unit and damaged an ISIL building.

Also in Iraq, two airstrikes near Ramadi destroyed an ISIL vehicle, a strike southeast of Fallujah struck a small ISIL unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, and a strike northwest of Haditha destroyed four ISIL vehicles.

"Inherent Resolve Airstrikes Continue in Syria, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 7 Nov 2014.

On the night of 9 Nov, [Central Command](#) posted at their website their press release from 7 Nov 2014.

**8-10 Nov 2014: airstrikes on ISIL meeting in Iraq,
23 airstrikes in Syria
15 other airstrikes in Iraq**

On Saturday and Sunday, 8-9 Nov 2014, neither the U.S. Central Command nor the Pentagon websites had press releases about airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. Reuters and the Associated Press filled the void.

The final version from Reuters on 8 Nov reported:

U.S. air strikes destroyed an Islamic State convoy near the Iraqi city of Mosul but U.S. officials said on Saturday it was unclear whether the group's top commander Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had been in any of the 10 targeted vehicles.

Colonel Patrick Ryder, a Central Command spokesman, said the U.S. military had reason to believe that the convoy was carrying leaders of Islamic State, an al Qaeda offshoot which controls large chunks of Iraq and Syria.

....

"I can confirm that coalition aircraft did conduct a series of air strikes yesterday evening in Iraq against what was assessed to be a gathering of ISIL leaders near Mosul," said [Col.] Ryder, using another name for Islamic State. "We cannot confirm if ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was among those present."

....

A Mosul morgue official said 50 bodies of Islamic State militants were brought to the facility after the air strike.

Michael Georgy & Phil Stewart, "U.S. air strikes target Islamic State convoy in Iraq," [Reuters](#), 22:11 GMT, 8 Nov 2014.

The final version from Associated Press on 8 Nov reported:

The U.S.-led coalition conducted a series of airstrikes targeting a gathering of Islamic State leaders near the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, a senior U.S. defense official said Saturday [8 Nov].

The airstrikes on Friday [7 Nov] night destroyed a convoy consisting of 10 Islamic state armed trucks, said the defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to describe military operations.

He confirmed that coalition aircraft conducted a series of airstrikes "against what was assessed to be a gathering of ISIL leaders near Mosul," using another acronym for the Islamic State group.

"We cannot confirm if ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was among those present," he said. "We have no further information to provide regarding these strikes."

Sameer N. Yacoub, "US airstrikes target Islamic State leaders in Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 23:42 GMT, 8 Nov 2014.

On 9 Nov, the top general in the U.K. military said that even if Baghdadi were killed by the airstrikes, ISIL would recover. [Reuters](#).

At 19:44 GMT on 9 Nov, the Associated Press clarified that there had been *two* recent airstrikes on ISIL leaders. One was by U.S. airplanes near Mosul, which was reported above. The second was by Iraqi airplanes in the town of Qaim in Anbar province. Baghdadi was allegedly wounded in Qaim. [Associated Press](#).

Later on 9 Nov, the Associated Press reported:

Iraqi officials said Sunday that the head of the Islamic State group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was wounded in an airstrike in western Anbar province. Pentagon officials said they had no immediate information on such an attack or on the militant leader being injured.

Iraq's Defense and Interior ministries both issued statements saying al-Baghdadi had been wounded, without elaborating, and the news was broadcast on state-run television Sunday [9 Nov] night.

....

The operation was carried out by Iraqi security forces, both officials [an Interior Ministry intelligence official and a senior Iraqi military official] said, although they did not know how seriously al-Baghdadi was hurt. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss confidential material.

Qassim Abdul-Zahra & Vivian Salama, "Iraqi officials say IS leader wounded in airstrike," [Associated Press](#), 22:48 GMT, 9 Nov 2014.

On Monday morning, 10 Nov, the Pentagon posted a press release about cumulative airstrikes since the morning of Friday, 7 Nov:

U.S and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 7-10 using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 23 airstrikes, U.S. Central Command officials reported today.

Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 18 airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 7-10 using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists, officials said.

Anti-ISIL Attacks in Syria

In Syria, 13 airstrikes conducted near Kobani struck an ISIL vehicle and five small ISIL units, and destroyed an ISIL-occupied building used as an ammunition stockpile. Also destroyed were an ISIL command and control building and seven ISIL fighting positions, while two ISIL fighting positions were damaged. Eight airstrikes southeast of Dayr Az Zawr damaged several structures of an ISIL oil collection facility which was used to trans-load oil for the black market. Two airstrikes east of Dayr Az Zawr damaged an ISIL oil collection point.

Anti-ISIL Attacks in Iraq

In Iraq, seven airstrikes near Bayji struck three small ISIL units and destroyed an ISIL sniper position and two ISIL vehicles, one of which was used for construction. Three airstrikes in Fallujah struck two small ISIL units and ISIL fighters who were emplacing an improvised explosive device on a road, as well as destroying an ISIL vehicle mounted with an anti-aircraft gun.

Three airstrikes near **Mosul** struck a small ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL armed truck and a vehicle convoy consisting of 10 ISIL armed trucks. Two airstrikes near **Al Qaim** destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and two ISIL checkpoints. An airstrike 32 miles southwest of Haditha destroyed two ISIL Humvees. An airstrike near Ramadi struck a small ISIL unit. An airstrike in Ar Rutbah destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.

All aircraft departed the strike areas safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 10 Nov 2014. (Boldface on "Mosul" and "Al Qaim" added by Standler, to emphasize alleged airstrikes on ISIL leaders.) On 12 Nov, this press release was posted at [Central Command](#).

On Monday, 10 Nov, there continues to be conflicting reports of whether Baghdadi was killed in an Iraqi airstrike near Qaim on Saturday, 8 Nov. *Al-Jazeera* is still reporting an earlier story that Baghdadi may have been wounded in a U.S. airstrike near Mosul on Friday night, 7 Nov. The Pentagon has no information on Baghdadi's condition or location. [Associated Press](#), 17:26 GMT; [Reuters](#), 20:43 GMT; [Al-Jazeera](#), 03:36 GMT, all on 10 Nov.

As an example of Iraqi hysteria, on 10 Nov at 23:49 Baghdad time, [All Iraq News](#) reported a Twitter post by ISIL: "We will publish later details of killing the Caliphate Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and nominating a new Caliphate for the Islamic State."

But on 11 Nov, journalists were mostly silent about Baghdadi's condition — and no apology

for yesterday's hysterical reports of wounding or death.

On 13 Nov, ISIL released an audio recording purportedly of Baghdadi to "prove" that he is still alive, but the authenticity of the recording is difficult to confirm. [The Telegraph](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Associated Press](#).

My comments: Our so-called allies in Iraq are doing a good job at keeping the U.S. military in the dark about Iraqi military operations. Note that the Iraqi government sources do *not* agree on when and where Baghdadi was wounded. And there are no details about the alleged Iraqi airstrike near Al Qaim. In my [tenth essay](#) I cited examples of implausible information from the Iraqi government regarding high numbers of deaths of ISIL fighters, and I concluded that the high numbers were probably hysterical exaggerations by the Iraqi government.

During 8-10 Nov, journalists in Iraq were bleating about the alleged wounding of al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIL. Ordinary leaders are generic commodities — if one is killed, he is quickly replaced with another. However, a few leaders are charismatic, with the ability to inspire millions of people, and those leaders are difficult to replace. Baghdadi is difficult to characterize. He has certainly built a remarkably powerful organization, which suggest superior leadership. But he is reclusive — his only public appearance in recent years was *one* sermon at a mosque in Mosul in June 2014. Because the leadership and operation of ISIL is secret, it is difficult to predict the effect of killing Baghdadi.

Journalists abandoned this topic sometime around 14 Nov, but it seems that Baghdadi is alive and — while some ISIL leaders may have been killed — ISIL continues to function in Iraq.

11-12 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 11 Nov, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon posted a press release about airstrikes to their websites.

On Wednesday, 12 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 10-12 using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct sixteen airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted seven airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 10-12 using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, ten airstrikes conducted near Kobani struck eight small ISIL units, damaged three ISIL fighting positions and destroyed an ISIL logistics facility. There were two airstrikes south of Al-Haskah damaging a crude oil collection point operated by ISIL. Three airstrikes northeast of Dayr Az Zawr damaged an ISIL crude oil collection facility. Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike struck a small ISIL unit and damaged an ISIL vehicle.

In Iraq, two airstrikes near Kirkuk struck a small ISIL unit and a large ISIL unit. Five airstrikes near Bayji struck three small ISIL units, one large ISIL unit and destroyed

two ISIL buildings, an ISIL sniper position, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar tube and an ISIL artillery piece. All aircraft departed the strike areas safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Nov. 12: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 12 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 Nov 2014.

13-14 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 13 Nov, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon posted a press release about airstrikes to their websites.

On Friday, 14 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 12-14 using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 19 airstrikes against ISIL and one U.S. airstrike against a network of veteran al-Qa'ida operatives, sometimes called the "Khorasan Group." Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 16 airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 12-14 using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, 17 airstrikes conducted near Kobani struck 10 ISIL units, destroyed ten fighting positions, an ISIL building, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL motorcycle. An airstrike east of Ar Raqqa destroyed an ISIL training camp. Another airstrike east of Dayr Az Zawr destroyed an ISIL oil collection point. Finally, in northwest Syria west of Aleppo, a U.S. airstrike struck terrorists associated with a network of veteran Al Qaeda operatives, sometimes called the "Khorasan Group," who are plotting external attacks against the United States and our allies.

In Iraq, airstrikes south of Kirkuk struck four small ISIL units and an ISIL vehicle. Two airstrikes west of Kirkuk struck two small ISIL units, destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL weapons bunker, and an ISIL vehicle. One airstrike west of Taji destroyed three ISIL vehicles. Two airstrikes near Ar Rutbah destroyed 13 ISIL vehicles and two ISIL excavators. Three airstrikes near Bayji struck two small ISIL units and destroyed one ISIL vehicle. An airstrike near Fallujah struck a large ISIL unit. Finally, one airstrike east of Mosul, Iraq, destroyed one small ISIL unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Nov. 14: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 14 Nov 2014.

Later posted at the [Pentagon](#), 14 Nov 2014.

15-17 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Saturday and Sunday, 15-16 Nov, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon posted

a press release about airstrikes to their websites.

On Monday, 17 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 14-17 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct eleven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 20 airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 14-17 using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, nine airstrikes near Kobani destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, suppressed another ISIL fighting position, destroyed four ISIL staging areas, and struck one tactical ISIL unit. Two airstrikes near Dayr Az Zawr struck an ISIL crude oil collection facility and destroyed one ISIL tank.

In Iraq, four airstrikes near Ar Rutbah destroyed nine ISIL trucks, two ISIL excavators and one ISIL front-loader, and damaged one ISIL vehicle. Three airstrikes near Fallujah destroyed two ISIL vehicles, one ISIL bulldozer and one ISIL front-loader. One airstrike southwest of Mosul Dam destroyed one ISIL bulldozer and struck one tactical ISIL unit. Two airstrikes west of Mosul struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed one ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position. Three airstrikes near Kirkuk struck one tactical ISIL unit, and damaged one ISIL tank and destroyed another. One airstrike southwest of Al Qaim destroyed one ISIL vehicle. One airstrike in Tel Afar struck one tactical ISIL unit. Five airstrikes near Bayji struck two tactical ISIL units and one large ISIL unit and destroyed one ISIL tank, one ISIL vehicle, and four ISIL fighting positions.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Nov. 17: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 17 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 17 Nov 2014.

18-19 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 18 Nov, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon posted a press release about airstrikes to their websites.

On Wed, 19 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 17-19 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes against ISIL and one U.S. airstrike against a network of veteran Al Qaeda operatives, sometimes called the "Khorasan Group." Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 24 airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 17-19 using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, five airstrikes near Kobani destroyed one ISIL fighting position, an ISIL staging area, three ISIL occupied buildings, suppressed two ISIL fighting positions and

struck two tactical and one large ISIL unit. One airstrike southeast of Al-Hasakah damaged a crude oil collection point operated by ISIL. Finally, in northwest Syria near Haram, a U.S. airstrike struck and destroyed a storage facility associated with a network of veteran Al Qaeda operatives, sometimes called the "Khorasan Group," whose members are plotting external attacks against the United States and its allies.

In Iraq, thirteen airstrikes near Kirkuk destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, seven ISIL staging areas, one ISIL mortar position, an ISIL bulldozer and front-loader. Seven airstrikes near Mosul struck five ISIL tactical units, damaged an IED factory and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL occupied building, an ISIL artillery piece and ISIL artillery mover. Three airstrikes near Bayji struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL occupied building and an ISIL vehicle. One airstrike near Fallujah struck an ISIL tactical unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Nov. 19: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 19 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 19 Nov 2014.

20-21 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 20 Nov, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon posted a press release about airstrikes to their websites. Beginning on 10 Nov, the U.S. Military now publishes press releases about airstrikes only on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Note that infrequent U.S. military press releases that cover several days of airstrikes will frustrate historians who want to know what happened on a specific day.

On Friday, 21 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Military airstrikes continue against ISIL in Syria and Iraq. U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 19-21 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 23 airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 19-21 using fighter, attack, bomber and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, six airstrikes near Kobani destroyed four ISIL staging areas, two ISIL-occupied buildings, two ISIL tactical units, and suppressed an ISIL fighting position. Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike damaged an ISIL barrack.

In Iraq, six airstrikes near Bayji destroyed three ISIL buildings, a bunker, two ISIL transport vehicles, five ISIL tactical units, an ISIL checkpoint and damaged another ISIL building. Near Sinjar, four airstrikes destroyed two ISIL barracks, an ISIL bunker and storage facility, an ISIL guard post, at least eight ISIL armored vehicles and a truck in a vehicle storage yard, as well as two tactical ISIL units. West of Kirkuk, three airstrikes destroyed five bunkers, two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL tactical unit. Near al Asad, four airstrikes destroyed four ISIL vehicles, an ISIL building, and struck three

ISIL tactical units. Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL guard post, an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL tactical units. Near Ramadi, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL tactical unit, while also damaging an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL-occupied building. Finally, in Tal Afar, an airstrike damaged an ISIL-occupied airfield.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Nov. 21: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 21 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 21 Nov 2014.

22-24 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Saturday and Sunday, 22-23 Nov 2014, neither the U.S. Central Command nor the Pentagon websites had press releases about airstrikes in Iraq and Syria.

On Monday, 24 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 21-24 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct nine airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted fifteen airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 21-24 using fighter, attack, bomber and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, seven airstrikes near Kobani destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL staging areas, damaged another ISIL staging area and suppressed four ISIL fighting positions. Near Ar Raqqa, two airstrikes struck an ISIL headquarters building.

In Iraq, five airstrikes near Mosul destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, three ISIL HMMWVs, a large ISIL unit, two tactical ISIL units and a heavy weapon. Near al-Asad, two airstrikes destroyed a mortar position, a ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL vehicle and a tactical ISIL unit and damaged an ISIL-occupied building and an ISIL vehicle. Near Baghdad, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL-occupied building, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL HMMWV and two tactical ISIL units, one of which was emplacing IEDs. Near Ramadi, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles. Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes suppressed a mortar position. Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL obstruction near Fallujah Dam. Near Hit, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Nov. 24: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 24 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 24 Nov 2014.

25-26 Nov 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 25 Nov 2014, neither the U.S. Central Command nor the Pentagon websites had

press releases about airstrikes in Iraq and Syria.

On Wednesday, 26 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 24-26 using bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct ten airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted seven airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 24-26 using attack, fighter and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, ten airstrikes near Kobani struck an ISIL fighting position, a large ISIL unit, two tactical ISIL units, and destroyed four ISIL staging areas and six ISIL fighting positions.

In Iraq, two airstrikes near Mosul destroyed an ISIL bulldozer, two ISIL vehicles, three ISIL-occupied buildings and an ISIL fighting position, and also struck a large ISIL unit. Near Kirkuk, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tank, an ISIL HMMWV and an ISIL vehicle, as well as struck two ISIL units. North of Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL HMMWV and an ISIL vehicle. Northwest of Ramadi, an airstrike damaged an ISIL checkpoint.

Finally, west of Bayji, an airstrike destroyed one ISIL vehicle and damaged another.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Nov. 26: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 26 Nov 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 26 Nov 2014.

27 Nov to 1 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 27 Nov 2014, neither the U.S. Central Command nor the Pentagon websites had press releases about airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. At 22:50 EST on 28 Nov, the Central Command website was offline, and the Pentagon website had no press release today about airstrikes. On 28 Nov, Central Command did provide a press release to Reuters:

The U.S. military and its allies hit Islamic State forces with 15 air strikes in Iraq and Syria during a three-day period, the U.S. Central Command said on Friday [28 Nov].

Thirteen attacks were carried out in Iraq since Wednesday [26 Nov] and two more targeted Islamic State in Syria.

The air strikes in Syria hit an Islamic State fighting position and staging area near Kobani and a tactical unit near Aleppo, Central Command said.

In Iraq, bunkers, vehicles, a bulldozer and a fighting position were destroyed near Kirkuk and a large unit and four tactical units also were hit in five air strikes. Near Mosul, two raids destroyed vehicles and a heavy weapon while another tactical unit was hit near Ramadi.

Islamic State vehicles, tactical units, a fighting position and a building were hit in strikes near the Iraqi cities of Ar Rutbah, Falluja, Al Qaim and Baiji, Central Command said.

"Fifteen Islamic State targets hit by U.S., allies since Wednesday: U.S.," [Reuters](#) 15:45 GMT, 28 Nov.

On the night of 29 Nov and on the afternoon of 30 Nov, there was a link on the Central Command homepage to a 28 Nov press release, but clicking on the link returned a "Page Not Found" error message. So I quoted the Reuters news article above.

On Sunday night, 30 Nov 2014, the U.S. Central Command posted their press release for Friday, 28 Nov:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 26-28 using bomber and remotely-piloted aircraft to conduct two airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted thirteen airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 26-28 using fighter, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, an airstrike near Kobani struck an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL staging area. Near Aleppo, an airstrike struck a tactical ISIL unit.

In Iraq, five airstrikes near Kirkuk destroyed five ISIL bunkers, four ISIL vehicles, a bulldozer and an ISIL fighting position and also struck a large ISIL unit and four tactical ISIL units. Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed five ISIL vehicles and a heavy weapon, and also struck two ISIL units. Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike destroyed seven ISIL vehicles. Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes destroyed a fighting position and an armored vehicle. An airstrike in Baiji struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL occupied building.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Nov. 28: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 28 Nov 2014.

This 28 Nov press release was *not* posted at the Pentagon website.

On Sunday, 30 Nov 2014, the Associated Press reported:

U.S.-led coalition warplanes carried out as many as 30 airstrikes overnight against Islamic State militants in and around the group's de facto capital in northeastern Syria, activists said Sunday [30 Nov].

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the strikes targeted IS positions in the city of Raqqa as well as the Division 17 air base, which the militants seized earlier this year from government forces.

The monitoring group, which relies on a network of activists inside Syria, reported at least 30 coalition strikes in all. The Local Coordination Committees, an activist collective, also confirmed the airstrikes. Neither group had casualty figures.

There was no immediate confirmation from the U.S. military.
"Coalition airstrikes pound IS stronghold in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 10:09 EST, 30 Nov 2014.
See also [Reuters](#).

On Monday evening, 1 Dec 2014, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Nov. 28-Dec. 1 using fighter, bomber and remotely-piloted aircraft to conduct 27 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 28 airstrikes in Iraq Nov. 28 - Dec. 1 using attack, fighter, and remotely-piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, 17 airstrikes near Kobani destroyed two ISIL-occupied buildings, three ISIL tanks, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL armored personnel carrier, three ISIL vehicles and two ISIL staging areas, and also struck seven tactical ISIL units. The airstrikes also targeted six ISIL fighting positions and damaged an ISIL-occupied building. Near Ar Raqqa, nine airstrikes struck an ISIL electronic warfare garrison, an ISIL military garrison, an ISIL headquarters, an ISIL jamming system, an ISIL tank and 14 ISIL vehicles. Near Aleppo, a U.S. airstrike struck a target associated with a network of veteran al Qa'ida operatives, sometimes called the "Khorasan Group."

In Iraq, 13 airstrikes near Mosul destroyed four tactical ISIL units, two large ISIL units, two fighting positions, three armored vehicles, seven vehicles, two ISIL trucks and a bulldozer. Additionally, these airstrikes destroyed heavy weapons to include two heavy machine guns, a mortar position and an anti-aircraft artillery emplacement as well as an ISIL-occupied building and a tunnel entrance. Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL-occupied buildings.

Near Tal Afar, five airstrikes destroyed 19 ISIL vehicles, two ISIL bunkers, an ISIL compound and struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Hit, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, an ISIL bunker, and an excavator and struck a tactical ISIL unit and also damaged another ISIL checkpoint. Near Tal Talab, two airstrikes destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Tirkrit, two airstrikes destroyed three ISIL vehicles and struck two large ISIL units. Near Kirkuk, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle. Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and struck a tactical ISIL unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.
"Dec. 1: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 1 Dec 2014.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 1 Dec 2014.

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.").

On 23 Sep 2014 there was a change in U.S. strategy in Syria from (1) defeating Assad to (2) defeating ISIL. This change occurred when the U.S.-led airstrikes in Syria began. A conspiracy theorist might accuse the U.S. Government with a secret deal with Assad: the USA will not attack Assad's military in exchange for Syria not shooting at Coalition aircraft that are attacking ISIL inside Syria.

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 November 2014, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

Obama refuses to cooperate with Assad's military. Obama has refused to cooperate with Syrian Kurds, because the Turkish government considers the Kurds to be terrorists. Instead, Obama plans to train and equip the so-called "moderate rebels" in Syria, an effort that could take two years to train 15,000 rebels. Meanwhile, effective troops on the ground are needed *now* to prevent ISIL from capturing more cities and infrastructure. This lack of competent ground forces in Syria is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

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 — only slightly better than Yemen, Somalia, and Libya — is now 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.

The Iraqi army has been exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent. It will take years to fix these defects in the Iraqi army, while effective troops on the ground are needed *now* — truly were needed back in Jan 2014 — to prevent ISIL from capturing more cities and infrastructure. This lack of competent ground forces in Iraq is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

this document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria15.pdf>
begun 1 Nov 2014, last modified 2 Dec 2014

The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

[my homepage](#)