

Syria & Iraq: December 2014

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 13 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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. On 3 Dec, John Kerry followed the lead of the French Foreign Minister in calling ISIL "Daesh", as described [below](#).

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.

It is strange that the insurgents, who allege that Assad's military released the chlorine, prevented an OPCW investigation that might have revealed war crimes by Assad.

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.

My essay for [Sep 2014](#) mentions an unpublished OPCW report on this topic.

There was no new information from this investigation during October 2014 to December 2014. The delay in beginning the investigation, and the lack of recent progress, indicate to me that OPCW wants to avoid the allegations of chlorine gas use in Syria.

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.

There was no mention of any investigation on this topic during November and December 2014. Politicians and diplomats responded to the 23 October claims with hysteria about war crimes, then they failed to see that the claims were adequately investigated.

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. After massive intervention by the USA and other nations, the death toll on 20 Dec 2014 was only 7400.

Death Toll in Syria

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

On 2 Dec 2014, SOHR reported the first cumulative death toll since the Arabic-language SOHR press release on 21 Aug 2014:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of nearly 300000 persons since 18/03/2011, which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Daraa, until 12/01/2014.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 63072 civilians, including 10377 children and 6603 women.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters: 34838
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2486
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian fighters from the ISIS, al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham Movement and al-Khadra' battalion: 22624
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 44237
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 28974
- Pro- regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al

Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 2388

- Fighters from Hezbollah: 624
- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 3111.

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include more than 20000 detainees in regime prisons and thousands of those who disappeared during regime raids and massacres. It does not include more than 2000 regular soldiers and pro-regime militants and hundreds of “regime supporters” captured by IS, Islamic fighters, Al-Nusra front, rebel and Islamic battalions on charge of “dealing with the regime”.

The numbers also do not include more than 1500 fighters from the YPG, IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic battalions and rebel battalions who were kidnapped during clashes among the mentioned parties. These statistics do not include the destiny of 4000 abductees from the civilians and fighters inside IS jails from Shaitaat tribe who were kidnapped by the Islamic State in the province of Deir Ezzor.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Junoud al-Sham, al-Katiba al-Khadra', Jund al-Sham, rebel battalions, regular forces and pro-regime militants to be approximately 80,000 more than the documented number due to the extreme discretion by all sides on the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

The silence of the International community for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria encourages the criminals to kill more and more Syrian people because they have not found anyone that deter them from continuing their crimes that cause to wound more than 1500000 people; some of them with permanent disabilities, make hundreds of thousands children without parents, displace more than half of Syrian people and destroy infrastructure, private and public properties.

Despite our loss of hope in an international community capable and willing to put an end to the ongoing atrocities in Syria, we in the Syrian Observatory call upon all sides that claim to defend the freedoms of the people and their rights, to take a serious and responsible stance in order to end the bloodshed in Syria amid the increasing violence and the escalating number of casualties.

We also call upon all sides to support the Syrian people in their aspirations towards freedom, equality and democracy and to exert all effort in guaranteeing that the perpetrators and their wrongdoings will not go unpunished, through the International Criminal Court or through establishing a special court for Syria.

After the failure of referring cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria to the International criminal court because of the Russian-Chinese veto in the Security Council, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights renews its call to all international sides to establish a special court for Syria. We in the Syrian Observatory demand the punishment of all perpetrators, instigators, collaborators and all individuals and sides who used the Syrian blood as a political card and a means to

to carry out their personal agendas, as well as those who transformed a revolution for dignity to a sectarian and ethnic civil war.

"Nearly 300000 people killed since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution," [SOHR](#), 2 Dec 2014. (Bulleted list added by Standler.)

My total of the numbers of dead in the bulleted list is 202,354. Adding the "do not include" numbers in the text push the total to 309,854.

Journalists reported the 2 Dec press release from SOHR. [Daily Star](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Arab News](#)(AFP). Note that neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported this cumulative death toll.

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.

Executions by ISIL in Syria

On 28 Dec 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) announced the execution of approximately 2000 people by ISIL in Syria, since the declaration of the Caliphate by ISIL on 28 June 2014.

SOHR could document death of 1878 executed by Islamic State since the declaration of "Caliphate" in Syria in 6/28/2014 until yesterday 12/27/2014.

The death toll is as follows:

- 1175 civilians, including 4 children and 8 women. They were executed by beheading, shooting or stoning in the provinces of Deir Ezzor, al- Raqqa, al- Hasakah, Aleppo, Homs and Hama. 930 out of 1175 are from al- Shaitaat tribe in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor.
- 81 fighters of the Nusra Front, rebel and Islamic battalions. IS executed them after arresting them either in clashes between the mentioned battalions and IS or on IS- checkpoint.
- Islamic State also executed 120 of its own members for "exceeding the limits in religion"; most of them executed after arresting them during their attempt to come back home.
- 502 officers and soldiers of the regime forces. They were arrested during clashes between IS and the regime forces.

We in SOHR believe that the real number of people that had been killed by IS is higher than the number documented by SOHR because there are hundreds of missing and detainees inside the IS jails, loss of communication with about a thousand men of al- Shaitaat tribe as well as because there are dozens of Kurds who have still been missing since the beginning of IS attack on the countryside of Ayn al-Arab "Kobani" in September 16.

"About 2000 people killed by Islamic State since the establishment of 'Caliphate'," [SOHR](#), 28 Dec 2014.

2014 Annual Death Toll in Syria

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced that a total of 76,021 people had been killed in Syrian during the year 2014.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of nearly 76021 persons since 01/01/2014, until 12/31/2014.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 17790 civilians, including 3501 children and 1987 women.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters: 15488
- Defected soldiers and officers: 259
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian fighters from the ISIS, al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham Movement and al-Khadra' battalion: 16979
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 12861
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 9766
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 2167
- Militiamen from Hezbollah guerrilla: 366
- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 345.

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include more than thousands of detainees inside regime prisons and thousands of those who disappeared during regime raids and massacres. It does not include more than hundreds of regular soldiers and pro-regime militants and supporters" captured by IS, Islamic fighters, Al-Nusra front, rebel and Islamic battalions on charge of "dealing with the regime".

These statistics do not include the destiny of 3000 abductees from the civilians and fighters inside IS jails from Shaitaat tribe who were kidnapped by the Islamic State.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-

Syrian casualties from the IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Junoud al-Sham, al-Katiba al-Khadra', Jund al-Sham, rebel battalions, regular forces and pro-regime militants to be approximately 30,000 more than the documented number due to the extreme discretion by all sides on the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

The silence of the International community for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria encourages the criminals to kill more and more Syrian people because they have not found anyone that deter them from continuing their crimes that cause to wound more than 1500000 people; some of them with permanent disabilities, make hundreds of thousands children without parents, displace more than half of Syrian people and destroy infrastructure, private and public properties.

We also call upon all sides to support the Syrian people in their aspirations towards freedom, equality and democracy and to exert all effort in guaranteeing that the perpetrators and their wrongdoings will not go unpunished, through the International Criminal Court or through establishing a special court for Syria.

After the failure of referring cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria to the International criminal court because of the Russian-Chinese veto in the Security Council, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights renews its call to all international sides to establish a special court for Syria. We in the Syrian Observatory demand the punishment of all perpetrators, instigators, collaborators and all individuals and sides who used the Syrian blood as a political card and as means to carry out their personal agendas, as well as those who transformed a revolution for dignity to a sectarian and ethnic civil war.

"76021 people killed in Syria in 2014," [SOHR](#), 1 Jan 2015.

This story was reported by [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#). The Associated Press did *not* report this story.

Rebels in Syria

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 2 Dec 2014, the Syrian National Coalition posted a press release at its website: Nasr al-Hariri, Secretary General of the Syrian Coalition, said that the announcement of the formation of the Revolution Command Council, a broad a coalition of 90 military rebel factions, is a step in the right direction and demonstrates a high sense of responsibility on the side of the signatory factions. "We highly praise this important move as it comes at a crucial stage of the course of the Syrian Revolution, hoping that it will help speed up the salvation of the Syrian people of tyranny and dictatorship. I take this opportunity to call on all other rebel factions to follow suit, as the failure to close our ranks will only lead to more bloodshed and losses. Coalition News, "A Broad Coalition of 90 Rebel Factions Announced," [SNC](#), 2 Dec 2014.

Reuters reported that the new organization failed to entice more rebel groups to join. Worse, the new organization is "heavily dominated by Islamists":

The latest effort to unify the fractured Syrian military opposition has done little to create a cohesive vehicle for foreign military aid that could fight insurgents in Syria, after at least two major rebel groups dropped out of the initiative.

The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), formed over the weekend, was meant to include Islamist and more secular-minded groups while excluding hardliners Nusra and Islamic State targeted by U.S.-led coalition air strikes since September.

Among the RCC participants in an August statement of intent were the Western-backed Harakat Hazm and Syrian Revolutionaries Front, which Syrian opposition sources say have been vetted by the U.S. authorities to receive military support.

But opposition sources said both groups found it too heavily dominated by Islamists. The southern branch of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front denied any link to the council.

"When we felt it was diverting from the principles of the revolution we dropped out," a senior member of Harakat Hazm said on condition of anonymity.

The RCC, which held its first meeting in the southern Turkish town of Gaziantep, never made a public statement of its aims. Other opposition sources said groups did not take the new body seriously.

"I went for the first day of the meeting in Gaziantep last week and left right away," said one source declining to be named. "It's a waste of time. They are not harmonized."

Dasha Afanasieva, "New Syrian opposition grouping fails to entice major rebel factions," [Reuters](#), 18:03 GMT, 2 Dec 2014.

Confusingly, subsequent Coalition News posted at the website of the Syrian National Coalition continues to refer only to the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army:

- "Hariri Meets With The FSA's Supreme Military Council," [SNC](#), 8 Dec 2014. ("A delegation from the Syrian Coalition, headed by the Secretary General Nasr al-Hariri, met with the FSA's Supreme Military Council and the Interim Prime Minister Ahmed Tomeh.")
- "Syrian Coalition: Failure to Support the FSA Will Fuel Extremism in Syria," [SNC](#), 19 Dec 2014. ("Nasr al-Hariri, Secretary General of the Syrian Coalition, said that the failure of the international community to support the FSA and punish the Assad regime is responsible for the rise of extremism and the region.")
- "Koenders Reminds Bahra: The Situation in Syria Involves More Than Just Assad's War Against ISIS," [SNC](#), 22 Dec. ("Bahra stresses 'the need to support the Free Syrian Army with advanced weapons for its battle against Assad and ISIS,' pointing out that the FSA was the first to declare war on ISIS.")

Leaders of Free Syrian Army have "disappeared"

In my [March 2014](#) essay on Syria, I noted that Gen. Salim Idriss, the commander of the FSA before Feb 2014, had disappeared from the news. In my [August 2014](#) essay on Syria, I noted that Gen. Bashir — the replacement for Idriss — essentially disappeared from the news in July-August 2014. During [September 2014](#), I found only three published interviews involving either Idriss or Bashir.

On 27 Dec 2014, I searched Google News for the queries "Salim Idriss" Syria and al-Bashir "Free Syrian Army" but found very little in the three months since 30 Sep 2014.

I find it very strange that the leader of the Free Syrian Army has been invisible in the news media for most of 2014. One would expect the leader of the FSA to be publicly clamoring for more weapons, more ammunition, and exhorting his troops to defeat Assad, ISIL, Al-Qaeda, and the jihadists.

During August 2014, I noticed that the website of the Syrian National Coalition no longer has a webpage devoted to the FSA or Supreme Military Council:

On 5 August, I looked at the Syrian National Coalition website. The website has a series of tabs, that are pull-down menus for detailed information. The tab labeled "Coalition Components" has an item for [FSA Staff Command](#), but that item returns an "item not found" message (404 error). There are mentions of the FSA in various press releases at the Coalition website, but no webpage devoted to either the FSA or Supreme

Military Council. Again, this is really strange, given that the Coalition hopes to depose Assad by military force through the FSA. On 30 Aug 2014, I confirmed the facts in this paragraph.

Standler, [tenth essay](#) on Syria, 2 Sep 2014.

On 27 Dec 2014, I checked the homepage of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) and again found that the above-mentioned link to the "FSA Staff Command" generated a 404 error. There were no other links to either the FSA or Supreme Military Council on the homepage of the SNC. Further, there were no links on the SNC's homepage to the new Revolution Command Council.

The four official [goals](#) of the SNC include: "To unify support for the joint leadership of the military council, the revolutionary council, and the FSA". Apparently the SNC has abandoned this goal. This is very strange, in that the SNC pretends to be a government in exile for Syria, but the SNC is apparently *no longer* affiliated with any military force.

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.

On 5 Dec, the head of the Syrian National Coalition said that U.S. training of Syrian rebels "will not start until at least late February" 2015. [Reuters](#). Note that the U.S. Congress approved the training in Sep 2014.

Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

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

On 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.

My essay for [Nov 2014](#) cites a *Washington Post* article on 29 Nov that Assad may lack resources to win the civil war. Inadequate resources for Assad to win the civil war may motivate Assad — and also motivate Assad's supporters in Russia and Iran — to negotiate a peace agreement, but one wonders whether any of significant terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front) will negotiate.

On 28 Dec, Hugh Naylor, writing in the [Washington Post](#), says that Assad's army has been depleted by recent "soaring casualties" and desertions. Replacements are not arriving because of "evasions of compulsory military service". So Assad is imposing harsh measures on deserters and draft dodgers. These harsh measures will increase Assad's unpopularity, and further weaken Assad.

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.

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 9-10 Nov, de Mistura met in Damascus with the Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Moallem, and Assad himself, to discuss Mistura's proposal for ceasefires in Aleppo and other cities. By 27 Nov, the Syrian government seemed to agree with Mistura's proposal, while the Syrian National Coalition rejected it, and the terrorists — ISIL, Nusra, Islamic Front, etc. — were silent.

On 7 Dec, de Mistura met with the Syrian National Coalition in Istanbul for three hours. On 8 Dec, Mistura met with the Revolutionary Command Council (the successor to the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army) and other rebel groups in Gaziantep, Turkey for eight hours. On both days, the meetings were to discuss Mistura's proposal for a ceasefire in Aleppo. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#).

On 13 Dec, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) demanded guarantees from de Mistura that Assad would *not* be part of a future Syrian government.

Nizar Al Hiraki, member of the Syrian Coalition, said that "a cease-fire in all parts of Syria, the delivery of relief aid, the release of women and children from Assad's jails and the departure of Bashar al-Assad are conditions that can not be waived." Hiraki, commenting on the ceasefire plan put forward by the UN special envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura, told Al Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper that "we need guarantees that pressure would be put on Assad to implement any future agreements so as not to repeat the scenario of the Geneva II talks that failed to yield any positive results."

Coalition News, "Syrian Coalition Demands Guarantees on Assad's Departure," [SNC](#), 13 Dec 2014.

My comment is that these preconditions are harmful to negotiations. The logical approach is

to have negotiations and see what happens. The SNC first wants to unilaterally specify the result, and then negotiate to obtain that result, which is not only backwards, but also allows no flexibility during negotiations.

We have been here before. On 7 May 2013, Lavrov and Kerry publicly proposed the Geneva2 peace negotiations. However, those negotiations actually began on 24 Jan 2014, owing to repeated delays — plus numerous preconditions and demands — by the Syrian National Coalition. This history is chronicled in my previous essays.

23 Dec 2014: dual plans by Russia and U.N.

On 23 Dec 2014, the Associated Press reported:

The search for a negotiated settlement to the Syrian civil war is gaining steam, as President Bashar Assad's forces feel increasingly squeezed on the battlefield and Islamic extremist groups proliferate across the region.

Russia, Assad's chief international ally, is trying to convene peace talks in Moscow between Syrian government representatives and the mainstream opposition on how to move toward a political transition. Its diplomats have been shuttling between various sides of the conflict to try to arrange talks without preconditions.

Elsewhere, U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura is attempting to decrease the level of carnage in Syria through a plan that calls for "freezing the conflict" in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo as a building block for a wider solution to the war.

So far, there is little to suggest that either of those plans has a real chance of success. But analysts say there is a greater chance now for a settlement as a result of recent government losses in the north and south as well as growing resentment toward Assad among his traditional supporters — particularly after the mass killings of soldiers by militants.

....

Bassem Mroue & Zeina Karam, "Search is on for diplomatic solution to Syria war," [Associated Press](#), 18:49 GMT, 23 Dec 2014.

On 25 Dec, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Alexander Lukashevich, said negotiations would convene in Moscow sometime after 20 Jan 2015. The opposition leaders have not yet agreed to attend. [Associated Press](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

On 26 Dec, the Syrian National Coalition announced it "would lead the dialogue" for the opposition parties in the Moscow negotiations. [SNC](#). One wonders what the other opposition groups thought about the Coalition arrogantly appointing itself leader in an undemocratic move.

On 30 Dec, it was announced that de Mistura had been invited to attend Syrian peace talks in Moscow during 26-29 Jan 2015. Someone from de Mistura's office will attend. [Reuters](#);

Daily Star.

My comment: Having two parallel paths for peace negotiations leaves parties feeling they might get a better deal in the other negotiation forum, with the result that both negotiating fora might fail. It might be possible to have negotiations between the Syrian government and the Syrian National Coalition, but the Coalition is irrelevant inside Syria. It seems unlikely that the major insurgent groups (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, and Islamic Front) would agree to negotiate, because they want to establish a caliphate, emirate, or Islamic government in place of Assad's secular government. Unlike many wars, there are *not* two sides to the Syrian civil war — there are at least six sides:

1. Assad's government
2. ISIL caliphate
3. Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda)
4. Islamic Front (jihadists)
5. Kurds, ethnic group from northeast Syria
6. moderate rebels, secular (e.g., Free Syrian Army)

I say "at least" six groups, because the moderate rebels are badly fragmented, and the Islamic Front is also an amalgamation of different groups. It boggles the mind that at least six groups can compete for control of one nation.

29 Dec 2014: opposition peace plans

The Daily Star newspaper in Lebanon gives us a glimpse at the plans of the Syrian National Coalition and unspecified other rebel groups during a meeting in Cairo with the leader of the Arab League.

Discussions in Cairo between Syrian opposition officials are focusing on an ambitious proposal to form a transitional government and elect a president eligible for two four-year terms, Al-Mayadeen television said Sunday [28 Dec].

The proposal also envisions an end to Baath Party control over state institutions, during a three-month period, and the cancellation of all laws that “restrict freedoms,” the report said.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri said that Syria’s opposition had indicated its agreement in principal to attend meetings in Moscow, according to the Anadolu news agency, but did not mention the plan reportedly being floated.

....

A member of the opposition-in-exile National Coalition had earlier stated that his group preferred not to open a new set of talks with the regime, insisting on the 2012 Geneva communiqué as a basis for talks.

Badr Jamous said the opposition preferred to resume the Geneva format, even though a round of talks earlier this year ended in failure. The Geneva process envisions the

establishment of a transitional political body with “full executive powers,” which would exclude a role for President Bashar Assad.

Russian officials have expressed public support for the Geneva communiqué of 2012, although their latest attempt to bring the opposition and regime representatives together appears to be based on a significantly different plan, which would leave Assad in power. The document, as reported by Al-Mayadeen, makes an explicit reference to the Geneva formula as the basis for negotiations.

....

[Syrian National Coalition president] Bahra on Saturday [27 Dec] stated that the Russian proposal remained vague.

“There is no clear Russian initiative, only an [informal] invitation to meet and talk in Moscow,” Bahra told reporters. He added that his group had not received any formal invitation to talks in Moscow.

"Cairo talks focus on bold plan for Syria," [Daily Star](#), 29 Dec 2014.

My comments: "Ambitious proposal" is correct — this proposal has zero chance of success because it requires not only that Assad resign, but also Assad's entire political party (Baath) abandon power.

The proposal for "the cancellation of all laws that 'restrict freedoms,' " is absurd. *Every* law, no matter how benign or how beneficial, restricts someone's freedom. For example, a law about parking meters restricts freedom to park a car for free.

The Geneva1 Communiqué is actually silent about the future role of Assad. The rejection of Assad is something desired by rebels and the Friends of Syria nations, but is *not* specified in Geneva1. This ambiguity was built into the hastily written Geneva1 Communiqué, as explained in my [essay](#).

There is no mention of the major terrorist organizations (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front) at these peace negotiations. If the Syrian National Coalition manages to push Assad aside, then the weak and indecisive Coalition will need to fight against ISIL, Al-Qaeda, and the jihadists — a fight the Coalition will surely lose. At this moment, Assad is our best hope of defeating the terrorists in Syria.

A 28 Dec Coalition News press release at the website of the Syrian National Coalition criticizes de Mistura's proposal:

Bahra describes the plan [of the UN envoy to Syria Staffen De Mistura] as not offering a comprehensive solution to the conflict, expressing fears that the Assad regime might exploit the “freeze” plan to withdraw his troops from Aleppo and redeploy them elsewhere.

"Syrian Coalition: De Mistura's Plan Must Be More Comprehensive," [SNC](#), 28 Dec 2014.

A 30 Dec Coalition News press release at the website of the Syrian National Coalition

derides any meeting in Moscow:

Qaddah [vice president of the Syrian Coalition] concluded his remarks stressing that “Moscow is not a place to hold a conference, particularly as it has been Assad’s main partner in the killing of the Syrian people since the beginning of the revolution. The country where the negotiations are to be conducted should be neutral and not an accomplice to the genocidal crimes against the Syrian people.”

"Cairo Talks Continue," [SNC](#), 30 Dec 2014.

My comment is that the SNC objects to *both* de Mistura's proposal and the Russian proposal. My feeling is that the SNC would object to *any* proposal that is not their own.

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.)

22 Dec: Report

Sometime around 22 Dec, Ban was scheduled to issue 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 31 Dec 2014 and 2 Jan 2015, I looked at the U.N. Security Council website, the U.N. Secretary General's website, and ReliefWeb, but none mentioned the report for December 2014.

Debacle in Iraq

Death Toll in Iraq

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) released the casualty figures for Iraq "in acts of terrorism and violence". During the year 2014, a total of 16,143 people were killed, which includes 12,282 civilians. Note that these numbers include *neither* all of Anbar province *nor* areas controlled by ISIL. The year 2014 was the deadliest year in Iraq since 2007. [UNAMI](#) (posted on 4 Jan); [UN News](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [All Iraq News](#); [NY Times](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#). The Associated Press did *not* report this story.

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.

My essay for [November](#) 2014 chronicles still more atrocities.

ISIL bombings in Iraq

On 4 December, a series of three car bombs in Baghdad and one in Kirkuk killed at least 37 people. [Associated Press](#).

On the morning of 24 December, an Islamic suicide bomber detonated in Baghdad, killing at least 24 people, most of whom were Sunni militiamen waiting to be paid. [Associated Press](#). Later, [Al-Jazeera](#) says 38 dead.

On the morning of 29 December, an Islamic suicide bomber exploded at a funeral in Iraq, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#). Later, there were 21 dead and 40 wounded. [All Iraq News](#). On 30 Dec, ISIL claimed responsibility for this bombing of a funeral. [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.

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.

Although involving neither ISIL, Iraq, or Syria, there is something very interesting in the massacre by 7 Taliban of 132 children and 16 staff at a school in Peshawar, Pakistan on 16 Dec. Because this story did *not* involve killings of Muslims by non-Muslims, there was little condemnation of the Taliban in Arab news media. Diana Moukalled wrote an editorial on this subject at [Al-Arabiya](#). I suggest this same indifference prevents Arab news media from condemning the ISIL and Al-Qaeda terrorists.

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 Shi'ite, 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 Shi'ites, with Kurds and Sunnis treated with suspicion and as outcasts."

When I searched Google News on 2 Sep, 19 Oct, and 20 Dec, 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. Note there was *no* attempt to punish these corrupt officers.

On 23 Nov, the [New York Times](#) reported on corruption in the Iraqi army, including army officers who sell weapons and ammunition and pocket the extra income. There is no mention of criminal prosecution for corrupt officers.

The conventional wisdom from journalists is that former prime minister Maliki wrecked the Iraqi army by replacing competent top officers with incompetent officers who were personally loyal to Maliki. See, e.g.,

- [Washington Post](#) ("... Maliki, who has been widely accused of promoting officers based on loyalty rather than merit.");
- [Washington Post](#) ("[U.S. officials] say [Maliki] assigned commanders on the basis of sectarian loyalty, diminishing military capabilities and undermining morale.");
- [Associated Press](#) ("Many have blamed the army's poor performance on al-Maliki, saying he replaced top officers with inexperienced or incompetent political allies in order to monopolize power.");
- [Christian Science Monitor](#) ("These [sectarian policies] fostered the promotion of incompetent Shiite officers on the basis of loyalty to Maliki, and a military culture filled with greed and corruption.");
- [Politico](#) ("... [Maliki] systematically purged the most capable senior officers from the Iraqi Army and replaced them with Shiite cronies who were personally loyal to him, but were incompetent — and, under fire, proved to be cowards.").

While Maliki appears to be responsible for part of the blame for the incompetent Iraqi army in June 2014, Maliki was appointed one of three Vice-Presidents of Iraq on 8 Sep 2014. It seems strange that the person who wrecked the Iraqi army is not only avoiding criminal prosecution, but continues to be a leader in the Iraqi government.

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.

There were no regularly scheduled meetings of Parliament during December. The next session of Parliament is scheduled for 7 Jan 2015. [All Iraq News](#).

On 25 Dec, Parliament held an emergency meeting with 181 members to discuss the draft budget for the Iraqi government. [All Iraq News](#). The meeting lasted only *one hour* and then they adjourned until 7 Jan. [All Iraq News](#).

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. See my essays for [October](#) and [November](#) for previous history.

On 3 Dec, another 150 peshmerga from Iraq arrived in Kobani. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#)

On 5 Dec, it was becoming apparent that Kobani was largely in ruins, after being destroyed in a more than two-month campaign by ISIL to capture Kobani. Kobani is now mostly of symbolic value, in that neither side wants to admit defeat. It is one of the illogical results of war that towns are destroyed by battles, so that the towns are no longer worth possession. See [Associated Press](#), 4 Dec; [Associated Press](#), 5 Dec.

Most of the U.S. airstrikes in Syria during December were targeted at ISIL in and near Kobani, as described in press releases by U.S. Central Command that are quoted [below](#). There seems to be a consensus that fighting in Kobani is stalemated, and neither side is likely to win in the foreseeable future.

On the night of 19 Dec, there was an all-night battle in Kobani that reportedly killed 33 ISIL fighters. [Rudaw](#).

On 27 Dec, Agence France-Presse quotes Rami Abdul-Rahman, director of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, as saying the Kurds now control "more than 60%" of Kobani. [Daily Star](#).

On 31 Dec, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the Kurds now control "about 70%" of Kobani. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#).

Daily News

1 Dec 2014: U.N. stops feeding Syrian refugees

On the morning of 1 Dec, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) suspended issuing vouchers to 1.7 million refugees from Syria. The vouchers enable refugees to purchase food from local stores in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt. The vouchers were suspended after many donor nations failed to pay money to the WFP. The WFP says it needs US\$ 64 million for December alone. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [WFP](#).

During 3-5 Dec, the WFP held online fundraising. People contributed US\$ 21.5 million in the first 24 hours. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [WFP](#). After three days, the WFP ended the online fundraising campaign, although donations were still accepted. [WFP](#).

On 9 Dec, the WFP reinstated the voucher program. [Associated Press](#).

My comments: The best way to help the refugees would be to end the civil war in Syria, and return all of the refugees to Syria, to work on rebuilding. But no one knows how to get the terrorists in Syria to stop fighting. Further, no one wants to pay billions of dollars per year, year after year, for someone else's problem, which is why donor nations fail to contribute money for refugees from Syria.

The \$64 million/month for 1.7 million people corresponds to a meager US\$1.2/day per person.

1 Dec 2014: Abadi retires Interior Ministry officials

The Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, involuntarily retired 24 officials in the Interior Ministry, in an attempt to improve security of Iraq. [Associated Press](#).

3 Dec: Anti-ISIL Coalition Meets

John Kerry convened a meeting of the foreign ministers of 60 nations in Brussels on 3 Dec. Personally, I am sure they came to eat donuts. *<grin>* The meeting must have been brief, because the press briefing at the U.S. State Department mentions:

The Secretary is on travel in Europe today. This morning in Brussels he participated in the Counter-ISIL Coalition Meeting at NATO, had meetings with EU High Representative Mogherini and Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi, participated in a meeting on Libya with European foreign ministers and the EU, a meeting on the U.S.-EU Energy Ministerial, and he held a press availability which I'm sure many of you saw.

Marie Harf, "Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept.](#), 3 Dec 2014.

Suppose the meeting lasted four hours. If an hour is devoted to speeches by John Kerry, General Allen, and Prime Minister Abadi, then there will be about 3 minutes for each of the 58 other nations.

The Joint Statement issued by the meeting clearly states how they intend to defeat ISIL, with five "lines of effort":

1. Supporting military operations, capacity building, and training;

2. Stopping the flow of foreign terrorist fighters;
3. Cutting off ISIL/Daesh's access to financing and funding;
4. Addressing associated humanitarian relief and crises; and
5. Exposing ISIL/Daesh's true nature (ideological delegitimization).

[Joint Statement](#) Issued by Partners at the Counter-ISIL Coalition Ministerial Meeting, Brussels, (3 Dec 2014). copy at [rbs0.com](#)

3-4 Dec: "Daesh" replaces ISIL

In his remarks on 3 Dec, both at the Coalition [meeting](#) and [afterwards](#), John Kerry used the name "Daesh", instead of ISIL. On 18 Dec, the commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, Lt. Gen. Terry, in a press briefing at the [Pentagon](#), also used the name "Daesh", instead of ISIL.

On 4 Dec, the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. reported that the French Foreign Minister and U.S. Secretary of State had adopted the name "Daesh" to replace ISIL, ISIS, and "Islamic State".

Speaking in Brussels yesterday [3 Dec], U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry adopted the new name.

....

France was first to embrace the Daesh name in September, and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius asked the media and others to do the same.

"This is a terrorist group and not a state. I do not recommend using the term Islamic State because it blurs the lines between Islam, Muslims and Islamists," he said in a statement at the time. "The Arabs call it Daesh and I will be calling them the 'Daesh cutthroats.'"

Daesh also sounds similar to the Arabic words daes — which means someone who crushes something underfoot - and also dahes — which is someone who sows discord.

Former U.S. secretary of State Hillary Clinton objected to the label Islamic State as well, and explained why during a visit to Ottawa in October:

"Whether you call them ISIS or ISIL, I refuse to call them the Islamic State, because they are neither Islamic nor a state," she said during a Canada 2020 conference.

"Whatever you call them, I think we can agree that the threat is real."

Kathleen Harris, "'Daesh' adopted as new name for ISIS by U.S., France," [CBC](#), 20:10 EST, 4 Dec 2014.

Laurent Fabius' remarks were reported on 18 Sep 2014 by France24:

[Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius] said: "This is a terrorist group and not a state. I do not recommend using the term Islamic State because it blurs the lines between Islam,

Muslims and Islamists. The Arabs call it ‘Daesh’ and I will be calling them the ‘Daesh cutthroats’.”

....

Daesh is a loose acronym of the Arabic for “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (al-**D**awla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-**S**ham). Use of acronyms is rare in the Arabic world, with the notable exception of the Palestinian group Hamas [full name omitted here].

First used in April 2013 by Arabic and Iranian media hostile to the jihadist movement, Daesh became a name commonly used by the enemies of IS, notably forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as well as activists and less fanatical rebel groups also fighting the Damascus regime.

A principal reason for using the acronym was to remove the words “Islamic” and “State” in reference to the group in a bid to stop Muslims in war-torn Syria and beyond flocking to its ranks.

Defiance and disrespect

It is also considered insulting, and the IS itself doesn’t like the name Daesh one bit.

Beyond the acronym, “Daesh” sounds like the Arabic “Daes”, meaning “one who crushes something underfoot” as well as “Dahes”, which means “one who sows discord”.

Dahes is also a reference to the Dahes wal Ghabra period of chaos and warfare between Arab tribes which is famous in the Arab world as one of the precursors of the Muslim age.

“Daesh” therefore has considerably negative undertones. There can be little political ambiguity behind the French government’s decision to deploy Daesh as a linguistic weapon.

Wassim Nasr, "French govt to use Arabic ‘Daesh’ for Islamic State group," [France24](#), 18 Sep 2014.

See also [Washington Post](#).

Hillary Clinton's remarks were reported on 6 Oct 2014 by [MSNBC](#).

On 13 Sep 2014, a coalition of British imams noted that the so-called Islamic State "is neither Islamic, nor is it a state." [Guardian](#).

My comments: I have never used the name "Islamic State". On 29 June 2014, when ISIL changed its name to "Islamic State", I continued 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.

On 15 Oct, the U.S. Central Command gave the name "Operation Inherent Resolve" to the

anti-ISIL coalition in Iraq and Syria. In my [twelfth essay](#) on Syria, I commented that was a "dumb name" and humorously proposed "Daesh Be Gone". Seriously, choosing a coalition name that insults or offends ISIL is a desirable feature of a name.

No immunity for U.S. Military in Iraq?

The U.S. Government insists that foreign nations grant legal immunity to U.S. Military personnel, before the U.S. personnel arrive in foreign nations. This protects Americans from unfamiliar foreign law, corrupt or incompetent police, biased trials, prejudice against Christians, etc. Before U.S. advisers were sent to Iraq in 2014, the Iraqi government granted such immunity in a "diplomatic note" on 23 June 2014. [Associated Press](#); [New York Times](#); [Washington Post](#). Instead of prosecution in an Iraqi court under Iraqi law, any misconduct by U.S. military personnel will be prosecuted in a U.S. Military court, under the U.S. Uniform Code of Military Justice.

On 4 Dec 2014, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq publicly reiterated that U.S. Military personnel in Iraq have immunity, as a result of the June 2014 "diplomatic note" from Iraqi prime minister al-Maliki. [Associated Press](#); [Guardian](#); [All Iraq News](#).

On 8 Dec, Iraqi prime minister Abadi insists "There is no immunity for any foreign fighter and I did not sign any immunity for any US soldier deployed in Iraq." [All Iraq News](#). While it is true that Abadi himself did not grant immunity, Abadi is expected to honor agreements made by the previous Iraqi prime minister.

My comment is that every U.S. taxpayer should be angry with the lack of gratitude and respect that the so-called Iraqi government has toward the USA. Not only did the incompetence, corruption, and stupidity of the Iraqis squander the gift of freedom from Saddam Hussein, but also the Iraqis continue to be ungrateful for the free military assistance from the USA.

I suggest the the U.S. suspend all military assistance (including airstrikes) to Iraq until the Iraqi Parliament passes legislation that both: (1) grants immunity to U.S. and other coalition military personnel in Iraq and (2) promises to repay the actual cost of all military assistance, with interest at 2%/month on amounts unpaid 30 days after an invoice.

9 Dec 2014: Hagel visits Iraq Abadi says "give more aid"

On 9 Dec 2014, U.S. Defense Secretary, Hagel, made his first — and presumably last — trip to Iraq. The Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, begged Hagel for the USA to give more heavy weapons to the Iraqi army, and begged for more airstrikes from U.S. Military.

Agence France-Presse reported:

[Hagel] said he appreciated Abadi's "directness" in requesting more firepower and added: "We talked about how in fact ... the U.S. has accelerated weapons systems that Iraq will need" such as Hellfire air-to-surface missiles and other arms and ammunition.

But Hagel, speaking to a group of U.S. and Australian troops, said the outcome of the campaign would ultimately hinge on the Baghdad government.

"It's their country, they have to lead, they're the ones who are going to have to be responsible for end results," he said. "We can help, we can train, we can assist, we can advise - we're doing that."

....

U.S. officials have said the scale of the American-led air campaign will not dramatically escalate until the Iraqi army is able to launch wider offensives. Dan De Luce, "US defense chief sees 'steady progress' in war on ISIS," [Daily Star](#), 9 Dec 2014.

The Associated Press reported:

"We are very thankful for the support that's been given to us," al-Abadi said. "Our forces are very much advancing on the ground. But they need more air power and more ... heavy weaponry. We need that."

Asked later about al-Abadi's request, Hagel told reporters, "I appreciated his directness," but he was not more specific about how he responded.

U.S. officials assert that the Iraqis' biggest need is competent military leadership, not additional military hardware. Robert Burns, "Iraqi leader asks US for more air power, weaponry," [Associated Press](#), 14:09 GMT, 9 Dec 2014.

The Pentagon posted a transcript of Hagel's press briefing in Baghdad:

SECRETARY HAGEL: Well, first, I want to thank the prime minister for his very candid and open discussions with me today. His specific request regarding additional firepower was one we did discuss, and I appreciated his directness in that discussion. We talked about how, in fact — and he noted this — the United States has accelerated many of the weapons systems that — and the platforms that Iraq will need and continue to require, like Hellfire missiles over the last few months. We've put all that on a fast track. MRAPs, new MRAPs, will be delivered later this month. Ammunition, small arms, all of these — these important armaments have been accelerated.

"Media Availability with Secretary Hagel in Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 9 Dec 2014.

My comments: "Gimme! Gimme!" is a pathetic request from the Iraqis. If the Iraqi government had not been incompetent and corrupt, then they would have had an army that could have resisted the relatively small number of ISIL invaders in January through June 2014. The fact that ISIL has captured about 1/3 of Iraq is solely the fault of the Iraqi government. One of the big reasons that ISIL now has sophisticated weapons is that they stole them from U.S.-supplied Iraqi army that fled when ISIL arrived. Now — because of the incompetence, corruption, and cowardice of the Iraqi army — Abadi is asking for gifts of weapons to replace the U.S.-supplied weapons that were stolen by ISIL.

13 Dec 2014

On 13 *The Telegraph* published an exclusive interview with the U.K. Minister of Defence. [Michael Fallon said;] “The challenge now is that the air strikes have changed ISIL’s patterns. They are not using large formations out in the open any more,” he says. “They are increasingly tucked away in towns and villages. That means they have got to be rooted out by ground troops.”

“This has to be done by an own-grown [Iraqi] army, not by Western groups.”
Tim Ross, "Michael Fallon: in defence of my world," [The Telegraph](#), 13 Dec 2014.

16 Dec 2014: Iraqi government ending "ghost soldiers"

On 30 Nov 2014, Abadi announced his office had found 50,000 "ghost soldiers" on the payroll of the Iraqi army. See the quotations from news articles in my essay for [Nov 2014](#).

On 16 Dec 2014, the Associated Press reported:

The Iraqi government has identified and stopped payment of tens of millions of dollars in salaries previously disbursed to nonexistent troops, known here as "ghost soldiers," as part of the prime minister's vow to tackle corruption in the military and regain a foothold in the battle against the Islamic State group, two senior government officials said.

The initiative is part of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's plan to rebuild the U.S.-trained military which crumbled in the face of last summer's onslaught by Islamic State militants.

Al-Abadi recently purged the military and interior ministry from a number of senior officials who were appointees of his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki. While it is unclear whether any of the sacked officials are among those accused of collecting misappropriated funds, al-Abadi vowed to pursue the sensitive matter "even if it costs me my life."

According to the two senior officials, authorities prevented the loss of over \$47 million of improper military spending in November, mostly from salaries that were previously paid to soldiers who are dead, missing or did not exist and which were pocketed by senior commanders. The two officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak to media, said the money was the first of several tranches of funding to be regained by Iraq's Defense Ministry.

....

The Iraqi military has struggled to recover from its collapse in June when the Islamic State group captured the country's second largest city, Mosul, and swept over much of northern Iraq. In the face of the blitz, commanders disappeared. Pleas for more

ammunition went unanswered. In some cases, soldiers stripped off their uniforms and ran.

The Iraqi army has since been reduced to 10 of the 14 divisions it had before the Islamic State offensive in June. The government officially says the country's total military and police forces stand at 1 million men. However, a senior Iraqi military official told The Associated Press that the military consisted of 238,000 fighters as of early December.

That figure is overstated, according to a senior U.S. military official, who said Iraqi military strength stands, generously, at 125,000 — down from 205,000 in January 2014. He believes the number of ghost soldiers is far greater than the 50,000 cited by the prime minister, but did not give his own estimate. Both military officials also spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media.

If all 50,000 soldiers cited by the prime minister received an entry-level salary (about \$750 per month), it would add up to at least \$450 million in bogus salaries per year. Qassim Abdul-Zahra & Vivian Salama, "Iraq government combats 'ghost soldier' corruption," [Associated Press](#), 01:50 EST, 16 Dec 2014.

war to take at least 3 years

On 18 Dec 2014, the commander of Operation Inherent Resolve held a press briefing at the Pentagon:

QUESTION: General, this is Joe Tabet with Alhurra.

Four months of airstrikes against Daesh, and that group is still in control of large parts of Syria and also in Iraq. When do you think your mission will reach a turning point in the fight against Daesh? [second question deleted]

GEN. TERRY: Okay. I — I would just tell you, I think we're in, you know, some patience in relationship to turning Daesh. They have proved to be resilient. And again, as I look at it from a military standpoint, you know, the first — the first strikes were, what, 8 August? And so this is December. What's that? Four months.

I think we've made significant progress in halting that offensive that I talked about, the ability for them to continue to expand, you know, in terms of terrain and geography out there. I think what we must do, especially inside of Iraq, is continue to build those capabilities. I think you're at least talking *a minimum of three years*. [italics added]

Now, that — that doesn't mean we haven't started turning Daesh in a certain direction. And that's going to be the power of the coalition. Not only from a military perspective, but how do you apply all those elements of — of national power, along from the different nations, along those lines of effort that have been laid out out there.

So I hesitate to give you a time, but I'll show up in six months and you'll ask me why

we haven't gotten there. I think a lot of it, I see the conditions for it right now being set for a pretty stable environment, but I still think we're, in terms of building some of the capabilities that are required there, *probably about three years down the road minimum*. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Lt. Gen. Terry in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 18 Dec 2014. (italics added in two places)

My comments: I think many Americans expect that we will drop some bombs on ISIL, then ISIL quickly surrenders to avoid being annihilated. A quick surrender is *not* realistic. First, it will take at least a year to train the Iraqi army to the point where they can enter ISIL-controlled towns and remove ISIL. Second, ISIL is willing to fight to the death — since they go to Paradise by dying in battle for their caliphate. General Terry's estimate of at least *three years* duration of the war against ISIL should be kept in mind when debating this war. While this will be another long and expensive war in the Middle East, we really have no choice, because ISIL must be defeated before it expands further. But I think the Arab nations, especially Iraq, should pay for more of this war, including reimbursing the USA for military contributions to the anti-ISIL campaign.

lack of support causes Shiite militia in Iraq to desert

On 20 Dec 2014, the Associated Press reported:

Abu Murtada al-Moussawi answered the call last summer from Iraq's top Shiite cleric to help save the country from the Islamic State group, but after less than three months on the front lines he and several friends returned home because they had run out of food.

"Sometimes, we didn't have enough money to buy mobile scratch cards to call our families," al-Moussawi, a Shiite from the southern city of Basra, said. "Everybody felt like we were being forgotten by the government."

Now Iraq's Shiite religious establishment is urging the faithful to donate food, money and supplies. The clerics hope to prevent a repeat of last summer's collapse of Iraq's demoralized army in the face of the Islamic State group's lightning advance, which saw the extremists capture the country's second largest city Mosul and sweep south toward the capital.

....

"The government's negligence toward us has created bitterness among the volunteer fighters risking their lives in order to protect the country," [Hassan Saleh, owner of a cafe in Sadr City, who took part in battles against the IS group north of Baghdad in September] said. "We did not receive any salary, while the government is continuing to pay the salaries of the soldiers and the policemen who abandoned their positions without fighting in June."

Sameer N. Yacoub & Sinan Salaheddin, "Iraq's Shiite fighters desert over shortages," [Associated Press](#), 06:17 GMT, 20 Dec 2014.

17-23 Dec 2014: Peshmerga liberate Sinjar from ISIL

The town of Sinjar was captured by ISIL on 3 Aug 2014. On 17 Dec, the Kurdish Peshmerga began an operation to reclaim Sinjar, including U.S. airstrikes on ISIL. On 20 Dec, the Kurdish Peshmerga defeated ISIL and rescued Yazidis who were stranded in the mountains near Sinjar. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(Reuters); [Associated Press](#). On 21 Dec the Peshmerga claimed they retook the town of Sinjar from ISIL. [Al-Bawaba](#)(Anadolu Agency); [Rudaw](#); [Associated Press](#). But on 22 Dec, there was "heavy resistance" from ISIL snipers in Sinjar. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). Fighting continued on 23 Dec, [Associated Press](#). On 27 Dec, ISIL attempted to bring explosives into Sinjar, but the Peshmerga killed the driver and detonated the explosives. [All Iraq News](#).

23 Dec 2014: ISIL returns to Beiji

On 18 Nov 2014, the Iraqis declared that they had driven ISIL out of Beiji, a town near a major oil refinery. But on 23 Dec, the [Associated Press](#) reports ISIL "fought their way to the edge of Beiji on Tuesday after three days of heavy clashes." The provincial governor whined to the Associated Press that ISIL was able to advance because the Iraqi forces "lack heavy weapons". But the Iraqis had some heavy weapons when the U.S. departed in Dec 2011, and the fleeing Iraqi army allowed ISIL to capture those heavy weapons.

28 Dec 2014: Iranian officer dies in Iraq

On 28 Dec, the Associated Press reported:

Iran's Revolutionary Guard says one of its senior commanders was killed during a battle against the Islamic State extremist group in Iraq. The Guard said in an online statement Sunday [28 Dec] that Brig. Gen. Hamid Taqavi was "martyred while performing his advisory mission to confront ISIS terrorists in Samarra."

"Iranian senior commander killed in Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 15:06 GMT, 28 Dec 2014.

When I looked at noon EST on Sunday, neither FARS nor IRNA reported this story, but PressTV said:

A senior Iranian military officer has lost his life in the battle against the ISIL Takfiri terrorists in Iraq.

The Public Relations Department of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) stated on Sunday that Brigadier General Hamid Taqavi was killed while on "an advisory mission" in the holy city of Samarra.

The statement added that Taghavi was killed while conducting the mission in cooperation with the "Iraqi army and popular mobilization (forces) to counter the ISIL Takfiri militants in the vicinity of the shrine of (the eleventh Shia Imam) Hasan al-Askari (peace be upon him)."

"Iran general killed during battle against ISIL in Iraq," [PressTV](#), 10:55 GMT, 28 Dec 2014.

Later, the [FARS](#) News Agency in Iran issued a news story that contained remarkably little

information.

Later, it was announced that General Taqavi had been shot dead by an ISIL sniper. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#).

Note that on 5 July 2014 it was reported that a Colonel in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards died while defending Shiite holy sites in Samarra, Iraq. See my essay for [July](#).

30 Dec 2014: Cost of U.S. War Against ISIL

On 19 Dec 2014, Commander Bill Urban at the Pentagon said the total cost of U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and Syria was US\$ 1,200,000,000 since operations began on 8 August 2014, up until 11 Dec 2014. I searched the Pentagon website, but could not find the original source there. [The Hill](#); [ABC News](#).

On 30 Dec, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article at its website about the cost of the war to the U.S. taxpayer, which has some incidental remarks about strategy:

.... As of Dec. 30, the United States and a few allied air forces have launched more than 420 airstrikes since Sept. 1 against bands of Islamic State fighters in Kobani, a small town on the Turkish border. Kobani once had a population of 40,000.

The strikes are intended to help a local Kurdish militia hold on to its town, which has been largely depopulated and destroyed.

In contrast, the U.S.-led coalition has launched only 21 airstrikes on the outskirts of Aleppo, one of the world's oldest cities and one of the largest in Syria. Aleppo has a population of more than 2 million. The strikes hit ISIS targets but have assiduously avoided targeting Mr. Assad's forces, which control about half of Aleppo and are threatening to encircle the city to starve it — as they have done elsewhere in Syria.

The other part of Aleppo is held largely by U.S.-backed rebels. They are gradually losing the battle to keep the most strategic city outside the Syrian capital. But Washington and its allies do not want to get directly sucked into Syria's civil war.

The numbers reflect the mounting costs of the U.S. intervention — and what's to come. They suggest impact, and a time frame for yet another long war in the region. Washington has acknowledged that its new initiative will last at least three years, during which it hopes to train 5,000 fighters each year. The goal is not to defeat the Assad regime militarily but to pressure it to negotiate with the rebels.

The Pentagon said this month that costs of the first four months of Operation Inherent Resolve in Syria and Iraq had surpassed \$1 billion, with expenses running about \$8 million a day — or more than \$330,000 an hour. (And that's before training and equipping of a new rebel militia begins.)

Robin Wright, "The War Against ISIS, by the Numbers," [WSJ](#), 30 Dec 2014.

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.

Symbolic Coalition for Airstrikes in Syria

In reading the press releases from Central Command about airstrikes in Syria, I get the impression that participation in the airstrikes by our so-called coalition partners (i.e., Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) was infrequent. To check that impression, I looked at the press releases for November 2014, and found credit to "partner nations" for airstrikes in Syria mentioned in press releases for 3, 10, 12, 14, 19, 21, and 24 Nov. That is only 7 times in 30 days. (Note that one mention "partner nations" in a press release during 10-29 Nov *might* refer to two days of partner activity, because of infrequent press releases, and because of lack of details — ambiguity — in each press release.)

On 17 Oct 2014, Central Command stopped identifying the names of partner nations that actually participated in airstrikes.

On 24 Oct, Central Command began including a final stock paragraph in press releases that mentions the names of *all* nations involved in the coalition. I considered this final stock paragraph as propaganda, *not* news, and so I omitted that final stock paragraph from quotations in my essays.

On 30 Nov, Fox News quotes a report from the Pentagon as saying that the USA flies 85% of the airstrikes in Syria and Iraq.

The United States is conducting roughly 85 percent of the multi-national air strikes against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, according to the most recent Pentagon report. U.S. fighter planes and drones have conducted 819 strikes, compared to 157 from the 10 other countries, states the detailed report obtained last week by FoxNews.com.

The U.S. began the strikes in Iraq on Aug. 8 and was joined roughly five weeks later by Australia, followed by France, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. They joined as part of President Obama's plan to have international support in the effort to stop the militant group's foray into western Iraq and eastern Syria. Canada was the last to join, on Oct. 7, and the last to launch a strike.

France on Sept. 17 became the first Western country other than the U.S. to launch an air strike, destroying an Islamic State depot.

The U.S. ordered the strikes in Syria on Sept. 23, about 72 hours after five Arab nations — Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates — agreed to participate.

"US flies roughly 85 percent of airstrikes against Islamic State, in complex mix of tactics,

politics," [Fox News](#), 30 Nov 2014.

My comment is that mixing Iraq and Syria data confuses the picture, because there are different coalitions in the two ISIL-infested nations. In Iraq, the coalition is Australia and a subset of NATO nations: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. In Syria, the coalition is composed of Arab nations: Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Nonetheless, it is becoming clear that the so-called "partners" in the coalition are *not* doing their share of the bombing.

On 18 Dec, Reuters reported about airstrikes in Syria:

As U.S. fighter jets pound Islamic State targets in Syria, Washington's coalition allies appear increasingly absent from the air war.

Although President Barack Obama's administration announced the Syrian air strikes three months ago as a joint campaign by Washington and its Arab allies, nearly 97 percent of the strikes in December have been carried out by the United States alone, according to U.S. military data provided to Reuters.

The data shows that U.S. allies have carried out just two air strikes in Syria in the first half of December, compared with 62 by the United States.

That accentuates a shift that began shortly after the start of the campaign in late September, when U.S. allies carried out 38 percent of the strikes. The percentage quickly dropped to around 8 percent in October and 9 percent in November, according to Reuters calculations based on the data.

....

Two factors are at play: a decline in the overall pace of strikes and fewer easier-to-hit fixed Islamic State targets after nearly three months of bombings, U.S. officials and Gulf sources say.

Such fixed targets were initially bombed by Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates while the United States has from the start focused on more difficult ones, using precision-guided munitions to avoid civilian casualties.

....

Just under half of the 65 non-U.S. coalition air strikes in Syria tallied until 3 a.m. on Dec. 15 took place in the first nine days of the air campaign in late September, according to U.S. military data. U.S. allies carried out 20 air strikes in October and just 14 in November.

The only two strikes by Washington's allies this month targeted an electronic warfare garrison near the city of Raqqa on Dec. 7, a U.S. official said.

Phil Stewart & Yara Bayoumy, "Exclusive: As easy targets thin, Syria air strikes by U.S. allies plunge," [Reuters](#), 23:57 GMT, 17 Dec 2014.

30 Nov 2014: Iranian airstrikes

On 30 Nov 2014, *Jane's Defence Weekly* reported that Iranian aircraft had conducted airstrikes inside Iraq:

An Iranian McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II jet has struck Islamic State targets in the eastern Iraqi province of Diyala, footage shot by regional media shows.

At least one F-4 is seen conducting a bombing run against ground targets in the footage shot by *Al Jazeera*, which erroneously identified the aircraft as an Iraqi fighter. Iran and Turkey are the only regional operators of the F-4, and the location of the incident not far from the Iranian border, and Turkey's unwillingness to get involved in the conflict militarily, indicate this to be an Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) aircraft.

While the IRIAF is known to have contributed Sukhoi Su-25 'Frogfoot' ground attack aircraft to the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq (ostensibly donated to the Iraqi Air Force, but believed to be crewed by Iranian pilots), this footage is the first visual evidence of direct IRIAF involvement in the conflict.

The *Al Jazeera* footage, which was shot on 30 November, shows the IRIAF F-4 supporting Iraqi forces retaking the town of Sa'adiya in what was purported to be the government's largest operation against the Islamic State since June. Its release comes weeks after IHS Jane's reported growing evidence of Iranian involvement in the war in Iraq.

Gareth Jennings, "Iranian Phantom jet strikes the Islamic State in Iraq," *Jane's*, 30 Nov 2014.

Early on Tuesday morning, 2 Dec, the [Times of Israel](#) reported the *Al-Jazeera* and *Jane's* revelations.

During a press briefing on 2 Dec at the Pentagon, questions were asked about reports that Iran had conducted airstrikes inside Iraq.

Q: Also on ISIS, are the Iranians striking ISIS targets inside Iraq, to your knowledge?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: I've seen the reports. We have no indication that the reports are not true, that Iranian aircraft have conducted airstrikes in the last several days against ISIL targets in eastern Iraq.

Q: So you're saying they are true. You would know — the military presumably would know if those reports were —

REAR ADM. KIRBY: We have no indication that they're not true. I have no reason to believe that they're not true, those reports that Iranian aircraft struck targets against ISIL in eastern Iraq. Again, you should consult the Iranian government to speak to the activities of their military.

Q: Thanks for that. That's helpful. (Laughter.)

Q: How do you deconflict that air space?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: It's the Iraqi air space and Iraqi's to deconflict. We are not coordinating with nor are we deconflicting with Iranian military.

Q: Iraq has that kind of air control that they can deconflict air space between U.S. and — and Iranian aircraft?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Yes. Yes. It's a sovereign nation.

Q: That doesn't mean they're competent.

REAR ADM. KIRBY: They're competent enough to deconflict their air space.

Yes?

Q: (off mic) number one, is it — is the Iraqi government taking the lead for the air traffic deconfliction and control? Or is it — or are Americans involved there?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: It's Iraqi — it is sovereign Iraqi air space. It's a sovereign country. They deconflict the air space requirements over their country. We are flying missions over Iraq. We coordinate with the Iraqi government as we conduct those. It's up to the Iraqi government to deconflict that air space. We are — nothing has changed about our policy of not coordinating military activity with the Iranians.

Q: And the second part of that question was, what is the Pentagon perspective on the fact of Iranian airstrikes within Iraq at this moment, if they are occurring? Is there — you know, does that — is that helpful? Or is that problematic?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Our message to Iran is the same today as it was when it started. And as it is to any neighbor in the region that is involved in the anti-ISIL activities, and that's that we want nothing to be done that further inflames sectarian tensions in the country.

Q: (off mic) inflame sectarian tensions?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Our position hasn't changed. We don't want anything to be done that's going to further inflame sectarian tensions. We don't — we're not taking a position on this particular report of these particular strikes.

Q: I just want to clarify, because your earlier statement was a double negative, actually, so not — kind of confusing to us here in the audience what you're actually saying. When you're saying that you don't have information to dispute this, are you acknowledging that there are in fact from this building that there have been Iranian airstrikes inside Iraq?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: I'll try it again. I'm not in a position — I speak for the U.S. military, the Department of Defense. I don't speak for the Iranian military. So I'm not going to confirm operations they did or did not conduct. You should talk to the folks in Tehran about that.

What I'm saying is — hang on a second — what I'm saying is everything I've seen — actually nothing that would dispute the reports that they flew airstrikes over eastern Iraq. I've seen nothing that contradicts that. So I can't say it didn't happen. But I'm not in the business of confirming the operations of foreign militaries. They need to do that.

Does that help? Does that clear it up?

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 2 Dec 2014.

The Washington Post reported an anonymous "senior U.S. defense official" blabbed: Iranian aircraft conducted strikes against Islamic State positions in eastern Iraq last weekend, expanding Tehran's role as a close ally of Iraq's Shiite-led government.

"We do think they did do some airstrikes at targets in Iraq," said a senior U.S. defense official, who added that "several" Iranian planes were involved. Although Iran has conducted surveillance flights in Iraq in recent months, the strikes would be the first confirmed air attacks.

"We've long said they have a presence in Iraq, contributing to helping the Iraqis against ISIL," said the official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, given the sensitivity of the matter, and using an acronym for the militant group.

[Jane's Defense Weekly](#) reported Monday [1 Dec] that an Iranian F-4 Phantom II struck targets in the eastern Iraqi province of Diyala, near the Iranian border. The plane appeared on video shot Sunday by Al Jazeera, which Jane's said erroneously identified it as an Iraqi aircraft. Only Iran and Turkey fly F-4s in the region, Jane's said.

....

Iran's F-4 Phantom II jets were made by McDonnell Douglas and obtained prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Karen DeYoung and Loveday Morris, "Iranian jets strike Islamic State targets in Iraq, U.S. official says," [Washington Post](#), 12:57 EST, 2 Dec 2014.

My comments on 3 Dec: It is amazing that the Iranians continue to fly their F-4s, which are now more than 35 years old. Spare parts for these aircraft have been part of the embargo against Iran for many years.

At 11:00 EST on 3 Dec, I checked the websites of the major English-language news organizations in Iran. I found either silence or denial about Iranian airstrikes in Iraq: [FARS](#); [Ahlul-Bayt](#). I am not quoting the Iranian news articles, because I believe they are *not* credible. See also: [Al-Jazeera](#); [Reuters](#).

On 3 Dec, the Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, said that Iraq had *not* given permission for Iranian airstrikes inside Iraq. [All Iraq News](#).

On 4 Dec, this story had disappeared from the news. If it is really true that Iran failed to ask permission to bomb inside Iraq, then it is not surprising that Iran would deny all airstrikes inside Iraq.

On 5 Dec, *The Guardian* newspaper in Manchester, England reported Iran's deputy foreign minister, Ebrahim Rahimpour, admitted in an interview in London that Iran conducted airstrikes inside Iraq.

“In this matter, we did not have any coordination with the Americans. We have coordinated only with the Iraqi government,” Rahimpour told the Guardian, in an interview in London. “In general, every military operation to help the Iraqi government is according to their requests.

“We will not allow conditions in Iraq to descend to the level of Syria, which has been created by foreign players. And certainly our assistance [to Iraq] is stronger than our assistance to Syria, because they are nearer to us.”

Iranian officials initially denied carrying out air strikes inside Iraq despite video aired by Al Jazeera this week showing vintage US Phantom warplanes, of the kind the Iranian air force still uses, carrying out raids in Diyala province on 24 November, near the Iranian border.

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[The Pentagon later confirmed](#) Iranian aircraft had been in action, but stressed there had been no coordination with US forces, which have carried out multiple air strikes against Isis targets in Iraq and Syria. The new American ambassador in Baghdad, Stuart Jones, said that, as a neighbour, Iran played an important role in the fight against Isis, adding the US left it the Iraqi government to ensure US and Iranian efforts did not duplicate each other or clash.

“Let’s face it,” Jones [told the Associated Press](#). “Iran is an important neighbour to Iraq. There has to be cooperation between Iran and Iraq. The Iranians are talking to the Iraqi security forces and we’re talking to Iraqi security forces ... We’re relying on them to do the deconfliction.”

Julian Borger, "Iran confirms it carried out air strikes against Islamic State extremists in Iraq," [Guardian](#), 18:14 GMT, 5 Dec 2014. [links in original]

This means that Iran's denials on 3 Dec were a pack of lies, and also Abadi was *not* informed of Iranian requests for permission.

Beginning on 10 Nov, the U.S. Military now publishes press releases about airstrikes only on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

2-3 Dec: U.S. airstrikes

On Wednesday, 3 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 Dec. 1-3 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct 14 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 11 airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 1-3 using fighter, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, 14 airstrikes near Kobani destroyed an ISIL vehicle, 17 ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL staging area. Also, those airstrikes suppressed eight other fighting positions and struck a large ISIL unit.

In Iraq, four airstrikes near Mosul destroyed five ISIL bunkers, two ISIL-occupied buildings, an ISIL vehicle, a ISIL fighting position and two heavy weapons. In addition, those airstrikes also struck a large ISIL unit and a tactical ISIL unit. Near Ramadi, two airstrikes destroyed four ISIL vehicles. Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an excavator and struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Sinjar an airstrike destroyed four ISIL-occupied buildings and two ISIL tractor trailers. Near Hit, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle. Near al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed four ISIL vehicles. Near Fallujah an airstrike destroyed 12 ISIL vehicles, two ISIL weapon facilities and struck a tactical ISIL unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Dec. 3: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 3 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 3 Dec 2014.

4-5 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Friday, 5 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 Dec 3-5 using attack and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 14 airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 3-5 using fighter, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, five airstrikes near Kobani destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and a heavy weapon. Near Dayr Az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL excavator and struck a ISIL training camp.

In Iraq, four airstrikes near al-Qaim destroyed four ISIL checkpoints, four ISIL armored vehicles, four ISIL bunkers, five ISIL fortifications and struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Kirkuk, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL-occupied building, two vehicle IEDs and struck three tactical ISIL units. Near Samarra, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and struck two tactical ISIL units. Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL bunkers and an ISIL fortification. Near Mosul, two airstrikes

destroyed 11 ISIL bunkers, nine heavy weapons, an ISIL vehicle and struck two ISIL units. Near Fallujah an airstrike struck a tactical ISIL unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

.....

Editor's note: From this press release going forward, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve will replace USCENTCOM as the public affairs release authority.

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

Not posted at the Pentagon.

7 Dec 2014: alleged Israeli airstrikes near Damascus

On Sunday, 7 Dec, the Syrian government alleged that Israeli aircraft had bombed two sites near Damascus: (1) Dimas airbase and (2) near the Damascus International Airport. At the Damascus Airport, bombs hit a warehouse for imports and exports. The Associated Press reported:

The director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdurrahman, said the strike near the Damascus international airport targeted a depot for newly arrived weapons at a military facility that is part of the airport.

The strikes near Dimas, he said, went after weapons depots in hangars in and around a small air base. It was not clear whether those weapons were for the Syrian government or for Hezbollah. He had no word on casualties.

Albert Aji & Ryan Lucas, "Syria says Israeli airstrikes hit near Damascus," [Associated Press](#), 20:55 GMT, 7 Dec 2014.

See also [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#); [Washington Post](#).

The Israeli government had no comment. [Israeli National News](#), 17:03 GMT, 7 Dec 2014.

Commentators mentioned in the above news articles speculated that Israel wanted to prevent Syria from transferring Iranian missiles to Hezbollah. At the moment, Hezbollah is fighting against Islamic terrorists (e.g., Al-Qaeda, ISIL, Islamic Front), which benefits Israel by keeping the moderate government of Assad in control of Syria. However, someday Hezbollah may again attack Israel. Hezbollah attacked Israel in 2006.

On 8 Dec, Russia joined Syria in criticizing the alleged Israeli airstrikes. Both Syria and Russia speciously claim that Israel is assisting the "extremist groups" who are fighting against Assad. [RIA-Novosti](#); [TASS](#); [Associated Press](#). Strangely, when the USA and its Arab partners had much larger airstrikes inside Syria on 22 September, there was no protests from Syria and Russia.

6-8 Dec 2014: U.S. airstrikes

On Monday, 8 Dec 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 Dec. 5-8 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct 15 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 31 airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 5-8 using fighter, bomber, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, 14 airstrikes near Kobani destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL-occupied buildings, two ISIL staging areas, two ISIL tanks, a motorcycle, a mortar and struck eight tactical ISIL units and two ISIL fighting positions. Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck an electronic warfare garrison.

In Iraq, six airstrikes near Kirkuk destroyed two excavators, a bulldozer, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL ammunition dump and struck another excavator and an overpass servicing the ammunition dump. These airstrikes also suppressed an ISIL fighting position and struck a tactical ISIL unit near Kirkuk. Near al-Biaj, four airstrikes destroyed four armored vehicles, an ISIL checkpoint and two ISIL storage containers. Near Sinjar, four airstrikes destroyed six ISIL-occupied buildings, seven ISIL storage containers, two ISIL fighting positions, an excavator and struck an ISIL bunker. Near Mosul, four airstrikes destroyed an excavator, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL heavy weapon and struck two ISIL tactical units.

Also in Iraq, three airstrikes near al-Qaim destroyed two ISIL armored vehicles and struck an ISIL observation point. Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL armored vehicles, a bulldozer and an excavator. Near Ramadi, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL-occupied building, a front-loader and struck two ISIL units. Near Bayji, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL-occupied building and struck two tactical ISIL units. Near Rawah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tank. Near Hit, an airstrike was conducted, but there was no damage.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Dec. 8: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 8 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 8 Dec 2014.

9-10 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Wed, 10 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 Dec 8-10 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 13 airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 8-10 using fighter, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, seven airstrikes near Kobani destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and struck

three other ISIL fighting positions and a large ISIL unit.

In Iraq, four airstrikes near Sinjar destroyed four ISIL-occupied buildings, three ISIL storage containers and two ISIL fighting positions and also struck an ISIL guard tower. Near al-Qaim, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL storage container and an ISIL armored vehicle, and also struck two ISIL bunkers, two ISIL armored vehicles and two ISIL armored personnel carriers. Near Ramadi, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and a heavy weapon, and also struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL-occupied buildings, an ISIL bunker and struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Samarra, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL vehicles and struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck a tactical ISIL unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Dec. 10: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 10 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 10 Dec 2014.

11-12 Dec 2014: airstrikes

At 09:45 EST on 13 Dec, the 12 Dec press release had not yet been posted at the Central Command website, but a copy was posted at the Pentagon website on 12 Dec.

On Friday, 12 Dec 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 Dec 10-12 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 20 airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 10-12 using fighter, bomber, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, five airstrikes near Kobani destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and also struck another ISIL fighting position. Near Aleppo, an airstrike struck five ISIL-occupied buildings. Near al-Qaim, on the Syrian border, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL fortifications.

In Iraq, four airstrikes near Sinjar destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and two ISIL storage containers and also struck another ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL checkpoint. Near Ramadi, four airstrikes destroyed an excavator and five ISIL vehicles and also struck an ISIL-occupied building and three ISIL units. Near Ar Rutbah, three airstrikes destroyed two bulldozers and an ISIL storage container. Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed a bunker and a bulldozer and also struck an excavator. Near alQaim, three airstrikes destroyed four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL-occupied buildings, an ISIL storage container, and an ISIL guard tower and also struck an ISIL bunker. Near Samarra, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit. Near Rawah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL guard shack. Near Al Asad an airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

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

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

On Friday, 12 Dec, ISIL used a shoulder-fired rocket to shoot down an Airbus EC635 helicopter that belonged to the Iraqi army. [Associated Press](#). ISIL shot down two other Iraqi army helicopters in early October 2014.

13-15 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Monday, 15 Dec 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 Dec 13-15 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct nine airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted nine airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 13-15 using fighter, bomber, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, eight airstrikes near Kobani destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, two ISIL staging positions and also struck another ISIL fighting position. Near abu-Kamal, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

In Iraq, three airstrikes near Mosul destroyed an ISIL fighting position and struck three tactical ISIL units and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position. Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL compound and struck a second ISIL compound. Near Hit, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle, a trailer and an excavator. Near al-Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator. Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck two ISIL vehicles. Near Samarra, an airstrike struck a tactical ISIL unit. Near Kirkuk, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and bunker and struck an ISIL tactical unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 15: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 15 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 15 Dec 2014.

16-17 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 17 Dec 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 Dec. 15-17 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 61 airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 15-17 using fighter, bomber, attack, and remotely-piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

In Syria, five airstrikes near Kobani destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL mortar and struck two ISIL tactical units, two additional

buildings and two ISIL fighting positions. Near Abu Kamal, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.

In Iraq, eight airstrikes near Mosul destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL buildings, one ISIL mortar position, one ISIL bulldozer and an ISIL bunker and also struck a large ISIL unit and an ISIL tactical unit. Near Tal-Afar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL building and three ISIL bridges and also struck an ISIL tactical unit. Near Sinjar, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL guard towers, three ISIL containers and one ISIL storage container. Near Hit, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and an excavator. Near Rawa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building and a storage container. Near Irbil, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and struck an ISIL tactical unit. Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building.

An additional 45 strikes were conducted in support of the Peshmerga (KSF) and Iraqi security forces operating in the region. Precision airstrikes from 15 coalition aircraft destroyed approximately 50 targets, to include bulldozers, vehicles, checkpoints, enemy fighting positions, enemy fighters, and equipment.

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

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

18 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Thursday, 18 Dec 2014, the U.S. Central Command resumed daily reports of airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. (During 10 Nov to 17 Dec, reports were only issued on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.)

U.S. and partner nation military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria Dec. 18 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted five airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 18 using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani - six airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL building and also struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Tal Afar - two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul - two airstrikes struck two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL Tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi - an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 18: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 18 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 18 Dec 2014.

Note the new Central Command format is easier to read and copies the format used by the Pentagon for many weeks.

Also on 18 Dec, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that General Dempsey said that three high-level leaders of ISIL had been killed by airstrikes in Iraq since mid-November. [WSJ](#); [Daily Star](#); [Reuters](#).

19 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Friday, 19 Dec 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 Dec. 19 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted eleven airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 19 using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL staging area and struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike damaged an ISIL training compound.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL building and mortar and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and damaged an ISIL bridge.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

20-22 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Saturday, 20 Dec 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 Dec. 20 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted eight airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 20 using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL mortar, six ISIL technical vehicles and struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ar Rut bah, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL checkpoint and four ISIL tactical vehicles and damaged an ISIL storage container.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed seven ISIL machine guns and two ISIL bunkers.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL buildings and struck a large ISIL unit.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Dec. 20: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 20 Dec 2014.

Not posted at the Pentagon on night of 22 Dec 2014.

On Sunday, 21 Dec 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 Dec. 21 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct three airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted thirteen airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 21 using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL staging position and two ISIL fighting positions and struck two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Sinjar, four airstrikes destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL mortar position and three ISIL tactical vehicles and struck a large ISIL unit and two ISIL tactical units.

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes destroyed three ISIL buildings and struck a large and a tactical ISIL unit.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL VBIED.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes destroyed three ISIL vehicles and struck a large ISIL unit and a tactical ISIL unit.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL bunkers and struck three ISIL bunkers.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL building.
- Near al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical vehicle.

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

Not posted at the Pentagon on night of 22 Dec 2014.

On Monday, 22 Dec 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 Dec. 22 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct twelve airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted ten airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 22 using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists. These engagements were in support of the 7th Iraqi Army, local police and tribal fighters engaged in fighting with ISIL forces in the vicinity of Dulab.

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and struck four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Aleppo, three airstrikes destroyed artillery equipment and struck ten ISIL buildings.
- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, two ISIL trucks, an ISIL building, and two ISIL storage containers.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL checkpoint complex.

Iraq

- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes destroyed three ISIL tactical vehicles, three ISIL trucks, five ISIL buildings and struck two large ISIL units and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL building and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL buildings and struck a weapons

factory complex.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Dec. 22: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 22 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 22 Dec 2014.

23 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 23 Dec 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 Dec. 23 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted three airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 23 using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building and struck several ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Barghooth, an airstrike struck ISIL oil collection equipment.

Iraq

- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and struck a mortar and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

All aircraft returned to base safely. Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. "Dec. 23: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 23 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 23 Dec 2014.

24 Dec 2014: airstrikes

An F-16 airplane from Jordan, with a Jordanian pilot, crashed near Ar-Raqqah, Syria. The Jordanian pilot ejected, parachuted into a lake, and was captured by ISIL. This is the first anti-ISIL Coalition soldier to be captured by ISIL. The U.S. Central Command denied early reports that ISIL has shot down the airplane with a shoulder-launched missile.

[U.S. Central Command](#); [Associated Press](#) at 20:59 GMT; [Reuters](#) at 21:24 GMT; [Al-Jazeera](#) at 24:14 GMT, all on 24 Dec 2014.

On Wednesday, 24 Dec 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 Dec.

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

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani, eight airstrikes destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building, an ISIL staging position, and also struck three ISIL tactical units, an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike struck a crude oil collection point.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck an ISIL weapons stockpile.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, three airstrikes destroyed eight ISIL tactical vehicles and an ISIL storage container.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL technical vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 24: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 24 Dec 2014.

Not posted at the Pentagon.

25-26 Dec 2014: airstrikes

Neither Central Command nor the Pentagon posted a press release on 25 Dec.

On Friday, 26 Dec 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 Dec. 26 using fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct sixteen airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted fifteen airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 26 using fighter, bomber, attack aircraft, and remotely piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of those strikes:

Syria

- Near Kobani, thirteen airstrikes destroyed three ISIL buildings, two ISIL staging areas, an ISIL vehicle, and nineteen ISIL fighting positions and struck two large ISIL units and four ISIL tactical units.

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles and struck a drilling tower.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL mortar, an ISIL rocket system, four ISIL vehicles and struck a large ISIL unit and two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes destroyed three ISIL vehicles and struck three ISIL tactical units.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed three ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL commercial vehicle and struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Al Qaim, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL storage container, ISIL equipment and struck two ISIL tactical vehicles.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 26: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 26 Dec 2014.

Not posted at the Pentagon.

Journalists reported that Central Command announced a total of 39 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria on 25-26 Dec. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). The 26 Dec CenCom press release claims a total of 31 airstrikes on 26 Dec, so there must have been 8 airstrikes on Christmas day.

27 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Saturday, 27 Dec 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 Dec. 27 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 27 using fighter, attack aircraft, and remotely piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of the strikes conducted since the last press release:

Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes destroyed two ISIL buildings, five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles and struck an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building and struck an ISIL tactical unit.

- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL technical vehicles and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes struck an ISIL refinery and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck three ISIL buildings.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 27: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 27 Dec 2014.

Not posted at the Pentagon.

28 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Sunday, 28 Dec 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 Dec. 28 using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct eight airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted five airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 28 using fighter and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of the strikes conducted since the last press release:

Syria

- Near Kobani, eight airstrikes destroyed an ISIL building, thirteen ISIL fighting positions, one ISIL heavy machine gun and struck three ISIL fighting positions and a large ISIL unit.

Iraq

- Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes destroyed three ISIL guard shacks.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker and an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 28: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 28 Dec 2014.

Not posted at the Pentagon.

29 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Monday, 29 Dec 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 Dec.

29 using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 12 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq Dec. 29 using fighter, remotely piloted and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of the strikes conducted since the last press release:

Syria

- Near Kobani, ten airstrikes destroyed eleven ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL storage container and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Day az Zawr, an airstrike struck several ISIL buildings.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck several ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL buildings and struck a large ISIL unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 29: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 29 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 29 Dec 2014. This is the first press release about airstrikes at the Pentagon since 23 Dec.

30 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 30 Dec 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, Dec. 30, using fighter aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted eight airstrikes in Iraq, Dec. 30, using fighter, remotely piloted and attack aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of the strikes conducted since the last press release:

Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes destroyed three ISIL buildings, damaged an ISIL building, and struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Dayz ar Zawr, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL shipping container.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes destroyed four ISIL excavators and two ISIL

fighting positions.

- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes destroyed four ISIL buildings and three ISIL tactical vehicles and struck an ISIL tactical unit and a large ISIL unit.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck two ISIL buildings.
- Near Mosul, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles and two ISIL checkpoints and struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 30: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 30 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 30 Dec 2014.

31 Dec 2014: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 31 Dec 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, Dec. 31, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted three airstrikes in Iraq, Dec. 31, using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of the strikes conducted since the last press release:

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes destroyed four oil derricks.
- Near Kobani, five airstrikes destroyed five ISIL buildings and six ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Mosul, one airstrike struck one ISIL fighting position, destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, and struck one ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Dec. 31: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 31 Dec 2014.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 31 Dec 2014.

31 Dec 2014: airstrikes reported on 1 Jan 2015

On Thursday, 1 Jan 2015, 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, Dec. 31, 2014, using fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 17 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, Dec. 31, 2014, using fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against the ISIL terrorists.

The following is a summary of the strikes conducted since the last press release:

Syria

- Near Al Raqqa, two airstrikes destroyed five ISIL checkpoints and struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and struck an ISIL shipping container.
- Near Kobani, 13 airstrikes destroyed 12 ISIL buildings, four ISIL fighting positions, one ISIL vehicle and struck two ISIL tactical units and two large ISIL units.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, seven airstrikes destroyed six ISIL buildings and an ISIL fighting position and struck three ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL tactical units, two buildings, and a large ISIL unit.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and struck two ISIL tactical units and a large ISIL unit.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Taji, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL vehicles and one ISIL mortar system and struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Jan. 1: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 1 Jan 2015.

Not posted at the Pentagon.

U.S. Congress

On 1 Dec, the U.S. Congress resumed business after the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Congress is scheduled to adjourn for the Christmas/New Year's holiday on 12 Dec. During these two weeks, Congress needs to pass a budget for the federal government. Also, there have been promises that Congress would pass a new authorization for the President to use military force against ISIL and other terrorist organizations.

AUMF

A new Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) was promised by some Senators, who realized that both the 2001 AUMF for Afghanistan and the 2002 AUMF to depose Saddam

Hussein were *not* adequate for the current war in Iraq and Syria. There are two general concerns: (1) Obama's war in Iraq and Syria is unlawful, and (2) Congress has abdicated its Constitutional responsibility to declare war.

On 4 Dec, the Democrats seemed to want to limit the President's authority to fight ISIL, while the Republicans were more supportive of the war against Islamic terrorists. In early December, the Obama administration is *not* willing to make witnesses available to testify in Congressional hearings on the Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF), perhaps because Obama believes he can get a broader AUMF from Republicans who will control both chambers of Congress in 2015-2016. The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is hoping to vote for a new authorization on 10 Dec. [Associated Press](#); [The Hill](#), 4 Dec; [The Hill](#), 2 Dec.

On 9 Dec, John Kerry testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about the proposed AUMF, which includes a three-year limit and a ban on use of U.S. ground troops in combat roles, except to support airstrikes or rescue missions. President Obama has repeatedly and clearly stated that U.S. Military will *not* fight on the ground in Iraq ("no boots on the ground"), but Kerry pleaded with the Senate for "flexibility" by not explicitly prohibiting the President from deploying U.S. Military in combat roles. Kerry also wants no geographical restrictions on fighting ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 11 Dec, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed an AUMF that had been drafted by Senator Menendez, without input from the Obama administration. The draft prohibited the President from using U.S. troops in combat roles on the ground, and the draft AUMF expires in three years. The vote was 10 to 8, along party lines, with Democrats approving it. [Washington Post](#); [The Hill](#). [NY Times](#)(blog). This draft AUMF is only symbolic, because the full Senate will adjourn without considering it, and the current House of Representatives will never consider it. Congress will begin anew in January 2015.

In 2014, Congress failed to deliver a new Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) for the anti-ISIL war in Iraq and Syria.

On 18 Dec, the [Boston Globe](#) published an article that said the Massachusetts delegation to the U.S. Congress — all Democrats — was "vexed" that there was no debate on the war against ISIL.

U.S. Defense Dept. Budget

On 4 Dec, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 300 to 119 to pass a US\$ 585 billion defense department budget authorization. The bill also reauthorizes the training and equipping of moderate Syrian rebels that was previously passed on 18 Sep, but expires on 11 Dec.

On 12 Dec, the Senate passed the US\$ 585 billion defense department budget authorization on an 89 to 11 vote. Obama signed the bill on 19 Dec.

Omnibus Spending Bill

At midnight on 11 Dec 2014, the previous funding authorization for the U.S. Government will expire. At approximately 21:00 EST on 11 Dec the U.S. House of Representatives passed a US\$ 1,100,000,000,000 bill to fund the government through Sep 2015. The vote in the House was 219 to 206. The draft bill has a length of 1603 pages, long enough to assure that few members of Congress will know what is in the bill on which they vote. Further, the draft was released on the night of 9 Dec, not nearly enough time to read and debate such a complex and lengthy bill. Fortunately, the [Washington Post](#) summarized what is in this bill.

A news article in the [Washington Post](#) called the 2011-2012 Congress "the least productive congressional session in modern history."

On Friday night, 12 Dec, the Senate postponed a vote on the big omnibus budget bill until Monday, 15 Dec. This brief postponement will *not* immediately shut down the government, because the House passed an extension of current funding until midnight Wednesday, 17 Dec. Over the weekend the Senate was scheduled to confirm some of Obama's nominations, extend the government's terrorism insurance program, and extend some tax breaks.

Note that the Senate has a Hobson's Choice: the Senate must pass the exact bill that was approved by the House, because the House has adjourned and its members have gone back to their home states. Failure to pass the bill means the U.S. Government shuts down. Further, the huge budget bill includes dozens of significant policy changes that are irrelevant to the budget, but the Senators are *not* permitted to vote on each significant policy change.

On Saturday night, 13 Dec, the Senate passed the omnibus budget bill by a 56-to-40 vote. [Washington Post](#). Obama signed the bill on Tuesday, 16 Dec.

The Senate adjourned late at night on 17 Dec.

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 cooperate 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 31 Dec 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/syria16.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

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