

Syria & Iraq: January 2015

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 14 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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 few tens of thousands of terrorists. On 3 Dec 2014, John Kerry followed the lead of the French Foreign Minister in calling ISIL "Daesh".

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

In my essay for [Dec 2014](#), I summarized the history of the use of chlorine gas at various towns in Syria during April/May 2014. I concluded that OPCW wants to avoid the allegations of chlorine gas use in Syria. But on 6 Jan 2015, the Associated Press reported the U.N. Security Council considered a confidential third report from OPCW:

Chemical weapons investigators concluded "with a high degree of confidence" that chlorine gas was used as a weapon against three opposition-controlled villages in Syria last year, affecting between 350 and 500 people and killing 13, according to a report

obtained Tuesday [6 Jan] by The Associated Press.

The third report by a fact-finding mission from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons didn't apportion blame but said 32 of the 37 people interviewed "saw or heard the sound of a helicopter over the village at the time of the attack with barrel bombs containing toxic chemicals."

....

The 15 council members discussed the fact-finding mission's report behind closed doors Tuesday, and diplomats said the U.S. and other Western nations who signed the letter along with Jordan urged Security Council action in response to the findings. But Russia, Syria's closest ally, insisted that the report on chlorine attacks was an issue for the OPCW, which polices the Chemical Weapons Convention, the diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity because consultations were private.

....

The investigators interviewed 14 people from the village of Talmenes in Idlib governorate about barrel bomb attacks on April 21 and April 24. At two houses that were hit, a 7-year-old boy, a teenage girl, and the matriarch of a family died from exposure to chlorine gas, they said. Domestic animals including cows, goats and sheep also died at both houses.

Fourteen people from the village of Al Tamanah, also in Idlib, were interviewed by the mission's investigators about five incidents in April and May — all but one at night. Eight members of two families who had sought refuge in the village died shortly after separate attacks involving the toxic chemical, the report said.

Investigators said they interviewed nine people from Kafr Zita in Hama Governorate in northern Syria and were told that the village had been the target of hundreds of attacks with conventional weapons and 17 attacks using toxic chemicals between April and August.

Edith M. Lederer "Inspectors confident chlorine gas used in Syrian villages," [Associated Press](#), 20:52 EST, 6 Jan 2015.

See also [Washington Post](#)(AP); [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

I looked at the OPCW website on the night of 9 Jan, but could not find the report that was discussed on 6 Jan.

My comment is that 13 dead people is trivial compared to the *more* than 206,000 killed in Syrian civil war. Furthermore, OPCW is unable to identify *who* used chemical weapons — either Sarin in August 2013 or chlorine in April 2014 — so criminal prosecution is impossible. Instead of fuming about alleged war crimes from use of chemical weapons, we need to focus all of our efforts on ending the Syrian civil war.

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 nine 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. On 24 Jan 2015, Russian rebels violated agreements and began an offensive against Mariupol. By the end of Jan 2015, more than 5000 people had died in the war in the Ukraine.
2. a continuing civil war in the Central African Republic
3. more violence in South Sudan, as ceasefires are violated
4. On 14 April 2014, 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 2014, Boko Haram attacked a mosque in Kano, killing more than 102 people. On 3-7 Jan 2015, Boko Haram attacked 17 towns and slaughtered approximately 2000 people, "too many to count". [Guardian](#).
5. On 18 May 2014, 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 2014, 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.
 9. For many years, Yemen has been an impoverished, failed nation, infested by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2012, longtime president Saleh was deposed. On 19 Jan 2015, Houthi (Shiite) rebels surrounded the home of the president (a Sunni) who is supported by the U.S.-government. On 22 Jan 2015, the president and cabinet resigned, plunging Yemen deeper into anarchy.
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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 8 Jan, the SOHR posted at its website the death toll in Syria for December 2014: SOHR documented the death of 4358 people, who were killed in December/2014, and they are as following:

- 1052 civilians (156 children under the age of 18 and 91 women) including 230 civilians from al-Sh'etat in the eastern countryside of Der-Ezzor.
- 636 Syrian fighters from rebels and Islamic battalions and YPG.
- 6 dissident soldiers, 10 of them were tortured to death in regime prisons.
- 1352 Non-Syrian fighters from the IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Mohajrin wa al-Ansar

- army, and Jund al-Aqsa.
- 682 soldiers from regime forces.
- 552 NDF, peoples committees and regime spies.
- 5 Hezbollah.
- 65 Non-Syrian fighters allied to regime forces, including Shiaa fighters.
- 8 unknown people.

We, in SOHR, believed that the real number of casualties on the fighting parties is more than our number with 1000, because there is absolute secrecy on casualties and due to the difficulty of access to many areas and villages that have witnessed violent clashes and bombardment by all sides.

"About 4500 killed in December/2014," [SOHR](#), 8 Jan 2015.

On 1 Feb 2015, the SOHR posted at its website the death toll in Syria for January 2015: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 2683 people in January 2015.

The death toll is as follows:

- Civilians: 750 civilians, including 50 children and 37 women killed the regime warplanes, 61 civilians, including a child, died under torture inside the regime jails, 66 civilians, including 13 children and 12 women, die due to shelling by the Nusra Front, Islamic State, rebel and Islamic battalions, 25 civilians, including 12 children, and 3 women, died due to the bad weather, lack of treatment and medical supplies, 20 citizens executed by IS militants, 280 civilians, including 19 children and 21 women, died due to the regime shelling as well as 27 people killed by unknown gunmen.
- YPG, Rebels and Islamist fighters: 285
- Non-Syrian fighters from IS, al Nusra Front, Jund al aqsa and al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army: 877
- Defected soldiers: 5
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 382
- Fighters of the People's Committees and NDF as well as spies: 313
- Fighters of Hezbollah: 10
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 37
- Unidentified victims (documented by photos and footages): 10

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is going to monitor and document all the massacres, crimes of war and crimes against humanity which are committed against the Syrian people. In addition to, we are going to publish statistics about casualties in order to reach to that day when the conscience of international community wake up and see the cruel crimes committed against our people in Syria.

"2683 people killed in Syria over January 2015," [SOHR](#), 1 Feb 2015.

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

Rebels in Syria

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 issued a press release that announced the formation of the "Revolution Command Council", which is a coalition of rebel factions. [SNC](#).

Confusingly, subsequent Coalition News posted in December 2014 at the website of the Syrian National Coalition continues to refer only to the Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army, as documented in my [previous essay](#). Apparently, the new "Revolution Command Council" was stillborn.

On 22 Jan 2015, the president of the Syrian National Coalition met "with the FSA's Supreme Military Council (SMC) held today in the Turkish city of Gaziantep. The meeting discussed

mechanisms of establishing safe havens in northern and southern of Syria and ways to integrate the revolutionary and military forces into the SMC to create a central force that represents the nucleus of a national army." [SNC](#).

My comment is that the 22 Jan press release is *not* consistent with previous press releases by the SNC. The Supreme Military Council was abolished in September 2014. My search on 25 Jan 2015 of the SNC website found no press release about the appointment of a new Supreme Military Council after Sep 2014. Furthermore, since 15 May 2014, there is *no mention of the name* of the leader the Supreme Military Council. ([SNC 15 May 2014](#) mention of "General Abdul Ilah Bashir, Chief of Staff to the Supreme Military Council").

In my essay for [Dec 2014](#), I documented that the leader of the Free Syrian Army (Gen. Bashir) had disappeared from public view since July 2014. My search of the Syrian National Coalition website on 25 Jan 2015 shows their most recent press release that mentions Bashir is dated 9 July 2014. ([SNC](#)) It is extraordinary that the leader of an army disappears from public. I have *not* found any explanation for this disappearance.

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 2014, 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 2014, 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.

On 5 Jan 2015, [Reuters](#) reports that Turkey and USA hope to reach an agreement in January 2015 about training of between 1500 and 2000 Syrian rebels in Turkey, possibly beginning in March 2015. More rebels will be training in Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The intended goal is to train a total of 15,000 rebels by March 2018.

On 15 Jan, the Pentagon announced that 400 U.S. Military personnel would train Syrian rebels at sites outside of Syria. The goal is to train 5000 rebels in the first year. [Reuters](#).

On 16 Jan, a press briefing at the Pentagon discussed training of the Syrian rebels.

REAR ADM. KIRBY: What I can tell you, Bob, is that General Nagata continues to work this very, very hard. I think what you can expect is several hundred U.S. troops being sent over there in a training capacity to the various sites that are still being established and prepared.

I think you'll start to see orders for some of those troops over the next four to six weeks. Some could be given orders very soon, perhaps as soon as within the next week

or so. But they'll flow in, I think, over the next four to six weeks.

I'm hesitant to give an exact number on that because I think some of the sourcing solutions are still being worked out, but several hundred is about the right range. And they'll be spread out accordingly, apportioned to the different sites. Again, it'll depend on the requirements and the — and the site preparations.

I think it's also important to note that there will be significant contributions from partner nations in this as well.

Now, I can't give you an exact number there. Each country's going to have to speak for that themselves. But in addition to some countries hosting the training, which again, we're grateful for, we expect that there will be countries that will also contribute trainers to this effort and — and to complement ours. So, it's not just going to be a U.S. effort.

There will also be, in addition to, you know, back to the U.S. side, in addition to the several hundred trainers that we think we'll need to provide to this effort, I think you can expect to see there'll be additional U.S. service members going in a support capacity, and what we traditionally call enablers, that kind of thing.

So, I don't know. Again, some of these sourcing solutions are still being worked. No orders have been cut as we sit here today, so I can't get into any specifics just now. But I think — and as you know, we always do, as orders are cut and as troops are deployed, we'll make the appropriate announcements at the right time.

But the main — the main point and to your question is that the progress continues on this. You know, we read out the meeting that General Nagata had in Istanbul with some of the leaders of the Syrian opposition. He — his — his takeaway from those meetings were that they were positive, optimistic. He felt he learned a lot about them and about their interest in this, and it was clear to him that they do have an interest in contributing to this, in other words contributing trainees to — to this program. So there's — there's interest on their part. And he's optimistic that — that things are moving in the right direction.

Q: How far has the vetting gone?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: The — there has been no active recruiting yet.

That said, he has — they are working with the Syrian moderate opposition leadership to identify potential Syrian moderate groups from which recruiting could occur, but no recruiting has actually yet started. No trainees have been identified and enrolled in this program just yet.

But again, he felt very optimistic that if everything stays on track, and that's a big if, that he believes that training could begin as early as this spring.

....

Q: Just on the trainers. Given that you're also going to have enabling troops as well, is it — is it pretty realistic then to expect about close to 1,000 U.S. personnel in the end in the training effort for the Syrian opposition?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Dan, I'm resident to — reticent to give you an exact number. I think several hundred trainers. I think you will also look at — it could be about a like number of enablers and support personnel. So all told, the number total for this mission could approach 1,000. It might even exceed that. I would — I can't rule that out.

But again, let's — we need to be careful about numbers here, because they will change. And again, the sourcing solutions are still being worked out.

And as — as I said, as we — as we get better fidelity on this, and as units get orders to go, we'll make sure that you know.

Q: And then just to follow up, how soon will then those moderate Syrian rebels actually be on the ground fighting?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: How soon? Well, we've said all along, this — the training could take at least several months before they would be in a position to — to head back into the fight. It's hard to say.

I mean, if the training is able to start in March, you could be looking at some opposition groups, you know, getting back into Syria and into the fight you know, before the end of the year. I think that's certainly a possibility, but we've got a lot of work to do before we're there.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 16 Jan 2015.

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 to negotiate a peace agreement, but one wonders whether any of significant terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front) will negotiate.

Beginning in December 2014, I no longer believe that Assad can win the civil war against a large number of opponents, including Islamic terrorists. However, I have kept the title of this section for consistency with my previous essays.

On 15 Jan 2015, rebels in the al-Waar suburb of Homs negotiated a 10-day truce with the Syrian government. These rebels were the last holdouts in Homs. The [Associated Press](#) called the truce "another setback for opposition fighters".

Peace Negotiations for Syria

de Mistura's proposal

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](#).

My essays for [Nov](#) and [Dec 2014](#) mention de Mistura's proposal for a ceasefire in Aleppo. Unfortunately, his proposal has no support from the insurgents. de Mistura's proposal seems to have died sometime around 7 Dec 2014.

peace conference in Moscow

On 30 Dec 2014, 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](#).

On 4 Jan 2015, Khaled Khoja was elected head of the Syrian National Coalition. [Reuters](#).

On 5 Jan 2015, Khaled Khoja, the newly elected head of the Syrian National Coalition, "said it was unlikely the coalition would attend peace talks" in Moscow. [Reuters](#).

On 5 Jan, Agence France-Presse reported:

The newly elected head of Syria's opposition-in-exile National Coalition Monday [5 Jan] ruled out taking part in a Russian-led bid for new talks to end the Syrian conflict.

Khaled Khoja, who was elected the day before to head the opposition grouping, said Moscow's proposal was impossible.

"The dialogue with the regime that Moscow is calling for is out of the question," he

said at a news conference in Istanbul, where the coalition is based.

....

[Russia] has invited 28 opposition figures, including members of the tolerated domestic opposition as well as individual coalition members, to Moscow later this month.

Among them are Hadi al-Bahra, whom Khoja succeeded Monday, and two other previous coalition chiefs, Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib and Abdel-Basset Seida.

It remains unclear whether the coalition will seek to ban those of its members who have been invited from attending the talks in Moscow.

"New Syria opposition head rules out Moscow talks," [Daily Star](#), 22:46 GMT, 5 Jan 2015.

On 6 Jan, the Syrian National Committee posted a press release at their website:

[In his inaugural speech, Khalid] Khoja also said that "we will work with all active revolutionary forces to create a common vision that achieves the goals of the revolution, which will exclude Assad and his cronies from any future role in Syria. We will also actively engage in diplomatic efforts with international and regional parties to amplify the voice for freedom and democracy." He calls on upon the Syrian people and the revolutionary forces to rally around the leadership of the Syrian Coalition in our next phase, namely the civilian and military councils and FSA commanders, to stand united with one hand and heart to defeat Assad and his murderous regime." Khoja denies that there are any Egyptian or Russian initiatives for launching a new round of negotiates with the Assad regime. "We have been holding discussions with all Syrian opposition blocs and political trends to find a solution to the conflict. However, we will negotiate the Assad regime only if it brings about real and complete political transition," he stresses.

"Syrian Coalition to Negotiate Only if Assad Is Out," [SNC](#), 6 Jan 2015.

On 7 Jan, the Syrian National Committee posted a press release at their website:

Khaled Khoja, president of the Syrian Coalition, said that Russia, Assad's staunchest ally, is still insisting on keeping him in power through its so-called initiatives aimed at reaching a settlement for the conflict during an interview with the Turkish newspaper, Star. "In its current form, Russia's so-called initiative will surely not be accepted by the Syrian people," Khoja stresses. He attributes ISIS's surge in the region to the "reluctance of the friends of the Syrian people to stop Assad's killing machine, especially the failure to supply the FSA with advanced weapons needed to counter regime forces." Khoja points out that "Assad is no longer strong enough to regain control all over Syria. He depends solely on his air force to bomb rebel-held areas, while on the ground he depends on the Afghan and Pakistani mercenaries, among others." In his first press conference after assuming the presidency, Khoja said that "we are holding discussions with all Syrian opposition blocs. We will sit at the negotiating table with the Assad regime only if these negotiations lead to full transition of power."

"Syrian Coalition Rejects Any Settlement that Keeps Assad in Power," [SNC](#), 7 Jan 2015.

My comments: Note that the Russians had invited 28 opposition leaders to attend as individuals, *not* as representatives of organizations. I wonder if the Russians invited

individuals to reduce the power of the Syrian National Coalition, which is opposed to Assad. Also, the Russians did *not* invite Khoja to the Moscow conference, perhaps because Khoja was not important when the invitations were issued in December. Not being invited could offend Khoja, although he might not admit it in public.

The refusal of the Coalition to negotiate unless Assad resigns is old dogma, which delayed Geneva2 negotiations for seven months in 2013, as documented in my previous essays. Once again, the Coalition is an impediment to peace in Syria.

In the 7 Jan quotation, note how Khoja attributes what the *Coalition* wants to what would be "accepted by the Syrian people". The Coalition pretends to speak for the Syrian people.

The Truth is that the Syrian National Coalition is irrelevant inside Syria. For example, on 5 Jan, Reuters reported:

Despite having only tenuous links with fighters on the ground and seen as out of touch with the general population, the National Coalition remains one of the main parties in international discussions to find solutions to the almost four-year-old civil war.

"Western-backed Syrian opposition body elects new leadership," [Reuters](#), 5 Jan 2015.

On 9 Jan 2015, Reuters reported:

The main Turkish-based National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces has already shunned the meeting and said any of its members who attended would be expelled.

[Reuters](#), 19:55 GMT, 9 Jan 2015.

Note that the National Coalition enforces its "consensus" with a threat to expel anyone who defies their edict. Why is attending a peace conference so bad that attendees deserve ostracism or expulsion from an organization?

On 9 Jan, a parade of Syrian opposition leaders began to announce they would *not* attend the peace negotiations in Moscow.

- Ahmad Moaz Khatib, a former head of the Syrian National Coalition announced on 9 Jan that he would not attend. Khatib demanded that Assad cease hostile actions and release prisoners before any negotiations could begin. [Daily Star](#); [Reuters](#).
- Later on 9 Jan, Louay Hussein — a member of the opposition tolerated by Assad, but "who has been detained by the Syrian authorities since mid-November" — declined to attend. [Daily Star](#).
- But on 10 Jan, Qadri Jamil — former deputy prime minister of Syria in 2013, who now lives in Moscow — said he would attend the negotiations. [Associated Press](#).
- And on 17 Jan, Hassan Abdul-Azim, head of the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria, said several people from his group in Damascus would attend the negotiations in Moscow. [Associated Press](#).

On 17 Jan, the Associated Press reported:

A Russian initiative to host peace talks this month between the Syrian government and its opponents appears to be unraveling as prominent Syrian opposition figures shun the prospective negotiations amid deep distrust of Moscow and concerns the talks hold no chance of success.

The faltering effort suggests that even after four years and at least 220,000 people killed, the antagonists in Syria's civil war are far from burning themselves out and will likely keep fighting for a more decisive battlefield advantage before any real talks can take place.

The planned meetings in Moscow, scheduled to start Jan. 26, would be the first on Syria since a U.N.-sponsored conference in Geneva collapsed early last year after making no headway.

But the Syrian tableau has changed dramatically since then.

President Bashar Assad faces growing resentment among his supporters in the wake of bloody defeats, while his main patrons, Russia and Iran, are feeling the pinch from the global plunge in oil prices. Syria's mainstream opposition — political and armed — teeters on the brink of irrelevance, and the extremist Islamic State group has seized control of large chunk of northeastern Syria and neighboring Iraq.

The United States also has joined the fray, carrying out airstrikes with its allies against Islamic State group militants while leaving Assad's forces untouched.

Washington has been conspicuously absent from the diplomatic shuffle toward Moscow, unwilling to spend its political capital to cajole the main Western-backed opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition, to attend peace talks that have limited hopes of success.

....

So far, the Moscow conference has only a short list of attendees. Assad's government, which has relied on Russia for economic and diplomatic support as well as military hardware during the conflict, has said it is prepared to participate. A few small, government-tolerated opposition groups also have said they will attend.

....

The biggest question hangs over the Coalition, which sat across the table from Syrian government representatives at last year's Geneva talks. The group is backed by Western and Arab Gulf powers, but has little credibility with any armed opposition groups inside Syria.

Its newly elected chief, Khaled Khoja, has said the group will not attend the talks. Other members say the SNC has yet to make a final decision, although the sentiment is

decidedly against going to Moscow because the talks there do not aim to create a transitional government in Syria with full executive powers — and no Assad. Ryan Lucas, "In new blow, Syrian opposition shuns Russia peace initiative," [Associated Press](#), 07:06 GMT, 17 Jan 2015.

My comments: Everyone seems focused on the Syrian National Coalition, although the Associated Press (quoted above) admits that Coalition "has little credibility with any armed opposition groups inside Syria." The *real* opposition to Assad in the Syrian civil war comes from ISIL, Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda), and Islamic Front — yet there is no mention of inviting any of them to peace negotiations. That is probably because these three Islamic terrorist organizations are unacceptable to Syria's neighbors, and also unacceptable to Europe, the USA, and to Russia.

On 19 Jan 2015, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) finished a 13-point list of demands to be achieved in negotiations with the Syrian government. [SNC](#) press release; [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon. Strangely, the SNC did *not* post a copy of their 13-point list at their website. The SNC press release says: "The document states that halting the bombing of civilians is a prerequisite for the resumption of the negotiation process." That one demand is probably enough to prevent negotiations with the Syrian government. Another demand is that Assad resign and have no role in a new government, which will also prevent negotiations with the Syrian government.

On 20 Jan, Russia appeared to hand the negotiations in Moscow to the United Nations. Reuters reported:

A Russian moderator [Vitaly Naumkin] for next week's talks between the Syrian government and a group of opposition figures set out modest goals for the Moscow meeting, saying he would consider it a success if the sides work together and agree to meet again.

....

Naumkin said no Russian government official would be present during the talks but that U.N. special envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura or his deputy could take part as monitors if they so agree with the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Gabriela Baczynska, "Russian moderator sets modest goals for Syria talks in Moscow," [Reuters](#), 18:03 GMT, 20 Jan 2015.

On 23 Jan, three days before the negotiations in Moscow will begin, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "That meeting [in Moscow] appears to be unraveling as prominent opposition figures shun the prospective negotiations amid deep distrust of Russia."

The badly fragmented and often incoherent opposition will meet in Moscow on 26-27 Jan, without anyone from the Syrian government. On 28-29 Jan, a delegation of 7 people from the Syrian government will meet with the opposition in Moscow. The Syrian government

delegation will be led by the Syrian ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Jaafari — *not* by the Syrian foreign minister, who led the delegation to the negotiations in Geneva during Jan/Feb 2014. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

In the following chronicle of events, I am calling the meeting in Moscow a "consultation", in agreement with the official statements from the meeting. Using the word "consultation" distinguishes this meeting from negotiations, where some result or accomplishment is expected. In American English, the word "orientation" might be better than "consultation". Orientation implies neophytes becoming familiar with a new environment, while consultation implies an expert advising someone.

26 Jan: Moscow consultations begin to fizzle

On the morning of 26 Jan at 09:10 Moscow time, the day consultations were scheduled to begin, the English-language news websites in Russia were almost silent on the consultations. For example, the most recent relevant story at [RAA-Novosti](#) was from Cairo on 24 Jan, titled: "Syrian Opposition Groups Unite Over Political Solution to Conflict — Representatives of Syria's main opposition groups agreed that Syrian conflict can only have a political solution." That story ends with the sentence: "Syrian government representatives and a number of opposition groups are scheduled to meet for talks in Moscow from January 26 to 29 after Russian authorities suggested holding an informal meeting to revive Syrian peace negotiations."

The news coverage at TASS was dominated by news about the rebellion in the Ukraine. I did not see any story about the Syrian consultations at TASS on the morning of 26 Jan. The most recent relevant [TASS](#) story was on 20 Jan and mentioned that more than thirty negotiators were expected at the talks in Moscow.

The Associated Press reported on the diminished expectations and circumlocutions for this consultation in Moscow.

Russia and Syria played down any hopes of a breakthrough in talks set to begin Monday in Moscow, while much of the opposition shied away.

The four-day gathering in Moscow, billed as a meeting to "establish personal contact" between some opposition members and government officials, underscored diplomatic fatigue with the four-year conflict that has killed over 220,000 people.

President Bashar Assad refuses any option that would have him step down. The opposition is fractured between Western-backed opposition figures, rebels lacking effective arms and jihadis surging through Syria.

"These are not talks, it is a meeting," said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a press conference. In the first phase, opposition members were to agree on "common approaches toward talks with the government."

After two days, "the opposition will be joined by official representatives of the Syrian

republic, again simply in order to establish personal contact... We never had any other goals for the Moscow meeting."

Albert Aji & Diaa Hadid, "Syrian president dismisses talks with 'puppets' in interview," [Associated Press](#), 12:20 GMT, 26 Jan 2015.

My comment is that Lavrov is working diligently to decrease expectations from these consultations, so that when the consultations fail to produce any results, Lavrov's credibility is not damaged.

The previous Associated Press article mentioned Assad called the opposition "puppets" in the title, but did not explain in the text of the article. However, the BBC explained:

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad has dismissed the country's Western-backed opposition as "puppets", as a new round of peace talks begins in Moscow.

In an interview with [Foreign Affairs](#), Mr Assad questioned if any dialogue with people who were "paid from the outside" would be fruitful.

The main Western-backed alliance, the National Coalition, has already said it will not attend the four days of talks.

However, five of its members are due to participate in a personal capacity.

They will be joined by representatives of opposition groups tolerated by the authorities in Damascus.

....

President Assad said the conflict could only be ended with a political solution but was dismissive of the idea of negotiating with exiled groups.

He pointed to the fact that leading rebel groups on the ground had refused to recognise the authority of the National Coalition.

"If you want to talk about fruitful dialogue, it's going to be between the government and those rebels."

"Opposition means national; it means working for the interests of the Syrian people. It cannot be an opposition if it's a puppet of Qatar or Saudi Arabia or any Western country, including the United States, paid from the outside. It should be Syrian," he added.

"Assad rejects Syria opposition 'puppets' as Moscow talks begin," [BBC](#), 13:25 GMT, 26 Jan.

[Reuters](#) characterized the U.S. Government response to the consultations in Moscow as "ambivalent". Reuters concluded that U.S. Government has reduced pressure on Assad. (Copy at [Gulf News](#).)

Interview with Assad

Part of the 20 Jan *Foreign Affairs* interview with Assad says:

ASSAD: But when you want to do something, it's not about the opposition or about the government; it's about the Syrians. Sometimes you might have a majority that doesn't belong to any side. So when you want to make a change, as long as you're talking about a national problem, every Syrian must have a say in it. When you have a dialogue, it's not between the government and the opposition; it's between the different Syrian parties and entities. That's how we look at dialogue. This is first. Second, whatever solution you want to make, at the end you should go back to the people through a referendum, because you're talking about the constitution, changing the political system, whatever. You have to go back to the Syrian people. So engaging in a dialogue is different from taking decisions, which is not done by the government or the opposition.

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN: So you're saying that you would not agree to any kind of political transition unless there is a referendum that supports it?

ASSAD: Exactly. The people should make the decision, not anyone else.

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN: Does that mean there's no room for negotiations?

ASSAD: No, we will go to Russia, we will go to these negotiations, but there is another question here: Who do you negotiate with? As a government, we have institutions, we have an army, and we have influence, positive or negative, in any direction, at any time. Whereas the people we are going to negotiate with, who do they represent? That's the question. When you talk about the opposition, it has to have meaning. The opposition in general has to have representatives in the local administration, in the parliament, in institutions; they have to have grass roots to represent on their behalf. In the current crisis, you have to ask about the opposition's influence on the ground. You have to go back to what the rebels announced publicly, when they said many times that the opposition doesn't represent us—they have no influence. If you want to talk about fruitful dialogue, it's going to be between the government and those rebels. There is another point. Opposition means national; it means working for the interests of the Syrian people. It cannot be an opposition if it's a puppet of Qatar or Saudi Arabia or any Western country, including the United States, paid from the outside. It should be Syrian. We have a national opposition. I'm not excluding it; I'm not saying every opposition is not legitimate. But you have to separate the national and the puppets. Not every dialogue is fruitful.

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN: Does that mean you would not want to meet with opposition forces that are backed by outside countries?

ASSAD: We are going to meet with everyone. We don't have conditions.

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN: No conditions?

ASSAD: No conditions.

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN: You would meet with everyone?

ASSAD: Yes, we're going to meet with everyone. But you have to ask each one of them: Who do you represent? That's what I mean.

....

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN: So what do you see as the best way to strike a deal between all the different parties in Syria?

ASSAD: It's to deal directly with the rebels, but you have two different kinds of rebels. Now, the majority are al Qaeda, which is ISIS and al-Nusra, with other similar factions that belong to al Qaeda but are smaller. Now, what's left, what Obama called the "fantasy," what he called the "moderate opposition"—it's not an opposition; they are rebels. Most of them joined al Qaeda, and some of them rejoined the army recently. During the last week, a lot of them left those groups and came to the army.

JONATHAN TEPPERMAN: Are these former defectors who came back?

ASSAD: Yes, they came back to the army. They said, "We don't want to fight anymore." So what's left of those is very little. At the end, can you negotiate with al Qaeda, and others? They are not ready to negotiate; they have their own plan. The reconciliation that we started and Mr. de Mistura is going to continue is the practical solution on the ground. This is the first point. Second, you have to implement the Security Council resolution, no. 2170, on al-Nusra and ISIS, which was issued a few months ago, and this resolution is very clear about preventing anyone from supporting these factions militarily, financially, or logistically. Yet this is what Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are still doing. If it's not implemented, we cannot talk about a real solution, because there will be obstacles as long as they spend money. So this is how we can start. Third, the Western countries should remove the umbrella still referred to by some as "supporting the moderate opposition." They know we have mainly al Qaeda, ISIS, and al-Nusra.

"Syria's President Speaks, A Conversation With Bashar al-Assad," [Foreign Affairs](#), 26 Jan 2015.

My comments are that I agree with Assad when he wants to negotiate with the actual fighters (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, etc.) and *not* with politicians who have never been elected by people inside Syria (e.g., Syrian National Coalition). Assad is a bit inconsistent when he welcomes assistance from Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, but when foreign nations give assistance to rebels that makes the rebels "puppets" of foreign governments.

Later in the interview, Assad proposes cooperation with the USA on airstrikes inside Syria. [Reuters](#) noticed those paragraphs in the interview and reported them as a news story. As I have observed for many months, Obama is obsessed with removing Assad, which blinds Obama to the [advantages](#) of cooperating with Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorists.

The U.S. State Department Spokesperson had a swift reaction to Assad's remarks in the interview:

QUESTION: Today President Assad gave an interview to *Foreign Affairs*, I think. Did you have a chance to look at it? What do you think about the —

MS. PSAKI: Well, I've seen, certainly, the reporting on it. The delusions that Assad presents here only reaffirm our — reinforce our firm belief that he no — he long ago lost all legitimacy and must go. There can never be a stable, inclusive Syria under his leadership.

....

Well, I can just reiterate to you what our position is. There's no question Assad has been there longer than we would like, and we've long felt that he's lost his legitimacy. Obviously, there are a range of circumstances that have made it difficult on the ground, including the fact that a year and a half ago, a range of external forces began to help and boost support for him. We've talked about that quite a bit. Our position hasn't changed. Some of it, I think, is an over-reading into one comment the Secretary made that is an inaccurate reading of what the United States position is.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 26 Jan 2015.

On 27 Jan, Tepperman, the editor of *Foreign Affairs* who interviewed Assad, appeared on National Public Radio and questioned Assad's mental state:

TEPPERMAN: And when [Assad] would speak these wild untruths, which — he had to know that I knew were patently false — he voiced them with unblinking, unshakable confidence. And it was really, really striking. And that said one of two things to me; either he is a spectacularly competent liar and this was all being done for domestic consumption, in which case he's merely a sociopath, or he really believes what he's saying. You know, this is like Hitler in his bunker when the Russians were an hour outside Berlin still insisting to his generals that Germany could win the war.

INSKEEP: Or he's speaking to the world and essentially saying and essentially saying, I'm not going anywhere.

TEPPERMAN: Right.

INSKEEP: Is that the message you think he was sending?

TEPPERMAN: Well, I do think so, and this to me is one of the other big takeaways from the interview. You know, if you've been watching carefully over the last few weeks, the West has started to send signals that it is more open to a compromised solution with Assad about how to end the war. In the past, the U.S. had insisted that Assad had to step down as a precondition to any peace treaty. In the last few weeks, [U.S. Secretary of State] Kerry and others have started to suggest that that's no longer necessary.

Steve Inskeep, "Syrian President Assad Talks To 'Foreign Affairs' Magazine," [NPR](#), 27 Jan 2015.

News report at [Al-Arabiya](#).

27 Jan: Moscow consultations begin to fizzle

I looked at the English-language TASS and RIA-Novosti websites in Moscow at 14:00 and 22:50 Moscow time on 27 Jan, but there was no news of any accomplishments on 26-27 January. The consensus seems to be that the consultations will accomplish nothing.

[Reuters](#) mentions: "None of the main Sunni Muslim insurgent groups fighting on the ground

was invited."

Given the international isolation of Russia because of Russian support for rebels in the Ukraine, I would expect Russia to trumpet its diplomatic achievement in arranging a peace conference for Syria. But instead the English-language news media in Russia are silent about what is happening inside this peace conference.

Why does the Syrian opposition need two days (i.e., 26-27 Jan) of talks without the Syrian government? The Syrian opposition had several meetings in Cairo earlier in January to develop a consensus.

28 Jan: Syrian government joins consultation in Moscow

TASS reported on agreement by the opposition:

At talks in Moscow, the Syrian opposition agreed a unified position on the necessity to stop violence and free political prisoners and abducted people, representative of independent opposition circles Khaled al-Mahamid told TASS.

"We were united in the necessity to stop violence, free political prisoners and those kidnapped, including women and children," al-Mahamid said, adding that the participants of the talks will voice those proposals at the upcoming negotiations with a delegation from Damascus.

"We believe it necessary to block channels of armament supply to terrorists, open access for humanitarian assistance to blocked areas," he said.

"Now we are all united in that the Geneva Communique [of June 2012], all points, are the basis for Syrian settlement," al-Mahamid said.

"In Moscow, Syrian opposition agrees unified position on necessity to stop violence," [TASS](#), 21:11 GMT, 27 Jan 2015.

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov will meet with the opposition and representatives of the Syrian Government. TASS reports:

The negotiations between Syria's opposition and government representatives began on Monday [26 Jan] from consultations of the opposing parties. Over the past two days, they may have tried to offer a common position, on the basis of which later on they could be working on ways to overcome the crisis. On Wednesday [28 Jan], the opposition will present results of its work to the delegation of the Syrian authorities. The negotiations are most likely to continue on Thursday [29 Jan].

The delegation of official Damascus is headed by Syria's Permanent Representative at the United Nations Bashar al-Jafari. The opposition's over 30 delegates from various parties and movements have come to Moscow. The list of participants has not been published, and the meeting is held behind closed doors. The only opposing movement — the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCR), based in Istanbul, is not represented at the negotiations.

The discussions are of purely inter-Syrian character and do not involve representatives of the international community or the media, thus information about the talks is very limited. However, TASS learned from Safwan Akkash of the National Coordination Committee (NCC), that at the talks in Moscow the Syrian opposition "managed to reach agreement on certain positions, which should have positive effect on the inter-Syrian negotiation process." He said, the atmosphere during the discussions "has been very positive."

"Russian FM to meet with Syrian negotiators in Moscow," [TASS](#), 05:30 GMT, 28 Jan 2015.

RIA-Novosti reported that on 27 Jan the opposition had agreed on ten points, which were presented to the Syrian government on 28 Jan. The list of ten points was *not* disclosed to the public. [RIA-Novosti](#), 12:02 GMT, 28 Jan.

TASS reports that the Syrian government wants further discussions with the opposition, possibly in Damascus. [TASS](#), 16:46 GMT, 28 Jan.

29 Jan: Moscow consultations finished

I looked at the English-language TASS and RIA-Novosti websites in Moscow at 15:20 Moscow time on 29 Jan, but there was no news of any accomplishments on 28-29 Jan.

Later, TASS reported:

Next round of consultations between the Syrian government and the opposition will be held in Moscow while the final meeting will be held in Damascus, the Syrian ambassador to the UN and delegation's head, Bashar Jaafari, said on Thursday [29 Jan].

The next consultative meeting will be held in Moscow and arrangements on it will be made by diplomatic channels, he said. As for the final meeting, the parties to the consultations would like to hold it in Damascus.

Jaafari clarified that the final meeting would be held in the form of a full-fledged dialogue between the government and the opposition, not consultations.

....

The Syrian government's delegation to the Moscow consultations hopes the Geneva communique of June 30, 2012 could be amended in view of growing terrorism in Syria, Bashar al-Jafari, the head of the governmental delegation said on Thursday.

"Since the adoption of this document, the threat of terrorism has grown dramatically. This aspect is not reflected in the communique. We believe this issue can be discussed at a final consultative meeting in Damascus," he said.

"Next round of inter-Syrian consultations to be held in Moscow — Syrian government source," [TASS](#), 16:40 GMT, 29 Jan 2015.

In another news article, [TASS](#) reported that the moderator of the consultation said the Syrian

government's proposal to modify the Geneva Communiqué "failed to gain the upper hand".

The *Syria Times* published the full text of the so-called "Moscow Principles", to which the Syrian government delegation and five opposition parties (but *not* the Coordination Commission, which is backed by the Syrian National Coalition) agreed:

Over the past four years, Syria witnessed the spread of unprecedented wave of terrorism that victimized tens of thousands of people in Syria and caused suffering to millions. Terrorists and extremists from all over the world were sent to Syria to promote takfiri thinking and impose new style of life which is very strange to the Syrian society.

The Syrian economic and social infrastructure, built over the past decades by the Syrians' efforts, in addition to the country's cultural heritage have been the target of the terrorists' acts of looting, stealing and destruction.

On this basis, all national peaceful parties in the Syrian society and all national people should adopt decisive procedures to make a change in the situation as soon as possible.

In this context, it is necessary to set political principles for Inter-Syrian-national dialogue without preconditions that help the Syrians settle urgent national issues.

Such principles include:

1. Preserving the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.
2. Fighting all forms of terrorism and coordinating efforts to combat terrorists and extremists in the Syrian land.
3. Settling the crisis peacefully on the basis of Geneva Statement issued on June 30 in 2012.
4. Deciding Syria's future based on free expression and democracy.
5. Rejecting any foreign intervention in Syria's affairs.
6. Maintaining the army and armed forces as a symbol of national unity and preserving the state's institutions.
7. Preserving the sovereignty of law, respecting the participle of citizenship and enhancing the principle that all citizens are equal before the law.
8. Rejecting any form of foreign armed forces existence in Syria without the approval of the Syrian government.

"Moscow Consultative Meeting: Syrian Government, Five Opposition Parties Agree on Moscow Principles," [Syria Times](#), 29 Jan 2015.

Different translation at [Breaking News](#).

Strangely, the news reports from Moscow on 26-29 Jan did *not* mention U.N. envoy de Mistura. If he was attending the consultations, then he was invisible.

The [Associated Press](#) news story at 17:57 GMT on 29 Jan was titled: "Syria talks in Moscow end without visible results". That was a bit pessimistic, because most of the participants did agree on the "Moscow Principles". [Reuters](#) reports that the opposition and Syrian government did agree to meet again, at an unspecified future time.

These consultations could *not* bring peace to Syria, because *no* representatives of the fighters (e.g., ISIL, Nusra, Islamic Front, moderate rebels, etc.) were present. The fighters were not invited.

On 30 Jan, an opposition delegate said the next consultations would be "in Moscow in late February or early March". [RIA-Novosti](#).

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.)

No Report for December 2014

On 31 Dec 2014 and 18 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.

Report for January 2015

On 22 Jan 2015, Ban issued his monthly report required by Resolutions 2139 and 2165. This January 2015 report actually covers events in December 2014. As noted in my previous essays, the U.N. document delivery system had been nonfunctional since 16 May 2014. But on 28 Jan 2015, I downloaded a copy of Ban's January 2015 Report from the U.N. website.

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

22. The humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has continued to deteriorate, with 12.2 million people requiring assistance. Nearly 3.8 million people have been forced to flee the country as refugees, and approximately 7.6 million people — almost half of the Syrian population — are now internally displaced.

....

31. Of the 4.8 million people in hard-to-reach areas, some 212,000 people remain besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic, with 185,500 people besieged by Government forces in eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk and another 26,500 people besieged by opposition forces in Nabul and Zahraa.

....

36. In Nabul and Zahraa, about 26,500 people are besieged by opposition forces. No humanitarian assistance has reached the two villages since 8 May 2014. Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)," United Nations Security Council, [S/2015/48](#), 22 Jan 2015.

Haruna Yukawa & Goto beheaded by ISIL

On 20 Jan 2015, ISIL announced that it would behead two Japanese citizens, Kenji Goto Jogo and Haruna Yukawa, unless a ransom of US\$ 100 million was paid for each hostage within 72 hours (23 Jan deadline). Yukawa was captured by ISIL on 17 Aug 2014, and Goto was captured by ISIL in Oct 2014. [Associated Press](#); [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#).

On 24 Jan, ISIL released video of Goto holding a photograph of decapitated Yukawa. ISIL dropped its US\$ 100 million demand for Goto, and instead wants to exchange Goto for a failed suicide bomber in 2005 who is currently in a prison in Jordan. [The Guardian](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).

Obama condemned ISIL before the beheading video could be authenticated. [White House](#). But then there is never a bad time to condemn ISIL. <grin>

My comment is that I am concerned about the emphasis placed on the beheading of 3 Americans, 2 Britons, and 1 Japanese citizen when more than 200,000 Syrians have been killed in the civil war. Also note the frustration of leaders of major industrial nations (e.g., USA, U.K., Japan) when dealing with ISIL. The terrorists in ISIL demonstrate their power by defying the threats, demands, and anger of industrial nations. The public fuming of leaders of industrial nations is a major propaganda victory for ISIL.

On 27 Jan, ISIL released a statement that the Jordanian government must release the failed suicide bomber within 24 hours, or else ISIL would execute Goto, and also execute the Jordanian military pilot who was captured in Syria on 24 Dec 2014. [Associated Press](#).

On 28 Jan, Jordan caved in and agreed to release the failed suicide bomber from prison in exchange for ISIL releasing the Jordanian military pilot. The government of Jordan did not mention Goto. ISIL then extended the deadline for executing the two hostages until sundown (14:30 GMT) on 29 Jan. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 29 Jan, Jordan demanded proof that its pilot was still alive. When ISIL failed to deliver

proof, Jordan held its prisoner inside Jordan, instead of delivering her to the Syria-Turkey border for the prisoner exchange. The deadline for the exchange expired with no report of what was happening. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 30 Jan, ISIL continued its silence about the hostages. Jordan announced that if ISIL executed the Jordanian pilot, then Jordan would retaliate by executing "as soon as possible" *all* ISIL prisoners currently in Jordan's prisons. [Daily Mail](#); [Al-Bawaba](#) at 15:42 GMT on 30 Jan. More than one day after ISIL's deadline to execute the Jordanian pilot, there is still silence from ISIL. [Associated Press](#) at 20:15 GMT on 30 Jan.

On 31 Jan at 02:30 GMT — 36 hours after the deadline on 29 Jan — Japanese broadcaster NHK reported a Japanese government official said negotiations with ISIL were "at a standstill". [NHK](#). The [Ashai Shiumbun](#) newspaper translated the same statement as "in a stalemate". A standstill is no activity, while a stalemate is repetitive activity that can *not* result in victory for either party. The [Japan Times](#) newspaper translated the same statement as "is now deadlocked", which means no progress in reaching a consensus. It appears that the silence by ISIL is most accurately described as a standstill, because the other two translations imply futile activity.

On 31 Jan at approximately 20:30 GMT, journalists began to report ISIL had released a video showing the beheading of Goto. [Ammon News](#) at 20:27 GMT; [Reuters](#) at 20:35 GMT; [BBC](#); [NHK](#); [Associated Press](#).

It seems no atrocity is complete until the U.S. president has condemned it, so Obama condemned the execution of Goto. [White House](#).

My comment is that there is far too much news coverage of ISIL's beheading of a few non-Arabs, and too little news coverage of the deaths of more than 200,000 Arabs in Syria. Further, the emphasis on beheading of non-Arabs is favorable publicity for ISIL in the minds of ISIL's supporters, as it shows that ISIL is powerful and the USA, U.K., and Japan are weak. As I said above, the terrorists in ISIL demonstrate their power by defying the threats, demands, and anger of industrial nations. The futile rhetoric of leaders of industrial nations is a major propaganda victory for ISIL.

Debate in Iraq

Death Toll in Iraq

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of monthly death tolls announced by UNAMI in 2013-2015.

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 essays for [September](#), [October](#), [November](#), and [December](#) 2014 each chronicle more atrocities, including bombings of civilians by ISIL and executions of unarmed people by ISIL.

On 12 Jan 2015, the Associated Press reported a suicide bombing in Iraq:

A suicide car bomb killed 12 Shiite militiamen and Iraqi soldiers Monday in a town north of Baghdad, authorities said, sparking a battle between security forces and fighters with the extremist Islamic State group.

The suicide bomber rammed his explosive-laden car into a gathering of soldiers and Shiite fighters in the town of Abasiyat, just south of Tikrit, 130 kilometers (80 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

Police and hospital officials said the attack killed 10 militiamen and two soldiers, while wounding 18 people.

....

Iraq sees near-daily bombings and other attacks mainly targeting the Shiite majority and security forces. Tikrit, held by the Islamic State group, and surrounding areas have been under constant attacks by its extremists.

Sameer Yacoub, "Officials say suicide bombing kills 12 people in Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 14:11 GMT, 12 Jan 2015.

Three Islamic bombs in markets in two towns near Baghdad, and in the Shiite district of Baghdad, killed at least 18 people on 17 Jan. [Associated Press](#).

On 26 Jan, an Islamic sniper shot three bullet holes in a Boeing 737 airplane from Dubai, UAE that was landing at Baghdad airport. Initial reports said that two of the 154 passengers were wounded, but later reports said one girl was slightly wounded. [All Iraq News](#); [Aviation Herald](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#).

As four airlines from the UAE cancelled all flights to Baghdad in response to the 26 Jan shooting [Reuters](#), the Iraqi government issued a truly amazing piece of propaganda designed to reassure airlines:

Iraqi Transportation Minister Bayan Jabr said authorities believe the shooting was unintentional — possibly from someone firing off rounds at a social event such as a

wedding or funeral — but they are not ruling out the possibility that it was an intentional terrorist attack.

Adam Schreck, "Airlines halt flights to Baghdad after gunfire hits plane," [Associated Press](#), 14:42 GMT, 27 Jan 2015.

My comment is that the Arab custom of firing rifles and pistols into the air to celebrate is dangerous and should be abolished. And the Islamic terrorism of shooting at civilian airplanes is even more dangerous and should be abolished, along with exterminating all of the terrorists. One remembers the Islamic terrorists who shot at a civilian airplane in Peshawar, Pakistan on 24 June 2014, killing one passenger, which was cited in my [ninth essay](#) on Syria.

On 26 Jan, Iraqi prime minister Abadi issued a [press release](#) that called shooting into the air "uncivilized". Abadi did *not* mention the incident of hitting a civilian airliner with bullets. Abadi may have been trying to prevent celebrations if Iraq won the soccer Asian Cup. ([All Iraq News](#), 25 Jan)

On 26 Jan, Shiite militiamen alleged killed 72 unarmed civilians (probably Sunnis) in Barwana, Diyala province of Iraq. Additionally, Iraqi army troops watched the massacre, but the army did nothing to prevent or stop the massacre. [Reuters](#); [Arab News](#); [Daily Star](#); [NY Times](#). On 28 Jan, prime minister Abadi ordered an investigation into the alleged massacre. [BBC](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP). My comment is that propoganda about unity and inclusiveness can *not* erase the fact of massacres like this one. But, since Abadi can *not* prevent such atrocities, all he can do is bleat about unity.

On 29 Jan, a series of four bombings and one shooting in or near Baghdad killed at least 19 people. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) reports at least 21 dead.

On 31 Jan, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL had burned all of the non-Islamic books in the main library in Mosul. This is a continuation of ISIL's earlier destruction of historic religious shrines and archaeological relics.

On 31 Jan, the [Associated Press](#) reported that five Islamic bombs in or near Baghdad killed at least 14 people.

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.

It is interesting to compare the 7 Jan attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris with the 12 Jan suicide bombing in Iraq. Each attack by Muslims killed 12 people. But the attack in Paris was the major news story in the USA for at least five days, while the attack in Iraq was ignored by news media in the USA. Why the difference? Perhaps deaths in the civil war in

Iraq are ordinary and expected, while one does *not* expect terrorist attacks in Paris. Further, the attacks in Paris could have happened anywhere in Europe (or the USA), as terrorists return from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and other Islamic conflicts — making the attacks in Paris an attack on Western Civilization.

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.

This continuing condemnation by Muslim clerics is *not* something that is nice to have. It is an essential element in fighting against Islamic terrorism. On 3 Dec 2014, sixty nations agreed that "ideological delegitimization" was one of five "lines of effort" that would be used to defeat ISIL, see my [essay](#).

El-Sisi in Egypt

The president of Egypt spoke at Al-Azhar University in Cairo the week before the Islamic atrocities in France. He called for tolerance in Islamic religious discourse, instead of the rigid orthodoxy of extremists.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi has called for a “revolution” in religious discourse to confront extremist ideology during a speech celebrating the birth of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad on Thursday [1 Jan].

Sisi called for “revamping religious speech in accordance with the tolerant Islamic religion” during the celebration organized by Egypt’s Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Endowments). The Egyptian president called on the Awqaf Ministry and Al-Azhar, the highest Sunni authority in the country, to do more to combat extremist ideology and promote a moderate understanding of Islam.

....

“Islamic religious scholars from across the world will confirm in one voice: ‘no’ to extremism, and ‘yes’ to tolerance,” he said.

During his speech, Sisi specifically called on Al-Azhar scholars to lead the process of revitalizing religious discourse in Egypt and confronting extremist ideology and incitement to violence, an implicit reference to the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Egyptian state holds responsible for a series of terrorist attacks in the country following the ouster of Islamist president Mohamed Mursi.

In comments to Asharq Al-Awsat, professor of Islamic jurisprudence at Al-Azhar

University Abdul Halim Mansour said: “Renewing religious discourse requires a return to the religious discourse that was present during the time of the Prophet which was characterized by flexibility, without imposing itself on anybody.”

Waleed Abdul Rahman, "Egypt: Sisi calls for 'renewal' of religious discourse," [Asharq Al-Awsat](#), 2 Jan 2015.

On 8 Jan, the *Wall Street Journal* published an English translation of part of Sisi's speech. I have copied all of what the WSJ printed:

I am addressing the religious scholars and clerics. We must take a long, hard look at the current situation. I have talked about this several times in the past. We must take a long, hard look at the situation we are in. It is inconceivable that the ideology we sanctify should make our entire nation a source of concern, danger, killing, and destruction all over the world. It is inconceivable that this ideology. . . .

I am referring not to ‘religion,’ but to ‘ideology’ — the body of ideas and texts that we have sanctified in the course of centuries, to the point that challenging them has become very difficult. . . .

It has reached the point that [this ideology] is hostile to the entire world. Is it conceivable that 1.6 billion [Muslims] would kill the world’s population of seven billion, so that they could live [on their own]? This is inconceivable. I say these things here, at Al-Azhar, before religious clerics and scholars. May Allah bear witness on Judgment Day to the truth of your intentions, regarding what I say to you today. You cannot see things clearly when you are locked [in this ideology]. You must emerge from it and look from outside, in order to get closer to a truly enlightened ideology. You must oppose it with resolve. Let me say it again: We need to revolutionize our religion. . . .

Honorable Imam [the Grand Sheik of Al-Azhar], you bear responsibility before Allah. The world in its entirety awaits your words, because the Islamic nation is being torn apart, destroyed, and is heading to perdition. We ourselves are bringing it to perdition. "Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi challenges imams to rethink Islamic teachings that antagonize the rest of the world." [WSJ](#), 8 Jan 2015.

Sisi's remarks seem to have been ignored in English-language newspapers in Arab nations. His remarks are apparently highly controversial amongst Muslims, who have grown accustomed to the dogma of spreading Islam either by proselytization or conquest.

On 19 Jan, Sisi spoke to the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Agence France Presse reported:

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi Monday [19 Jan] said the fight against "terrorism" needs a new Muslim religious discourse in addition to security and military measures.

"The rise in terrorism ... requires a thoughtful response from the international community," said Sisi told the World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi.

"The fight must not only be restricted to security and military aspects ... but should include a reformed religious discourse from which false ideologies that could lure some into adopting violence to impose their ideas have been removed," [Sisi] said.

"Egypt President Sisi urges new Muslim religious discourse to fight 'terrorism'," [Daily Star](#), 19 Jan 2015.

Also posted at [Al-Arabiya](#), and part at [Saudi Gazette](#).

The religious content of Sisi's speech was ignored by the two major newspapers in the UAE: [The National](#) and [Gulf News](#).

Reaction to Islamic terrorism in Paris, France

See [below](#) for the discussion of the Islamic reaction to the terrorism in Paris, France on 7-9 Jan 2015.

U.K. letter to Muslim leaders

On 18 Jan, two leaders in the United Kingdom government sent a letter to more than one thousand Muslim leaders in the U.K., including every mosque in England. Here I quote part of their letter:

....

We are proud of the reaction of British communities to this attack [in Paris]. Muslims from across the country have spoken out to say: not in our name.

But there is more work to do. **We must show our young people, who may be targeted, that extremists have nothing to offer them.** [boldface added] We must show them that there are other ways to express disagreement: that their right to do so is dependent on the very freedoms that extremists seek to destroy.

We must show them the multitude of statements of condemnation from British Muslims; show them these men of hate have no place in our mosques or any place of worship, and that they do not speak for Muslims in Britain or anywhere in the world.

Let us assure you that the Government will do all we can to defeat the voices of division, but ultimately the challenges of integration and radicalisation cannot be solved from Whitehall alone. Strong community-based leadership at a local level is needed.

You, as faith leaders, are in a unique position in our society. You have a precious opportunity, and an important responsibility: **in explaining and demonstrating how faith in Islam can be part of British identity.** [boldface added] We believe together we have an opportunity to demonstrate the true nature of British Islam today.

There is a need to lay out more clearly than ever before what being a British Muslim

means today: proud of your faith and proud of your country.

We know that acts of extremism are not representative of Islam; but we need to show what is.

....

/signed/
The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State

Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Communities and Local Government

"Eric Pickles' letter to Muslim leaders: the text in full," [The Independent](#), 19 Jan 2015.

[Boldface added by Standler in two places.]

Official [copy](#).

This letter was met with dismay by the Muslim leaders, some of whom criticized it as a right-wing attack on Islam. [The Guardian](#); [The Telegraph](#). The U.K. Prime Minister, Cameron, then supported the letter. [BBC](#); [The Guardian](#); [Express](#); [The Independent](#). Obviously, nonviolent Muslims are very sensitive about government telling them to help solve the problem of Islamic terrorism. While one can understand that sensitivity, Muslim clerics — as the above letter correctly says — "are in a unique position" to influence young Muslims who might otherwise join ISIL or Al-Qaeda. This controversy in the U.K. over a reasonable letter shows the great difficulty of enlisting moderate Muslim clerics in the war against Islamic terrorism.

On the morning of 22 Jan, I searched Google News and the U.K. Prime Minister's websites, but I found nothing significant since Cameron's public support on 19 Jan.

No Criminal Prosecution of Cowardly Iraqi Army Officers

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

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

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

Lebanon.

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

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

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

When I searched Google News on 2 Sep, 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.

7 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 14:10 Baghdad time on 7 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 262 members (80%) present.

At 17:38, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 8 Jan.

8 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 12:31 Baghdad time on 8 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 247 members (75%) present. The draft budget law was read aloud.

At 17:33, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 10 Jan.

10 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 11:59 Baghdad time on 10 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 206 members (63%) present.

At 16:30, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 12 Jan.

12 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 11:50 Baghdad time on 12 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with

220 members (67%) present. The draft budget law was discussed again.

At 15:16, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 20 Jan, which was later postponed until 21 Jan.

21 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 12:10 Baghdad time on 21 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 220 members (67%) present.

At 18:26, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 22 Jan.

22 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 12:22 Baghdad time on 22 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with a quorum present.

At 14:50 — only a two hour meeting (!) — [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 24 Jan.

24 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 13:34 Baghdad time on 24 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 230 members (70%) present.

At 17:39, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 26 Jan.

26 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 14:12 Baghdad time on 26 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 230 members (70%) present.

At 15:05 — less than a one hour meeting (!) — [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 29 Jan.

29 Jan 2015: Parliament meets

At 17:00 Baghdad time on 29 Jan, [All Iraq News](#) Parliament was scheduled to convene with an unknown number of members present. Parliament finally passed the budget law. [All Iraq News](#).

At 23:17, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 10 Feb.

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](#), [November](#), and [December](#) for previous history.

On 6 Jan, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that 41 ISIL terrorists (i.e., 24 near a bookstore and 17 "in the north of Mashatah Nour") and 7 Kurds died in Kobani in one day. [SOHR](#). Notice that the numbers in the SOHR text (24+17) disagree with the 31 number in the SOHR headline. [Reuters](#) reports: "The Kurds ... now control around 80 percent of Kobani, pushing Islamic State out towards the south and southeast, according to the Observatory."

On 14 Jan, the Associated Press reported:

With more than a thousand militants killed and territory slipping away, the Islamic State group is losing its grip on the Syrian border town of Kobani under intense U.S.-led airstrikes and astonishingly stiff resistance by Kurdish fighters.

It is a stunning reversal for the Islamic State group, which just months ago stood poised to conquer the entire town — and could pierce a carefully crafted image of military strength that helped attract foreign fighters and spread horror across the Middle East.

"An IS defeat in Kobani would quite visibly undermine the perception of unstoppable momentum and inevitable victory that IS managed to project, particularly after it captured Mosul," said Faysal Itani, a fellow at the Atlantic Council, referring to the militants' seizure of Iraq's second-largest city during its blitz into Iraq from Syria last summer.

....

Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, estimates the Kurds now control roughly 80 percent of Kobani. Kurdish forces offer similar estimates. Four months after barreling into the town, the extremists barely hold Kobani's southern and eastern edges, activists and residents say, despite weekly reinforcements to protect what it clearly views as a major strategic prize.

Since mid-September, the battle has killed some 1,600 people, including 1,075 Islamic

State group members, 459 Kurdish fighters and 32 civilians, according to the Observatory.

"Kobani is on the verge of being free of the Islamic State group," Abdurrahman said.

The militant group's "death toll is very high and they are not able to advance." Bassem Mroue, "Islamic State group losing ground in symbolic Kobani battle," [Associated Press](#), 22:01 GMT, 14 Jan 2015.

Agence France Presse reported that ISIL "launched a fierce new attack" on Kobani on 16 Jan 2015. ISIL paid for their assault with 23 dead, but 8 Kurds died. [Daily Star](#).

On 26 Jan, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the Kurds now controlled 90% of Kobani.

Reliable sources informed SOHR that YPG fighters, led by Mahmoud Barkhadan, could advance in the neighborhood of Kani Erban and monitor Tishreen School. They also advanced in the neighborhood of Maqtalah in the city of Ayn al- Arab. Thus, YPG has taken control over 90% of the city of Ayn al- Arab "Kobani" and IS militants receded towards the eastern strip at the outskirts of Ayn al- Arab "Kobani" city.

Meanwhile, cross-cutting resources informed SOHR that IS organization sent a battalion consisting of about 140 members, vast majority under the age of 18 and newly joined the training camps of Islamic battalions, to battlefronts in the city of Kobani, where SOHR could document death of 6 members who are under the age of 18.

"YPG fighters seize 90% of the city of Ayn Arab 'Kobani'," [SOHR](#), 26 Jan 2015.

On 26 Jan 2015, the Associated Press reported that ISIL was almost defeated in Kobani: Kurdish fighters backed by intense U.S.-led airstrikes pushed the Islamic State group almost entirely out of the Syrian town of Kobani on Monday [26 Jan], marking a major loss for extremists whose hopes for easy victory dissolved into a bloody, costly siege that seems close to ending in defeat.

Fighters raised a Kurdish flag on a hill in the border town near Turkey that once flew the Islamic State group's black banner. It represents a key conquest both for the embattled Kurds and the U.S.-led coalition, whose American coordinator had predicted that the Islamic State group would "impale itself" on Kobani.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and senior Kurdish official Idriss Nassan said the Islamic State group had been nearly expelled, with some sporadic fighting on the eastern edges of the town.

"The Islamic State is on the verge of defeat," said Nassan, speaking from Turkey near the Syrian border. "Their defenses have collapsed and its fighters have fled."

Zeina Karam, "Islamic State group nearly pushed out of Syria's Kobani," [Associated Press](#), 13:24 GMT, 26 Jan 2015.

Later on 26 Jan, the Kurds in Kobani declared victory over ISIL, as the remaining ISIL forces fled from Kobani. [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#), 22:28 GMT on 26 Jan; [Reuters](#), 01:12 GMT on 27 Jan. However, the Pentagon was not ready to declare victory in Kobani, but agreed that the Kurds now dominated Kobani. [Reuters](#), 18:46 GMT on 26 Jan. It is not known whether ISIL will concede defeat or try to recapture Kobani.

While Kobani may be liberated from ISIL, at least half of Kobani was destroyed during the four-month battle, and there is currently no food, no water, no electricity, and no hospital in Kobani. In summary, Kobani is *no longer* habitable. [Daily Star](#). On 28 Jan, Agence France-Presse reported that Kobani was in ruins: "Pulverized buildings, heavily armed fighters roaming otherwise deserted rubble-strewn streets: The ferocious battle for Ain al-Arab has left the Syrian border town in ruins..." [Daily Star](#); [Arab News](#). On 1 Feb, the [NY Times](#) mentioned the devastation in Kobani.

There is a lesson here — if anyone is listening. If we destroy every town that ISIL has occupied, there will be an immense cost to rebuilding Syria and Iraq, and refugees will remain refugees for years after the victory in their former town. Destroying a town in order to save it is an irrational act, but war contains many irrational acts.

On 31 Jan, ISIL admitted defeat in Kobani, blamed U.S. airstrikes, and ISIL vowed to recapture Kobani. [Associated Press](#).

On 2 Feb, the Kurds pushed into villages surrounding Kobani, as ISIL fled from those villages. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

Daily News

Abadi boasts of victory over ISIL in 2015

In his New Year's Day message, the Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, proclaimed:

The Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, congratulates Iraqis on the New Year and confirmed that 2015 will be a year for liberating all Iraqi territories from the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant terrorists and a year to bring back all the displaced to their houses and areas in addition to reconstructing the liberated cities.

"Abadi: 2015 will be year to liberate all Iraqi territories from ISIL," [All Iraq News](#) 1 Jan 2015.

This New Year's Day speech was *not* posted on the prime minister's English-language website.

On 6 Jan, Abadi appeared at the graduation ceremonies for the Iraqi military college and said:

"We will liberate all the Iraqi territories from the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant terrorists soon."

"All Iraqi territories to be liberated from ISIL soon, says PM," [All Iraq News](#) 6 Jan 2015.

On 18 Jan, the Associated Press reported the reality of the situation:

Nearly every night for a year, mortar and sniper fire from Islamic State group militants has pinned down outgunned Iraqi troops on the edge of Fallujah.

The city, the first to fall to the Sunni extremists a year ago this month, exemplifies the lack of progress in Iraq's war against the Islamic State group, which holds a third of the country. U.S.-led airstrikes and Iranian aid have helped Iraqi troops, militiamen and Kurdish fighters take back bits around Islamic State-held territory, but recapturing it all remains far out of reach.

....

The fall of Fallujah in January 2014 started the Islamic State group's dramatic blitz across Iraq. In June, the extremists captured Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, then swept south toward Baghdad in a march that put almost all the Sunni-majority regions of northern and western Iraq into its hands. The Iraqi military crumbled, with troops often dropping their weapons and fleeing.

Vivian Salama, "A year on, Islamic State group still rules Iraq's Fallujah," [Associated Press](#), 12:29 GMT, 18 Jan 2015.

My comment is that any future success by the Iraqi army depends on Abadi purging corrupt army officers, training of Iraqi soldiers by the U.S. Military, airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition, and help from Iran.

5 Jan 2015: U.S. began training Iraqi army

On 20 Dec 2014 in Anbar, and on 27 Dec north of Baghdad, the U.S. Military began a six-week course of training for soldiers in the Iraqi army. [Pentagon](#); [Central Command](#); [Reuters](#).

On 12 Jan 2015, Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, admitted that "Iraq may need three years to rebuild and restructure its military". However, Abadi said: "This does not mean that the fighting with Islamic State will last for three years." [Reuters](#) explains: "corruption is widely blamed for the near collapse of the army".

7-9 Jan 2015: terrorism in Paris, France

On 7-9 Jan 2015, three French Muslims killed 17 people in a series of terror attacks in Paris, France. (see [below](#)) This was the major news story in Europe and the USA during 7-11 Jan, pushing whatever occurred in Syria and Iraq out of the news. I looked at *The Daily Star* in Lebanon every day, and also *Al-Arabiya* and *Al-Jazeera*, but found little significant news from Syria and Iraq during this time.

12 Jan 2015: Iraqis ungrateful to USA

On 12 Jan, Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, said: "The US-led Coalition to the Iraqi Army is too slow, but it was improved in the last two weeks." [All Iraq News](#); [Press TV](#) in Iran. Remember that Obama was waiting for the Iraqi parliament to form a new government during June-August 2014, before beginning airstrikes. Then the Iraqi army was incompetent, corrupt, and cowardly — *not* able to fight battles against ISIL.

On 12 Jan, the [Associated Press](#) reported that "In the eyes of most Iraqis, their country's best ally in the war against the Islamic State group is not the United States", but Iran. The Associated Press also says "But many Iraqis believe the Americans mainly want to help the Kurds." Well, that is because the Kurds have a functional military (i.e., peshmerga), and the Iraqi army is incompetent, corrupt, and cowardly.

13 Jan 2015: Obama wants bipartisan support for his AUMF

In my essay for [Dec 2014](#), I described how the U.S. Senate failed to approve a new Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) in Iraq and Syria. During a 13 Jan meeting at the White House with leaders of the new U.S. Congress, Obama said his staff is preparing a draft AUMF for Congress to approve. [Politico](#); [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).

20 Jan 2015: Obama's State of the Union Speech

Although the State of the Union speech is mostly propaganda and empty promises, here is what Obama said about the war against ISIL:

In Iraq and Syria, American leadership — including our military power — is stopping ISIL's advance. Instead of getting dragged into another ground war in the Middle East, we are leading a broad coalition, including Arab nations, to degrade and ultimately destroy this terrorist group. (Applause.) We're also supporting a moderate opposition in Syria that can help us in this effort, and assisting people everywhere who stand up to the bankrupt ideology of violent extremism.

Now, this effort will take time. It will require focus. But we will succeed. And tonight, I call on this Congress to show the world that we are united in this mission by passing a resolution to authorize the use of force against ISIL. We need that authority.

(Applause.)

"Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address, January 20, 2015" [White House](#), 20 Jan 2015.

My comment is that this multi-billion dollar per year war, which will last an unknown number of years, received only two terse paragraphs in the SOTU speech.

At least Obama now admits that he needs a new Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) in the fight against ISIL. In 2014, Obama's position was that the authorizations for the wars in Afghanistan and deposing Saddam Hussein in Iraq were adequate for the fight against ISIL. Incidentally, Obama made an admission that the current war against ISIL is unlawful because it has not been authorized by Congress, although Congress has approved

funding for the war. Note that the AUMF is *not* "to show the world that we are united in this mission", but is a Constitutional requirement for the authorization of all wars by Congress.

Note that Obama did *not* say anything about the need for consistent and continuing condemnation of terrorism by Muslim clerics, in part to discourage young Muslims from joining Al-Qaeda and ISIL. Pickles and Ahmad attempted that in the [U.K.](#) a few days before Obama's SOTU speech, and they received a huge protest from Muslim clerics.

21 Jan 2015: Interview with Abadi

On 21 Jan 2015, the Associated Press reported an exclusive interview with Abadi: Iraq's prime minister on Wednesday [21 Jan] appealed for more aid for the country's beleaguered ground forces, which have yet to score a decisive victory against the Islamic State group despite five months of U.S.-led coalition air raids.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Haider al-Abadi praised the coalition's air campaign but said the international community has stalled on commitments to train and equip the ground forces needed to retake major cities.

"We are in this almost on our own," he said. "There is a lot being said and spoken, but very little on the ground."

....

The United States spent billions of dollars training and equipping Iraq's army during its eight-year intervention, only to see security forces crumble last summer when the Islamic State group swept across northern Iraq, capturing the country's second largest city Mosul.

The failure of the security forces was largely attributed to the sectarian policies of al-Abadi's predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki. Since assuming office in September, al-Abadi has reached out to the Kurdish and Sunni minorities and sought to revamp the armed forces, but the army has yet to retake much ground.

....

"We want to see an acceleration of the training, acceleration of the delivery of arms," al-Abadi said. He reiterated that Iraq does not want any foreign boots on the ground, but said it needs "support and logistics."

"We are fighting very hard to find resources to purchase arms," al-Abadi said. "We are left almost alone to get these arms and munitions for the army, for our fighters, and we expect much more."

Vivian Salama & Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "AP Interview: Iraq premier says ground troops need more aid," [Associated Press](#), 17:58 GMT, 21 Jan 2015.

My comment is that it is disgusting that the Iraqi government under Maliki squandered the

huge investment that the USA made in Iraq. Then the incompetence, corruption, and cowardice of the Iraqi army made them ineffective in resisting a relatively small group of ISIL terrorists in 2014. On paper, the Iraqi army outnumbered the ISIL terrorists by *more* than ten to one, perhaps thirty to one. But, instead of engage the invading ISIL terrorists, the Iraqi army fled. The Iraqi army abandoned their U.S.-supplied weapons and equipment to be captured by ISIL. And now the Iraqi government has the temerity to demand that the USA give more *free aid* to the Iraqi military!

On 1 Jan (see above), Abadi was boasting that the Iraqi army would liberate *all* of Iraq from ISIL during 2015. Three weeks later, Abadi is begging for weapons and ammunition for his so-called army that *might* be ready to fight in July 2015.

On 22 Jan, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Hagel, gave a press conference at the Pentagon, in which he refuted Abadi's complaints:

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, yesterday Prime Minister Abadi said that he was upset by what he considered the slow, stalled pace of U.S. weapons and training, both by the U.S. and the coalition in Iraq. Do you agree with his assessment? Has that been slow or delayed? And the 6,000 — the reports of 6,000 insurgents killed, is that a measure of what the U.S. is doing, and is that number accurate?

SEC. HAGEL: Well, regarding Prime Minister Abadi's comments, first, I don't agree with those comments. I met with Prime Minister Abadi, as many of you know who accompanied me on that trip about a month ago. The fact is that we have put a particular emphasis on getting the kind of equipment and materiel, ammunition, the needs, the requirements for the Iraqi Security Forces and the — and the Kurds.

To give you some examples, last year we were able to move more than 1,500 Hellfire missiles, expedited in every one of these cases, all of the requests that the Iraqi government has made.

We'll have provided over 250 MRAPs, some of those went to the Kurds. Tens of thousands of small arms and ammunition. The flow of ammunition and materiel and the requests continue at an accelerated rate.

So, I do — **I do disagree with the prime minister's comments. I would say even further, I don't think they're helpful.** [boldface added] We have a coalition of over 60 countries that have come together to help Iraq. And I think the prime minister might want to be a little more mindful of that.

We are continuing to deploy more American troops for training. And we have three of four training sites now operational in Iraq. We have about a dozen coalition partners who have trainers there, along with our trainers. We'll have a fourth training camp up soon.

So, we are doing everything we can possibly do to help the Iraqis.

As to the second part of your question, first, I have not seen any verification of that number of 6,000 that you referred to. We do know that thousands of ISIL fighters have

been killed, and we do know that some of ISIL's leadership have been killed.

But also, as you ask, is that the measurement or a significant measurement of progress? It is a measurement. But I don't think it is the measurement. I mean, I — I was in a war where there was a lot of body counts every day. And we lost that war.

What you look at is you look at things like do you have ISIL on the defensive? And I think by most every measurement, not imperfect, not perfect, they have been on the defensive.

Are they having difficulty recruiting? Yes they are.

The Peshmerga and the Iraqi Security Forces cut into their supply lines? Yes, they have.

Has there been a distortion in command and control networks of ISIL? Yes, there has been. Significant, tangible, measurable.

These are also the metrics you look at as to how much progress you're making in a war.

....

QUESTION: How would you rate the Abadi government now that he's been in office since August, on that front in terms of taking steps — (inaudible) — the Sunni minority and certain legislation that will be important for that campaign?

SEC. HAGEL: But first, the commitment that Abadi has made, Prime Minister Abadi, to in fact do what we think the United States and what he believes and I do believe he believes it, to form a more inclusive government, to allow all the elements of his country, Sunni, Shia, Kurds, to have a role, a real role, not just a paper role, in governing and a say in governing, is something that he is doing.

Is he moving as fast as we would like? Probably not. But in governing, especially in democracies, and when there are elections, you have certain parameters. And those are insulators, and those are safeguards that assure the people that voices, all voices will be heard. He has a lot of political dimensions and dynamics to what he is trying to do, which are not easy.

....

So, I think [Prime Minister Abadi is] trying, I think he's making every effort to do that, but it's not easy to do and we recognize that. But the acceleration of that is going to really determine, and ultimately the outcome of that effort, the future of Iraq.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Hagel in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 22 Jan 2015. (Boldface added in one place by Standler.)

22 Jan 2015: meeting of anti-ISIL coalition

On 22 Jan, foreign ministers and other leaders from 21 nations met in London to discuss the war against ISIL.

After the meeting, the U.K. foreign minister, Philip Hammond, Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, and U.S. secretary of state, John Kerry, held a joint press conference.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAMMOND:

Today's meeting confirmed the determination of our broad and united coalition to defeat not only ISIL, but also the ideology that underlies it, and not just in Iraq and Syria, but wherever it rears its head. We recognize that political progress in both Iraq and Syria will be vital in ultimately defeating ISIL in those countries, and Prime Minister Abadi updated the meeting on progress to date and the significant challenges remaining. We congratulated him on the progress that has been made in Iraq in the hundred or so days since he formed his government and reaffirmed our support for what he is doing.

Most importantly, we all confirmed our commitment to the struggle, however long it takes and wherever it leads us, to defeating the scourge of violent Islamist extremism. Thank you. [introducing Abadi:] Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER AL-ABADI: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. I think we are here to strengthen the international coalition against Daesh and the terrorist organizations. I'm personally here to get more support from our partners, and I'm very glad I have heard a lot of commitment from our partners to support Iraq in its fight against Daesh. This is quite important for the Iraqi people and very important for our military.

We have — in the last month, I have seen an increase in the air campaign against Daesh positions in terms of number and effectiveness, and many countries take part in this program and in this campaign in the reconnaissance and in the actual bombing of Daesh targets. We have seen an increase in delivering of arms and munitions — thank you very much for our partners on this — and we have seen a program of training of our armed forces. This program has started end of last year. There has been a lost art for this training, but eventually, there was such a program, and it's very successful, and we are happy with it.

We wanted to see a commitment from our coalition partners, international coalition, to support and stand with Iraq, and this is forthcoming. I think it was very useful, very frank, and very open meeting today. We have discussed a lot of issues which is standing in our way to stamp out Daesh. Iraqi forces are achieving a lot of progress on the ground, and the Government of Iraq has been reaching out to all political and communities inside Iraq and to the region. I think we have established now a very successful network and cooperation with the regional powers, neighboring countries of Iraq and in the region and inside Iraq. And this is very important to fight Daesh. We cannot fight Daesh without this progress. And the international coalition, which we

attended today, will strengthen our resolution to fight Daesh.

Another issue, which is being discussed today, is the fiscal problem for Iraq. You know oil prices have dropped to about 40 percent of their level last year. Iraqi economy and budget relies 85 percent on oil, and this has been disastrous for us. I cannot stress this anymore, and we explained this to our partners in the coalition, and I think there is — there will be a program to stand with Iraq in their crisis. We don't want to see a reverse of our military victory due to our budget and fiscal problems, and we have been assured that every member of this coalition will stand with Iraq in its fight against Daesh.

Daesh is a terrorist organization. It knows no race, no religion, no region. It spares nobody, so everybody must be facing Daesh. Thank you. [introducing John Kerry:] Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, Foreign Secretary Hammond and Prime Minister Abadi, thank you both very much for — in your case, Mr. Prime Minister, traveling here and spending an important amount of time. And Philip, thank you for co-hosting today and providing the venue here in London and bringing everybody together, and Mr. Prime Minister, I want to thank you for your forceful, strong, and important leadership at this critical time.

I think it's important to note that this meeting that we just took part in here today takes place in the context of the members of the global coalition to counter Daesh, having come together for the very first time as a group in Brussels. And as Foreign Secretary Hammond mentioned, in Brussels there were representatives from 60 different countries representing a very broad, worldwide range of views and of priorities. Today and then, we came together with the very same goal. We all understand that Daesh, as it is commonly known in the Arab world, is not simply a Syrian problem. It's not an Iraqi problem. Daesh is a global problem, and it demands a coordinated, comprehensive, and enduring global response. And that's what we came here to talk about today.

The coalition came together around the joint statement that was issued out of the meeting in Brussels, and that outlines our multiple lines of effort that we are currently engaged in — providing security assistance, strengthening the capacity of Iraq to stand on its own, protecting our homelands, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters, draining Daesh's financial resources, providing humanitarian relief to victims, and ultimately defeating what Daesh represents, defeating Daesh as an idea, if it can be called that.

And all the coalition partners are continuing to make vital contributions to this, and we mean all 60. Whether it's sheltering refugees, training, advising Iraqi troops on the front lines, or speaking out against Daesh's hateful, false ideology, we appreciate the contribution of every single member, each of whom has chosen one line of effort or another.

....

QUESTION: What mechanisms have you put in place, and what assurances have you given Prime Minister Abadi so that this coalition doesn't turn into a Friends of Syria-type coalition where a lot of talking take place with little results on the ground?

SECRETARY KERRY: [summarizing real accomplishments:]

Now since [the 5 Sep 2014 meeting in Brussels], almost 2,000 strikes in Syria and Iraq have had a high degree of precision and accuracy, and they have definitively put Daesh on the defensive where those strikes take place and in that particular region. We are taking out Daesh's fighters in the thousands thus far — single digits, but thousands. Their commanders — 50 percent of the top command has been eliminated. Hundreds of vehicles and tanks, which they captured, have been destroyed. Nearly 200 oil and gas facilities that they were using have been eliminated from their capacity to sell and get revenue from them — the — that's the infrastructure that funds their terror — as well as more than a thousand fighting positions, checkpoints, building, barracks in Iraq and in Syria.

Foreign fighter networks have been broken up in Austria, in Malaysia, in Kosovo, in other countries. Foreign fighters have been prosecuted in Germany, Australia, the UK. Saudi Arabia has now issued formal decrees criminalizing Daesh, and it's broken up Daesh cells with links to Syria.

We are destroying ISIL's refining capacity, which destroys their revenue. We're denying it revenue from oil trade. There are growing signs that our initiatives are, in fact, restricting Daesh's operations, including reports from Mosul that fighters are not getting paid or they're receiving far less than what the Daesh leadership had promised them. You saw that a whole large group of people tried to defect from Daesh because they didn't think the promises were being fulfilled and they didn't like their lives, and they were killed for wanting to leave.

The U.S. has provided over 208 million [dollars] for humanitarian response in Iraq, over three billion [dollars] for Syria in support of the UN-led humanitarian response in the last four years. And we've seen fatwas now issued by top religious leaders in Egypt and Saudi Arabia declaring Daesh a direct threat to Islam. And following the countering of a Daesh conference that was held by Kuwait in November, we're working with coalition partners to establish operation rooms to combat their social media presence and be able to message in real time.

"Remarks With U.K. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi After Their Meeting," [State Dept.](#), 22 Jan 2015.

My comment is that Hammond recognized the need to defeat "the ideology that underlies [ISIL]". Hammond honestly mentioned "defeating the scourge of violent Islamist extremism". It is important to recognize the real connection between Islamic religion and ISIL. See my discussion [below](#) of the Islamic terrorist attacks on Paris.

Similarly, Kerry reminded everyone of the "lines of effort" agreed at the 3 Dec 2014 meeting in Brussels, including "ultimately defeating what Daesh represents, defeating Daesh as an

idea, if it can be called that." Kerry also mentioned "speaking out against Daesh's hateful, false ideology". [Above](#), I mention some attempts at progress in this area during January 2015. Sadly, mainstream Muslim clerics seem resistant to repeatedly and continually condemning Islamic terrorism.

In response to a question, Kerry claimed that half of ISIL's top leadership had been killed. That is new information.

A Communiqué was *not* issued for this meeting.

23 Jan 2015: Current Military Situation in Iraq

In the 22 Jan briefing by Hagel, in which he refuted Abadi's criticism, the following exchange occurred about the number of ISIL fighters killed in Iraq.

QUESTION: And the 6,000 — the reports of 6,000 insurgents killed, is that a measure of what the U.S. is doing, and is that number accurate?

HAGEL: As to the second part of your question, first, I have not seen any verification of that number of 6,000 that you referred to. We do know that thousands of ISIL fighters have been killed, and we do know that some of ISIL's leadership have been killed.

But also, as you ask, is that the measurement or a significant measurement of progress? It is a measurement. But I don't think it is the measurement. I mean, I — I was in a war where there was a lot of body counts every day. And we lost that war.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Hagel in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 22 Jan 2015.

My comment: The killing of 6000 ISIL fighters would be significant, given that ISIL has a total of approximately 30,000 fighters. The problem is that there are no reliable body counts from ISIL. In my essay for [Aug 2014](#), I chronicled the implausible numbers of ISIL fighters killed in Iraq. I concluded: "these reports of high death tolls are probably hysterical exaggerations by the Iraqi government, who are engaged in propaganda to make it *appear* that the Iraqi military is successfully fighting against ISIL."

On 23 Jan 2015, there was a press conference at the Pentagon:

QUESTION: In the last week or so, we've had a number of facts stated about the war against ISIS. Without putting them in context, we asked you I think it was last week, 700 kilometers regained, square kilometers regained out of how many? What percentage of land that ISIS once held does that represent? We now have senior officials saying that half the ISIS leadership has been killed. Is that one of two or 10 of 20?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Right.

QUESTION: And also the 6,000 fighters — out of how many?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Right. Let me see if I can provide a little bit of context on that, David.

On the — first of all, on the numbers of fighters killed, I want to — I want to revisit because I thought Secretary Hagel was very strong on this yesterday in what he said on numbers of killed. While it is something we're mindful of, they are estimates only. And they are not being used by this department or Central Command as a measure of overall success.

It is certainly something we're mindful of because it goes to the ability to degrade their capability, but it's not the metric of success and it's not — it's not a metric that we're going to hang our hat on when it comes to talking to the success of this strategy.

That said, the estimates on ISIL's strength vary — vary greatly. This is not a uniformed army with identification cards and recruiting posters. So, it's hard to say at any given time how many fighters they have in the field. And I would also point out that their fighters come and go. Not — you know, not everybody stays, you know, for the duration. It's not an organized force.

The — the estimates put out earlier still stand, that — that the estimates of their strength is somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000. That's a pretty broad range because as I said, it fluctuates. So, if you take the 6,000 figure that was acknowledged yesterday, that's would be — I would — if I were you looking for perspective, I'd say it's that number out of somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000.

But I — I really want to stress again that that's not a hard and fast figure. It's not a figure that we're paying an exaggerated amount of attention to. And the denominator there of 20,000 to 30,000 obviously changes and fluctuates all the time. So that's that.

On the land, the 700 square kilometers that we talked about, which is I guess roughly about 300 square miles, we assess that that land retaken from ISIL is largely in the north and has been taken — taken back largely by Kurdish forces, Peshmerga. And just to put it in perspective, as we stand here today — and again, I want to stress that these figures change. So let me put that out as preamble.

Right now, I think the general assessment is that in assessed areas of Iraq — I'm talking about Iraq and I'm talking about those areas that — that matter and that we are able assess. So this isn't the whole land mass of the country because there are very vast parts of Iraq that are unpopulated and not in contention, and frankly, aren't relevant.

But in those areas of Iraq that are, you're looking at roughly 55,000 square [kilometers] that ISIL has control or dominance over, roughly. In comparison to 77-some-odd [thousand] square kilometers that the Iraqi government has control or dominance over. (CROSSTALK)

REAR ADM. KIRBY: And then there's about, a rough amount, 56 or so thousand square kilometers that Kurdish forces have control or dominance over. So that's about 188,000 total square kilometers — I did the math before I came out there, I'm pretty

sure that's right, of assessed area in Iraq — and I want to stress again, it's assessed area, it's not the entire land mass of Iraq.

So, there's a little bit of perspective.

....

But [these numbers are] gonna change over time. It's gonna continue to change over time. And it's not simply — that's not simply those, even those — even those figures are not simply the only metrics of success here.

....

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Leadership, I don't know. I've seen this press reporting of half the leadership. I don't know what that equates to. I'd point you to CENTCOM. I don't have an assessment of what their leadership roster looks like.

Again, leaders come and go. And this isn't — this isn't an organized army with, you know, a bill of fare there, where everybody, you know, has a billet that they're filling.

So, you know, it depends on what you mean by leader and at what level. I just don't — I don't have that kind of context today.

....

There's a long way to go here. We've said this is going to take several years — three to five, probably. You know, from a military perspective, that the real goal here is good governance in Iraq, good governance in Syria, options for people so they don't have to be attracted to this ideology. And I've said it before, I'll say it again: That's the real center of gravity for this group is their ideology, not their fighters, not their trucks, and not necessarily, you know, every little camp they set up or position that they establish.

It's about this ideology and that's going to take time. And it's not going to be done through military means alone.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 23 Jan 2015. [At one point, Kirby said "miles" instead of "kilometers", and in another place Kirby omitted "thousand". I have deleted the part of the transcript that corrects these errors and simply inserted the corrections in brackets at the proper place. Finally, I changed the first of Kirby's ambiguous "it's" to include a noun, by inserting his previous words in brackets in place of the "it's".]

My comments: The Pentagon is trying to avoid body counts and other measures of success in the war against ISIL. But the previous day, Kerry claimed half of ISIL's leaders had been killed. Admiral Kirby admitted the imprecision in a count of ISIL's leaders, which makes it a meaningless statistic.

On the land area captured from ISIL in Iraq, the Peshmerga and Iraqi army have managed to wrest control of Mosul Dam, the oil refinery at Beiji, and the town of Sinjar from ISIL. ISIL

has repeatedly attacked these targets, trying to recapture them, so any victory may not be permanent. Note that recapturing 700 km² from the 55,000 km² held by ISIL in Iraq is pitiful — that's only 1% after a half-year of airstrikes.

Looking at land area recaptured from ISIL is premature, because the Iraqi army still has incompetent and corrupt leaders appointed by Maliki and untrained soldiers. Abadi himself (see above for 12 Jan) admits it will take three years to rebuilt the Iraqi army, although small parts of the Iraqi army may be ready to fight ISIL in mid-2015. Without an effective army on the ground, we can not recapture land seized by ISIL. Military experts in 2014 repeatedly said we needed ground forces to recapture towns from ISIL, and those experts were correct.

Admiral Kirby is correct to emphasize defeating ISIL's ideology. See my remarks on the Islamic public relations problem, [above](#).

Spread of ISIL to Egypt

On 3 Nov 2014, an Islamic terrorist group in Egypt, Ansar Beit [Bayt] al-Maqdis, pledged allegiance to the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIL). [Al-Arabiya](#); [BBC](#).

On 29 Jan 2015, the same group attacked four targets in the North Sinai and Suez provinces, and killed 27 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#). On 30 Jan, the death toll climbed to 31 or 32. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).

Spread of ISIL to Libya

On 9 Nov 2014, the [Associated Press](#), reported that a group of "militants" in Darna, Libya had "pledged their allegiance" to the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIL).

On 3 Jan 2015, [Reuters](#) reports that the Islamic State in Libya claimed credit for executing 12 Libyan soldiers.

On 27 Jan 2015, two terrorists from the Libyan affiliate of ISIL attacked a hotel in Tripoli, Libya — killing 4 Europeans, 1 American, and 5 guards. [Associated Press](#), 12:16 GMT, 28 Jan.

Spread of ISIL to Afghanistan

On 12 Jan 2015, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the Afghani government had confirmed that the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIL) was operating in Afghanistan. The [BBC](#) also reported this story on 12 Jan. On 16 Jan, the [Associated Press](#) had another news story about the "emerging threat" of ISIL in Afghanistan and Pakistan. On 15 Jan, [Radio Liberty](#) interviewed Afghans about ISIL in Afghanistan. On 18 Jan, [Al-Jazeera](#) reports similar information.

On 8 Dec 2014, [Reuters](#) had a story titled "Afghan students find inspiration in Islamic State's success". On 21 Jan 2015, [Reuters](#) reported disenchanted Taliban fighters in Afghanistan are considering the more successful ISIL ideology.

Note that the U.S. Government captured Mullah Abdul Rauf, then a Taliban commander, in 2001 and confined him in Guantanamo for six years. The U.S. Government released Rauf to the Afghani government in 2007. Now, Rauf is head of ISIL in Afghanistan.

When will ISIL be defeated?

Philip Hammond, the U.K. foreign minister, said on 22 Jan that the Iraqi army was "not ready" to fight ISIL, and it would take two years to defeat ISIL in Iraq. [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#).

On 30 Jan, Admiral Kirby, speaking at press briefing at the Pentagon, gave a more credible estimate of "probably going to take three to five years" to defeat ISIL. [Pentagon](#).

Reuters reported an exclusive interview with the prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan: Minister Nechirvan Barzani warned that despite victories in the war against Islamic State, the global coalition against the group was inadequate and predicted a campaign to retake the Iraqi city of Mosul would not happen before the fall.

In an interview with Reuters late on Thursday [29 Jan], Barzani said there was little chance of defeating the Jihadi movement so long as the civil war rages on in Syria, Iraq's army continues to exist more on paper than on the ground, and Kurdish Peshmerga forces in northern Iraq remain woefully under-armed.

....

[Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani] emphasized that the timetable for such an offensive would depend on the rebuilding of the Iraqi army, which collapsed last summer as IS conquered Mosul and raced across northern Iraq.

"There is no real Iraqi army that can do the job. It needs time. We have to be realistic," Barzani said.

Asked about plans touted by Iraqi and U.S. officials for an offensive by June on Mosul, Barzani said: "March definitely not. June, also I doubt it".

He said the "end of September or October" was a more realistic date for an attack, linking an offensive to Baghdad's ability to train enough soldiers to free the military up to move its two best divisions north from their current mission of protecting the capital. Samia Nakhoul, Ned Parker, & Isabel Coles, "Kurdish PM says US-led coalition against Islamic State faces long war," [Reuters](#), 21:28 GMT, 30 Jan 2015.

Some commentators and journalists have been reporting that ISIL is no longer on the offense in Iraq. That is wrong, as shown by ISIL's attack on Kirkuk on 30 Jan. [Associated Press](#);

[NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).

Whenever the Iraqi army decides to attack ISIL in Mosul, the Iraqi army will find that ISIL has converted Mosul into a fortress. [Reuters](#).

Finally, the information here shows that Abadi's promise on 1 Jan 2015 to expel ISIL from Iraq in 2015 is an empty boast, and a fantasy.

On 27 Jan, as some touted the victory in Kobani, *The Washington Post* editorial board excoriated Obama and his lack of strategy:

Mr. Obama still speaks of fostering a Syrian rebel force that could fight the Islamic State. But the initiative is pathetically underresourced and moving at a snail's pace. Similarly, a CIA program to help rebel groups has been so limited that many fighters have defected to more militant Sunni groups, including al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Behind this feckless effort is a cluster of mistaken notions. Mr. Obama has convinced himself that it's not possible or desirable to create a Syrian force that could defeat the regime of Bashar al-Assad; that the only alternative to his policy is an Iraq-style invasion by U.S. troops; and that the Islamic State can somehow be defeated in Iraq without tackling its Syrian birthplace and stronghold.

Most disturbingly, senior administration officials have grasped the figment that Russia and Iran can broker an end to the Syrian civil war — one that at least temporarily leaves the Assad regime in place. Setting aside the moral repugnance of a policy that would accept the continuance of a regime that has slaughtered tens of thousands of civilians with chemical weapons, "barrel bombs" filled with shrapnel and mass starvation, this thinking is, as a practical matter, delusional. Mr. Assad long ago showed he will not compromise with secular rebel forces, which in any case are not taking part in Russian-sponsored peace talks.

.....

Mr. Obama's passivity and false hopes are contributing to the steady worsening of the humanitarian and strategic situation in Syria, and the postponement of steps required for an acceptable outcome. These include military action to weaken the Assad regime and a concerted effort to create a new Syrian army and government. Kobane's relief, while welcome, won't alleviate the mounting catastrophe.

"A small victory in Syria is no reason to celebrate as the Islamic State gets stronger," [Washington Post](#), 27 Feb 2015.

While I agree with this editorial, there is one factual error that does not affect their conclusions. The so-called "Islamic State" did *not* have a "Syrian birthplace". ISIL was created in Iraq, moved into Syria sometime around May 2013, and then part of ISIL returned to Iraq beginning in Jan 2014.

Further, I am not concerned with Assad's barrel bombs. If the insurgents would stop fighting, then Assad would stop dropping barrel bombs. Assad was *not* using barrel bombs before the insurgency began in 2011, and there is no reason to believe he would use barrel bombs after

the insurgency ends.

Note that Assad's government poses no threat to either Europe or the USA. In contrast, ISIL and Al-Qaeda pose a huge threat to both Europe and the USA.

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.

2 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 2 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, Jan. 1, using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft to conduct 12 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted 11 airstrikes in Iraq, Jan. 1, using fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, nine airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and an ISIL fighting position and destroyed four ISIL buildings, 10 ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL tank.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two airstrikes destroyed 20 ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Taji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and two ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a mortar system, an ISIL building, and a bunker complex.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Qaim, three airstrikes struck an ISIL shipping container and destroyed an ISIL shipping container, a front end loader, and an armored vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and a VBIED.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

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

2 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 2 Jan 2015.

4 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On 3 Jan 2015, neither Central Command nor the Pentagon posted reports of airstrikes at their websites.

On Sunday, 4 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, Jan. 3, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted one airstrike in Iraq, Jan. 3, using fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 3, and 8 a.m., Jan. 4, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL fighting position and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, four ISIL buildings, three ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL staging areas.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

"Jan. 4: Military Airstrikes Continue Against ISIL in Syria and Iraq," [Central Command](#), 4 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 4 Jan 2015.

5 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 5 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, Jan. 4, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct 14 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq, Jan. 4, using fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 4, and 8 a.m., Jan. 5, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, eight airstrikes struck two large ISIL units and an ISIL fighting position and destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Dawr az Zawr, six airstrikes struck five ISIL crude oil collection points and an ISIL crude oil pipeline and destroyed two ISIL armored vehicles and an ISIL shipping container.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit.
- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit.
- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

[Central Command](#), 5 Jan 2015. I am omitting the unimaginative — and boringly repetitive — titles of these news articles in my bibliographic citation. Those who want the title can find it embedded in the bloated URL of the CENTCOM news article.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 5 Jan 2015.

6 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 6 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, Jan. 5, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct 10 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted two airstrikes in Iraq, Jan. 5, using remotely piloted and attack aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 5, and 8 a.m., Jan. 6, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, eight airstrikes destroyed 13 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL building and damaged an ISIL building.
- Near Dawr az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL tanks.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL vehicle and damaged an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

[Central Command](#), 6 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 6 Jan 2015.

8 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On 7 Jan 2015, neither Central Command nor the Pentagon posted reports of airstrikes at their websites.

On Thursday, 8 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, Jan. 7, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted seven airstrikes in Iraq, Jan. 7, using bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 7, and 8 a.m., Jan. 8, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL staging area and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck four ISIL crude oil pumps and five ISIL crude oil well heads.

Iraq

- Near Al Rutbah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

[Central Command](#), 8 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 8 Jan 2015.

9 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 9 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, Jan. 8, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and partner nation military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq, Jan. 8, using fighter and

remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 8, and 8 a.m., Jan. 9, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position and two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building and seven ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and a large ISIL unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL heavy weapon.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL building and an ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports.

[Central Command](#), 9 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 9 Jan 2015.

10 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 10 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 9, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft to conduct 12 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 9, and 8 a.m., Jan. 10, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, 11 airstrikes struck two large ISIL units and one ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed an ISIL building and 15 fighting positions.
- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL guard facilities.

Iraq

- Near Erbil, an airstrike struck an ISIL controlled bridge.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed a ISIL armored vehicle and semi-truck.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck a ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two fighting positions.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 10 Jan 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 10 Jan 2015.

11 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 11 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 10, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft to conduct 10 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes in Iraq, using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 10, and 8 a.m., Jan. 11, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, nine airstrikes destroyed 15 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Abu Kamal, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL shipping container, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL supply cache.

Iraq

- Near Erbil, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and an ISIL building, and destroyed an ISIL sniper firing position and an ISIL building.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL tactical unit, and a large ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle, five ISIL vehicles, and 21 ISIL boats.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 11 Jan 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 11 Jan 2015.

12 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 12 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 11, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft to conduct 11 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8

a.m., Jan. 11, and 8 a.m., Jan. 12, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, nine airstrikes struck two large ISIL units and an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL buildings, and two ISIL staging positions.
- Near Abu Kamal, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Dawr az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL oil refinery.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Taji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL armored vehicles and 10 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL artillery system and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL rocket launcher and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and two large ISIL units, and destroyed four ISIL vehicles, an ISIL VBIED, two ISIL armored vehicles, an ISIL semi-truck, an ISIL mortar system, three ISIL buildings, three ISIL boats, and an ISIL tank.

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

[Central Command](#), 12 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 Jan 2015.

13 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 13 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 12, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 12, and 8 a.m., Jan. 13, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Dawr az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tank.

Iraq

- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL building.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tactical unit, two ISIL bunkers, an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Baghdad, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tactical unit and struck another, destroyed an ISIL fighting position and two ISIL heavy machine guns.

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

[Central Command](#), 13 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 13 Jan 2015.

14 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 14 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 13, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 13, and 8 a.m., Jan. 14, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL armored vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL artillery system.
- Near Taji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Rutbah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Baqubah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL recoilless rifle system.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL excavator.

- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, two ISIL excavators, and an ISIL bunker, and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Baghdad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

[Central Command](#), 14 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 14 Jan 2015.

15 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, 15 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 14, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 11 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 14, and 8 a.m., Jan. 15, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL building and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three airstrikes struck an ISIL weapon storage facility and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, an ISIL fighting position, and three ISIL vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL shipping container.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Taji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and seven ISIL boats.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL building, an ISIL tactical unit, and an ISIL armored vehicle, and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL armored vehicle, and an ISIL fighting position.

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

[Central Command](#), 15 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 15 Jan 2015.

16 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 16 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 15, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes in Iraq, using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 15, and 8 a.m., Jan. 16, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes destroyed two ISIL staging positions and nine ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL barge and four ISIL boats.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL building.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck two ISIL mortar firing positions.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL mortar firing position and an ISIL fighting position.

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

[Central Command](#), 16 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 16 Jan 2015.

17 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 17 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 16, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 13 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 16, and 8 a.m., Jan. 17, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, 11 airstrikes struck an ISIL tank, three ISIL fighting positions, and four ISIL tactical units, and destroyed an ISIL tank and eight ISIL fighting

positions.

- Near Abu Kamal, an airstrike struck an ISIL vehicle and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Dawr az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Hit, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes struck an ISIL checkpoint and destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings.
- Near Taji, five airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL buildings.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL fighting position and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL fighting position and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

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

[Central Command](#), 17 Jan 2015.

Not posted at the Pentagon, probably because it was the Martin Luther King Day holiday weekend.

18 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On 18 Jan, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon websites posted any news about airstrikes. Reuters also had no news on 18 Jan about airstrikes.

19 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 19 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 18, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 15 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 18, and 8 a.m., Jan. 19, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, 11 airstrikes struck two large ISIL units and eight ISIL tactical

units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL staging positions, and an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Aleppo, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL artillery system.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and a large ISIL unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Taji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and a large ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and a large ISIL unit and destroyed two ISL buildings and an ISIL artillery system.
- Near Baghdad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 19 Jan 2015.
Not posted at the Pentagon, probably because it was the Martin Luther King Day holiday.

20 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 20 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 19, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft to conduct 10 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 19, and 8 a.m., Jan. 20, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, nine airstrikes struck seven ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL staging positions, five ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL

supply caches.

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL mortar systems.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings and two ISIL heavy weapons.

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

[Central Command](#), 20 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 20 Jan 2015.

21 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 21 Jan 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

U.S. and coalition military forces have continued to attack Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists in Syria and Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve officials reported today [21 Jan]. Officials reported details of the latest strikes, which took place between 8 a.m. yesterday [20 Jan] and 8 a.m. today [21 Jan], local time, noting that assessments of results are based on initial reports.

Airstrikes in Syria

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 13 airstrikes in Syria:

- Near Kobani, 10 airstrikes struck seven ISIL tactical units and a large ISIL unit and destroyed eight ISIL staging positions, 13 ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Abu Kamal, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Raqqah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL weapon cache and destroyed an ISIL guard facility.

Airstrikes in Iraq

Attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 10 airstrikes in Iraq:

- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and two ISIL logistic routes and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle, two ISIL vehicles, five ISIL buildings, an ISIL shipping container, three ISIL heavy weapons, an ISIL bridge, five ISIL road crossings and an ISIL improvised explosive device.
- Near Qaim, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL bunkers and a buried ISIL structure.
- Near Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Beiji, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and an ISIL checkpoint and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL heavy weapon and two ISIL

vehicles.

[Pentagon](#), 21 Jan 2015.

At 17:45 EST on 23 Jan, the link at the CENTCOM homepage continued to give a "page not found" error message, so I copied the press release from the Pentagon.

22 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, 22 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 21, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 10 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 21 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 21, and 8 a.m., Jan. 22, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, nine airstrikes struck six ISIL tactical units and destroyed 17 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL weapons storage facility.

Iraq

- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, 16 airstrikes struck two large ISIL units, two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL building, and an ISIL mortar team, and destroyed six ISIL culverts, two ISIL bridges, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL artillery system, 11 ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, six ISIL staging positions, two ISIL heavy weapons, an ISIL VBIED, and four ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL VBIED.

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

[Central Command](#), 22 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 22 Jan 2015.

23 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 23 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and

Syria:

On Jan. 22, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft to conduct 12 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 22, and 8 a.m., Jan. 23, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, 10 airstrikes struck six ISIL tactical units and a large ISIL unit and destroyed 12 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL trailer.
- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL mobile oil drilling rig.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, a large ISIL unit, and an ISIL vehicle, and destroyed an ISIL IED and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mosul, eight airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and a large ISIL unit and destroyed seven ISIL vehicles, two ISIL VBIEDs, an ISIL bulldozer, four ISIL buildings, an ISIL artillery system, an ISIL heavy weapon system, two ISIL armored vehicles, an ISIL shipping container, and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL vehicle.

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

[Central Command](#), 23 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 23 Jan 2015.

24 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 24 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 23, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 13 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 23, and 8 a.m., Jan. 24, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, 12 airstrikes struck eight ISIL tactical units and a large ISIL unit

and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL building, and eight ISIL fighting positions.

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL mobile oil drilling rig.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL weapons production facility.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck two large ISIL units, an ISIL choke point, an ISIL culvert, and four ISIL roads, and destroyed an ISIL culvert and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, five airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit, two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL cantonment area, and an ISIL vehicle, and destroyed an ISIL building, six ISIL vehicles, an ISIL bunker, two ISIL shipping containers, and two ISIL checkpoints.
- Near Erbil, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL shipping container, two ISIL vehicles, and three ISIL earth moving vehicles.

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

[Central Command](#), 24 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 24 Jan 2015.

25 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 25 Jan, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon websites posted any news about airstrikes.

26 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 26 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 25, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 21 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 25, and 8 a.m., Jan. 26, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two airstrikes destroyed six ISIL armored vehicles and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Kobani, 17 airstrikes struck 14 ISIL tactical units, a large ISIL unit, and

two ISIL fighting positions, and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Haditha, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL bunkers, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, seven airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed three ISIL mortar firing positions, three ISIL VBIEDs, eight ISIL armored vehicles, an ISIL checkpoint, 15 ISIL vehicles, and three ISIL fighting positions.

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

[Central Command](#), 26 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 26 Jan 2015.

27-28 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 27 Jan, neither the Central Command nor the Pentagon websites posted any news about airstrikes.

On Wednesday, 28 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 27, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 13 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 27, and 8 a.m., Jan. 28, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, 13 airstrikes struck 12 ISIL tactical units and an ISIL vehicle, and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL staging area, and three ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, six ISIL shipping containers, and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed six ISIL buildings and an ISIL heavy weapon.

- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed four ISIL vehicles.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 28 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 28 Jan 2015.

29 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, 29 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 28, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber and fighter aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 28, and 8 a.m., Jan. 29, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position, three ISIL tactical units, and a large ISIL unit.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL crude oil collection point.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Sinjar, five airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and destroyed 21 ISIL vehicles, four ISIL buildings, an ISIL shipping container, an ISIL modular structure, and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, four airstrikes struck two large ISIL units and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker, an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL bulldozer, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building, and an ISIL VBIED.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 29 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 30[sic] Jan 2015.

30 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 30 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 29, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in

Syria, using fighter aircraft to conduct two airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes in Iraq, using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 29, and 8 a.m., Jan. 30, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck two ISIL staging positions and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and one ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL firing position.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL fighting positions and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL bunker and an ISIL shipping container.

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

[Central Command](#), 30 Jan 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 30 Jan 2015.

31 Jan 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 31 Jan 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 30, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter aircraft to conduct 10 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 17 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Jan. 30, and 8 a.m., Jan. 31, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, eight airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL building and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL artillery system, and an ISIL staging position.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, two airstrikes destroyed four ISIL buildings, an ISIL bunker and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL rocket tube.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED factory, an ISIL building, six ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy

weapons and two ISIL pieces of engineer equipment.

- Near Balad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL armored vehicles and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, 10 airstrikes struck two ISIL large tactical units, three ISIL tactical units, four ISIL vehicles, and destroyed an ISIL bunker, three ISIL VBIEDs, an ISIL bulldozer, two ISIL armored vehicles, an ISIL artillery system, seven ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL buildings, and four ISIL vehicles.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 31 Jan 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 31 Jan 2015.

Islamic Terrorism in Paris, France

The three Muslim terrorists who ran amok in Paris during 7-9 Jan appear to be distinct from terrorists in Syria and Iraq. However, the reaction to them is clearly related to the problem of Islamic terrorism in Syria and Iraq.

On 7 Jan 2015, two French Muslims invaded the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, a satirical newspaper in Paris France, and killed 12 people. ISIL in Syria promptly issued a statement praising the attack. [Reuters](#). On 9 Jan, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (i.e., Yemen) claimed to have "directed" this attack. [Associated Press](#). On 14 Jan, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula claimed they "chose the target [*Charlie Hebdo*], laid out the plan, and financed the operation." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 9 Jan 2015, a French Muslim invaded a Jewish grocery store in eastern Paris, took 19 hostages, and killed 4 hostages. On 8 Jan this same Muslim terrorist had killed a French policewoman who was investigating a traffic accident.

Islamic Reaction

Some Muslims (e.g., Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Arab League, government of Saudi Arabia) condemned the murders at the office of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris. However, a more common reaction from Muslims was that the cartoonists at *Charlie Hebdo* deserved to be punished because they had insulted the Prophet Mohammed. The Foreign Minister of Morocco refused to attend the unity march against terrorism in Paris on 11 Jan because of "blasphemous cartoons depicting the Prophet" shown during the march. ([Daily Star](#))

The Al-Azhar University has no English-language website. On 13 Jan 2015 most recent entry at the English-language website of the Arab League is dated July 2014. Therefore, I could not find their full statements and copy it here.

The official Saudi Press Agency said, quoted in full:

An official source stated that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has followed with deep sorrow the terrorist attack that took place for Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris resulting in the murder and injury of many innocent victims.

The source added that while condemning this cowardly terrorist attack which is incompatible with Islam religion and disapproval by other religions and faiths, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia extends its condolences to the families of victims, Government and people of friendly France, wishing speed recovery for injured.

"Official Source: Kingdom Condemns Terrorist Attack in Paris," [Saudi Press Agency](#), 16:37 GMT, 7 Jan 2015.

See, e.g.,

- [Ahram](#) in Egypt, 7 Jan, "Al-Azhar and Arab League condemn Paris attack"
- [Reuters](#), 7 Jan, "Saudi Arabia condemns deadly attack on Paris satirical magazine"
- [Al-Arabiya](#), 7 Jan, "Arab League, Al-Azhar condemn Paris shooting attack"
- [Al-Arabiya](#), 7 Jan "Saudi Arabia condemns 'cowardly terrorist' shooting in Paris"
- [Al-Arabiya](#), 7 Jan, "Top Qatari editor urges Muslims 'not to apologize' for Paris shooting"
- [Arab News](#), 9 Jan, "KSA flays 'cowardly' Paris terror strike".

Joanna Paraszczuk wrote an insightful description of the reaction of newspapers in Islamic nations. [Radio Free Europe](#), updated 9 Jan 2015, copy posted at [Payvand](#) in Iran.

There is a genuine disagreement in the world about the proper extent of freedom of speech. One view is that freedom of speech is nearly absolute, and includes the freedom to offend racial and religious minorities. As with many issues, there is a difference between conduct that is unlawful and conduct that undesirable, provocative, offensive, rude, etc. At least amongst Jews and Christians, there is a consensus that offensive speech or cartoons *never* justifies homicide, arson, battery, and other violent retaliation. Governments with one official religion are more likely to be intolerant of insulting that official religion, while secular governments are more likely to tolerate insults against one religion.

If Islamic terrorists thought they could silence *Charlie Hebdo*, the terrorists were wrong. Before the attack on 7 Jan, *Charlie* printed 60,000 copies/week and was unrecognized outside France. A week later, *Charlie* printed an edition of 3,000,000 copies, all of which were quickly sold. Moreover, the ten dead employees of *Charlie* became martyrs for freedom of speech. "New Charlie Hebdo reaches global audience, dismays Muslims," [Associated Press](#), 13:11 EST; "Charlie Hebdo 'survivors' edition" sells out in minutes," [Reuters](#), 15:35 EST; "New issue of Charlie Hebdo sells out quickly," [Associated Press](#), 18:18 EST, all on 14 Jan 2015. By 18 Jan, a total of seven million copies of the 14 Jan edition of *Charlie Hebdo* had been printed. [BBC](#); [CNN](#). In other words, the Islamic terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo*

made that magazine more than 100 times more successful! Furthermore, police in Europe arrested dozens of Muslims — some of them innocent of any crime — in an attempt to prevent more attacks. [Associated Press](#). So the Islamic terrorist attacks in Paris consequently helped *Charlie Hebdo* and also hurt Muslims.

Hollande Denies Terrorists in Paris are Islamic

It is obvious that there was an Islamic motivation for the terrorism in Paris on 7 Jan. At the scene of the murders at the office of *Charlie Hebdo*, the Islamic terrorists exclaimed:

“We have avenged the Prophet Mohammed!”

and

“Allahu Akhbar!” [Arabic for "God is Great!"]

[The Telegraph](#); [BBC](#); [NY Times](#); all on 7 Jan 2015.

But on 9 Jan 2015, Hollande, the president of France, gave a televised speech about the terrorists attacks in Paris on 7-9 Jan by three Muslims. Hollande said:

These madmen, fanatics, have nothing to do with the Muslim religion.

[Reuters](#) at 23:41 GMT; [The Telegraph](#) at 19:14 GMT; [The Guardian](#) at 18:58 GMT; all on 9 Jan 2015.

My comments: First of all, who appointed Hollande to declare what is true Islamic faith? Hollande has never been a Muslim and has no knowledge of Islamic theology. If anyone is to declare what is true Islam, it should be a senior Muslim cleric, *not* a Christian politician like Hollande. Hollande's remarks may have been intended to stop anti-immigrant politicians in France (e.g., Marine Le Pen and her Front National) and to stop Islamophobia. But Hollande has no authority to declare what is orthodox Islam.

Second, let us set aside "political correctness" and liberal dogma that wants to ignore the obvious connection between terrorism and the Islamic religion. The Truth is that the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda in many nations, and ISIL in Iraq and Syria are all founded on what they consider Islamic principles, and all these groups want to establish a government based on Islamic law. And the undeniable Truth is that these Islamic groups have been responsible for a long series of homicides:

- 7 Aug 1998 — Al-Qaeda bombs U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, kills 224 people
- 11 Sep 2001 — Al-Qaeda bombs World Trade Center and Pentagon, kills 2997 people
- 11 Mar 2004 — Islamic bomb at Madrid railroad station kills 191 people
- 7 July 2005 — Four Muslims kill 52 commuters on buses and subways in London.
- Nov 2008 — Ten Pakistani Muslims kill 164 in Mumbai, India.
- 16 Dec 2014 — Seven Taliban members attacked an elementary school in Peshawar, Pakistan and killed at least 132 children and 16 staff members.
- Sep 2000 to Nov 2014 — palestinians kill 1265 people in Israel

These attacks are *not* accidents, and are *not* acts by rogue individuals (i.e., "lone wolf"). After each of these attacks, an Islamic terrorist organization publicly claimed credit for each attack, and other Islamic terrorist organizations endorsed or applauded each attack. The attacks on

the U.S. embassies, the World Trade Center, and the Pentagon were planned by Osama bin Laden, who was later killed by the U.S. Government. I conclude that it is dishonest to deny that these terrorists (e.g., the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIL) are based on the Islamic religion.

Returning to my first point above, who is to say what represents true Islam? In Christianity, theologians in different branches of Protestant religion have been differing since the Reformation about what is correct Christian dogma. And the Protestants differ from Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox Christian church, and the Coptic Christian church. Just as Christianity is fragmented into different branches, Islam is fragmented into Sunni, Shiite, Wahhabism, ... branches. From reading of news reports, some Muslims applaud acts of Islamic terrorism, most Muslims are publicly silent, and some Muslims publicly condemn terrorism in the name of their religion. It appears that branch of Sunni Islam includes the terrorists such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and ISIL. These terrorists are genuine Muslims, but have some different beliefs than most Muslims.

Journalists often put pejorative labels on members of Al-Qaeda or ISIL, such as "extremist" or "radical". Such labels are a matter of perspective. To the Islamic terrorists, they are genuine Muslims and other Muslims are some kind of infidel. Similarly, Hollande called the terrorists in Paris "madmen" and "fanatics". Again, that is propaganda that marginalizes the Islamic terrorists. These terrorists are quite sane. These terrorists are sincere in their motivation for their attacks. And these terrorists are *not* isolated individuals, but are part of an organization of tens of thousands of similar terrorists.

So the question arises: Is Western Civilization at war with Islam? The answer to this broad question is certainly *no*. We are definitely *not* at war with *all* Muslims. However, as explained below, we are at war with Islamic terrorists (e.g., Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIL), who are a relatively small group of Muslims.

The Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and ISIL all base their actions and goals on their interpretation of Islam, which drags religion into the conflict between Western Civilization and these terrorists. That makes Islamic terrorism a synonym for these terror organizations, and one could properly refer to them either by their terroristic acts and atrocities, or by their specific religious belief that Islam justifies their terrorism, or by their goal of imposing their interpretation of an Islamic government (e.g., a caliphate or emirate) in conquered land.

A better way to phrase the issue is that we are at war with the terrorists (e.g., Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIL), because of their suicide bombings and other violent acts against civilians, because of their violent revolt against established governments, and because of their violent discrimination against other religions.

But we can *not* ignore the religious motivation of these Islamic terrorists. As part of fighting these Islamic terrorists, respected Muslim clerics will need to repeatedly explain why the terrorists violate the essential teachings of Islam, in order to discourage the recruitment of young Muslims by the terrorists, as discussed in the Islamic public relations problem, [above](#). This duty falls on Muslim clerics, because no else has the authority to declare what true Islam requires. As mentioned above, a Christian politician has no credibility when he/she declares terrorists to be unIslamic.

After I had written the above comment on 12 Jan, the Associated Press reported:

"France is at war against terrorism, jihadism, and radical Islamism," [French Prime Minister Manuel] Valls declared. "France is not at war against Islam."

Lori Hinnant & Angela Charlton, "France: Terror funding, attack weapons came from abroad," [Associated Press](#), 18:22 EST, 13 Jan 2015.

My comment is that Valls said it correctly, provided that "radical Islamism" is interpreted to mean Muslims who either support terrorism or engage in terrorism, and "jihadism" is interpreted to mean violence against those who do not share their religious beliefs. ("Jihad" could also mean a personal and nonviolent struggle, in addition to its other meaning of a holy war against the enemies of Islam.)

See the editorials by Paul Sheehan, "These crimes have everything to do with Islam," in the Australian newspaper, [The Age](#); and by Rich Lowry, "Of Course It Is Islam," [Politico](#). On 18 Jan, Marine Le Pen wrote an op-ed that was translated in the [NY Times](#), in which she says France was attacked by "Islamic fundamentalism." She also says "Muslims themselves ... need the distinction between Islamist terrorism and their faith to be made clearly."

Islamic Terrorists Will Return to Europe

On 24 May 2014, a French Muslim returned from fighting in Syria, and murdered four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria, in the section titled "Islamic Terrorism in Europe".

On 7 Jan 2015, the two Kouchi brothers, who were trained by Al-Qaeda in Yemen, killed 12 people at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris.

These are two examples of Islamic terrorists — who were trained by an Islamic terrorist organization — returning to Europe and committing acts of terrorism in Europe. These examples show that Europe should not ignore what is happening in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, etc.

Three Islamic terrorists returned from Syria to Belgium, where they stockpiled automatic weapons for attacks on police stations. On 15 Jan 2015, police made a pre-emptive strike on the terrorist's apartment in Verviers, Belgium. There was an intense firefight, and two terrorists were killed. [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#).

On 9 Jan 2015, the [Associated Press](#) had a news story titled "Europe's nightmare: Terror threats both large and small". That story cites government officials for the statistics of Europeans fighting in Syria:

- 1200 French citizens
- 600 U.K. citizens
- 550 German citizens

That is a total of 2350 Europeans from just three nations. Many of these Europeans will

return to Europe and presumably carry out terrorist attacks inside Europe. Russia claims that "more than 800" Russian citizens — mostly from North Caucasus — are fighting for ISIL in Syria. [Interfax](#). The Associated Press cites the estimate that 450 people have gone from Belgium to Syria to fight, and 150 of them have returned to Belgium. [Associated Press](#).

On 16 Jan 2015, the Associated Press reported:

The large number of radicalized Muslim extremists across Europe, their lack of command structure and growing sophistication make it "extremely difficult" for law enforcement agencies to foil every terror attack, [Rob Wainwright] the head of European Union police agency Europol said Friday [16 Jan].

....

At least 2,500 and possibly up to 5,000 suspects have traveled from Europe to conflicts in Syria and Iraq, [Wainwright] said.

"The sheer numbers of people involved, the way in which they've been radicalized on the Internet, radicalized by their engagement in the conflict in Syria and Iraq, makes this extremely difficult for the police to contain it in a complete way," [Wainwright] said.

Mike Corder, "Europol chief: foiling every attack is 'extremely difficult'," [Associated Press](#), 12:03 GMT, 16 Jan 2015.

My comments: Aside from the deaths and damage caused directly by these terrorist attacks, there is another problem. People will demand that governments *prevent* these terrorist attacks. But law is traditionally reactive — (with a few exceptions) law only punishes criminal conduct that has already occurred. Furthermore, one nation (e.g., France) should not criminalize conduct that occurs outside its borders (e.g., fighting with Islamic terrorists in Syria), as a matter of jurisdictional issues. Also, increased surveillance and security checkpoints will be intrusive and burden innocent citizens.

We need to recognize the reality that we can *not* prevent people from traveling to foreign nations to fight with Islamic terrorists there. For example, people could fly from France to Indonesia, and then purchase a ticket in Indonesia for travel to Turkey, and once inside Turkey they can travel by land to Syria.

I have seen suggestions that nations enact laws that one loses citizenship by traveling to a foreign nation to fight with terrorists, so that these terrorists can *not* legally return to their home country after fighting with terrorists. (E.g., [Fox News](#)) It is relatively easy to check passports at borders, compared with finding a few terrorists hidden in a city of millions of people. But this suggestion has the legal problem of punishing behavior that occurred outside a nation, in an attempt to prevent a *possible* future crime. Also, I do not expect ISIL or Al-Qaeda to cooperate with governments who are attempting to punish terrorists, and without such cooperation it will be difficult to legally prove that someone actually fought with a terrorist organization. In addition to civil liberties problems, this suggestion will make some terrorists into stateless people, unless a state sponsor of terrorism wants to grant them citizenship.

Conclusions

I still agree with what I said in my Conclusion to my [eighth essay](#) on Syria that was written during June 2014.

The capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL on 10 June 2014 — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — changed the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.

Western View of Insurgency in Syria *Before 10 June 2014*

Before 10 June 2014, the conventional wisdom in the London11 nations — including the USA — was that Assad was Evil, and the removal of Assad was the Nr. 1 goal in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition has a consistent and intransigent demand that Assad resign. The intransigence of the Syrian National Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Kerry, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian government.

Obama's foreign policy on Syria is essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012 or 2013, Obama's foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality.

One can summarize a series of events that exposed the futility of the plans of the London11 group of nations and the United Nations negotiations in Geneva:

1. The reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, Assad is winning the civil war in heavily populated western Syria, and the insurgents are unable to force Assad to resign.
2. Assad did *not* resign, and the Geneva peace negotiations ended in failure on 15 Feb 2014. The Coalition's intransigent demand that Assad resign, and Assad's insistence on remaining in power, are *impossible* for compromise.
3. Not only are there no plans to resume Syrian peace negotiations in the foreseeable future, but also the United Nations negotiator (Brahimi) resigned in frustration on 13 May 2014.
4. Assad was re-elected for another seven-year term on 3 June 2014.
5. It is now obvious that neither side in the Geneva negotiations genuinely wanted to negotiate. The U.S. Government essentially forced the Coalition to attend the Geneva negotiations, and Russia forced Assad's government to attend.

Not all of these facts or events were known on 15 Feb 2014, when the Geneva negotiations ended. But all of these facts are known at the end of June 2014, and were documented in my previous essays. A more detailed analysis of the failure of the Geneva negotiations is found

in my separate [essay](#). I suggest that the London11 group of nations — and the Syrian National Coalition — were so obsessed with deposing Assad that they did not recognize that their demand that Assad resign would cause the Geneva2 negotiations to fail. Not only was much diplomatic effort and expense wasted on Geneva2, but also the frustration caused the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resign on 13 May 2014.

Western View of Insurgency in Syria After 10 June 2014

After the capture of Mosul by ISIL on 10 June 2014, it was obvious that the big enemy in Iraq was ISIL. Because ISIL actively operated in *both* Syria and Iraq, the problems in the two nations were suddenly recognized to be intertwined. The U.S. Government's view was that terrorists in Syria had spilled into Iraq. The Truth is that ISIL was created in Iraq in 2004 under the name "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" and entered Syria in May 2013, when the terrorists took the name "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL).

Iran is one of the two major suppliers to Assad's government in Syria, and Iran is also active in influencing the Shiite government in Iraq. Suppose the U.S. Government continues its policy of demanding the removal of Assad, and continues its policy of supporting the government of Iraq. Then the USA would be in the awkward position of opposing Iran in Syria, and agreeing with Iran in Iraq. This awkwardness could be avoided if the U.S. Government would both (1) abandon its declaration that Assad must resign, and (2) focus on the defeat of terrorism (e.g., ISIL) in both Syria and Iraq. Once the USA makes these two changes, there can be an alliance between Syria and Iraq, with both Iran, Russia, and the USA contributing to this alliance against terrorism.

An important point to recognize is that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL) was essentially defeated when the USA pulled its combat troops out of Iraq in Dec 2011. The weak and ineffective government of Maliki in Iraq allowed ISIL to capture much of western and northern Iraq from January 2014 through June 2014. There is an obvious lesson here. If the weak and ineffective Syrian National Coalition were to control Syria, ISIL would exploit that weakness. The result would be that ISIL would quickly seize control of Syria. In other words, we *need* a strong, decisive, experienced leader (e.g., Assad) in control of Syria, to limit the expansion of terrorists like ISIL, because ISIL is worse than Assad.

Here is a list of citations to some commentators who have recognized that we should be cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL and other terrorist organizations:

- David Wearing, editorial, "Bashar al-Assad's interests and the West's coincide over Iraq," [The Guardian](#), 28 June 2014.
- Leslie H. Gelb, op-ed, [NY Times](#), 1 July 2014 ("The greatest threat to American interests in the region is ISIS, not Mr. Assad.").
- Fred Kaplan, "Kaplan: Obama must work with the bad to defeat the worse," [Salt Lake Tribune](#), 21 Aug 2014 ("The fight isn't a cakewalk, but it doesn't have to be a huge struggle, if the Western politicians can get over their complexes about working

with certain bad people in order to defeat even worse people.").

- Zeina Karam, "Syria opposition: Deadly chemical attack forgotten," [Associated Press](#), 14:59 EDT, 21 Aug 2014 ("... global disapproval has shifted away from Assad and toward the Islamic extremists who are fighting him and spreading destruction across Syria and Iraq. Calls for Assad's ouster are no longer made publicly by Western officials.").
- Sam Jones, "US and allies must join Assad to defeat Isis, warns British MP," [Financial Times](#), 21 Aug 2014 (Sir Malcolm Rifkind — a former U.K. foreign secretary, former U.K. defence secretary, and a current member of Parliament — said “ 'Sometimes you have to develop relationships with people who are extremely nasty in order to get rid of people who are even nastier,' ..., referring to working with Mr Assad's dictatorship.").
- Lizzie Dearden, "James Foley beheading: Former Army chief urges Britain to co-operate with Syria's Assad regime to combat ISIS," [The Independent](#), 22 Aug 2014 ("The former head of the Army has said Britain must work with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to combat the Islamic State (ISIS). Lord Dannatt, the former Chief of General Staff, called on the West to reconsider its relationship with the leader, who was internationally condemned for a crackdown on civil liberties during the 2011 Arab Spring."). See also [The Telegraph](#) ("Britain must co-operate with President Assad, the Syrian dictator, in order to confront ISIL, the former head of the Army has said.").
- Max Abrahms, "The U.S. Should Help Assad to Fight ISIS, the Greater Evil," [NY Times](#), 18:27 EDT, 22 Aug 2014 (Assad does *not* threaten the USA; ISIL does threaten the USA. "But it's time for the Obama administration to pick its poison by prioritizing the safety of American civilians over the moral objection of helping out a leader who massacres his own.").
- Rajeev Syal, "David Cameron must 'consider cooperating with Syria' to crush Isis," [The Guardian](#), 5 Sep 2014 (Lord Richards, former chief of the U.K. defence staff, urged the current U.K. prime minister to cooperate with Assad in defeating ISIL.).
- Ahmad Samih Khalidi, op-ed, "To Crush ISIS, Make a Deal With Assad," [NY Times](#), 15 Sep 2014 ("... the West appears to be primarily appeasing Arab Persian Gulf allies that have turned the overthrow of Mr. Assad into a policy fetish that runs against any rational calculation of how to defeat Islamist terrorism. the only real 'boots on the ground' capable of destroying ISIS are the Syrian Army and its local allies, including Hezbollah.").

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

Conclusion for Syria

Obama needs to end his obsession with deposing Assad, and begin coordinating with Assad a strategy to defeat ISIL in both Syria and Iraq. It's past time for Obama to get with the program of defeating terrorism.

The refusal of Obama to cooperate with Assad has multiple disadvantages for the USA:

1. any U.S. airstrikes in Syria would be an illegal aggression against Syria.
2. unnecessary risks to U.S. pilots from Syrian anti-aircraft fire or Syrian fighter jets.
3. U.S. airstrikes will be less effective without Syrian intelligence on the ground
4. the airstrikes need to be coordinated with army action on the ground, and Assad has the best army in Syria (with the possible exception of ISIL).
5. it will be at least a year before we can train 5000 moderate Syrian rebels, while we would not need to train Assad's army — so we can attack ISIL in Syria sooner if we partner with Assad instead of the rebels.
6. helps keep Assad in power, which is good, because Assad is both the strongest and most experienced leader of Syria, and the only plausible secular leader of Syria (without Assad, Islamic extremists would likely be controlling Syria).

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 Islamic terrorists could eventually defeat Assad. Having Syria under the control of Islamic terrorists 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 paragraphs. 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 Jan 2015, 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.

End of Syria

Since October 2013, I have been advocating in my essays that Europe and the USA actively support Assad in his fight against terrorists. But it is increasingly clear that neither Europe nor the USA will support Assad. And, beginning in December 2014, it is becoming clear that Assad's resources are stretched too thin for him to win militarily against a formidable array of terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front). We have been here before. When the USA deposed Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, the result in Iraq was anarchy, followed by civil war. And when NATO airstrikes helped depose Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, the result was again anarchy and civil war. And so, when Assad leaves power, the Syrian government will collapse, anarchy will prevail, and each terrorist organization — already present in Syria since 2012-2013 — will rule a small part of former Syria and continue fighting with each other. In retrospect, some nations should be ruled by a strong tyrant (e.g., Hussein, Gaddafi, Assad), because a transition to democracy quickly degenerates into fragmentation, anarchy, and civil war.

Back in June 2014, Lakhdar Brahimi — the second U.N. negotiator for Syria — predicted Syria will become "a failed state, with warlords all over the place." See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria, at section titled: "Brahimi Interview".

It should be an immense scandal that Obama's idealistic obsession with "supporting democracy" (i.e., opposing Assad) in Syria led to:

- the deaths of *more* than 200,000 people,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure,
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front), and
- a huge refugee problem that has swamped Jordan and Lebanon.

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/syria17.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

[my homepage](#)