

# Syria & Iraq: February 2015

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## Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 15 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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.

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### **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](#).

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## Chemical Weapons

On 4 Feb 2015, OPCW issued a press release that said:

In a meeting today, the Executive Council of the OPCW adopted a decision expressing its serious concern regarding the findings of the Fact-Finding Mission, made with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine had been used as a weapon in three villages in northern Syria from April to August 2014. The Council reaffirmed its condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances. It emphasised that any use of chemical weapons anywhere at any time by anyone under any circumstances is unacceptable and would violate international law. The Council expressed its strong conviction that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable.

The Executive Council also expressed support for the continuation of the work of the

Fact Finding Mission and called upon all parties which will be addressed by the FFM to extend their full cooperation to the Mission to ensure that it completes its work safely and effectively.

The Director-General welcomed the commitment of States Parties to protect and strengthen the fundamental goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention. "This decision makes it absolutely clear that chemical weapons are illegal, and that their use will not be tolerated under any circumstances," said Ambassador Üzümcü.

"OPCW adopts a decision on reports of the Fact-Finding Mission," [OPCW](#), 4 Feb 2015.

**My comments:** My [ninth essay](#) on Syria discusses a 16 June 2014 report by the OPCW fact-finding team, which describes their failed mission and lack of facts. Then there was a confidential OPCW report in [Sep 2014](#). Now, suddenly, OPCW want to see prosecution of whoever used chlorine gas as a weapon in Syria during April 2014 to August 2014. Whatever evidence OPCW has is being kept confidential.

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## 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.

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### 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. From the end of April 2014 to 2 Feb 2015, the United Nations says 5358 people died in the war in the Ukraine. During the first two weeks of Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was

negotiated.

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 2014, 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 2014, 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. On 10 Feb 2015, the U.S. [State Department](#) closed the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, because of rapidly deteriorating security.

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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 7 Feb, SOHR announced a total of at least 210,060 dead in the Syrian civil war: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 210060 persons since 18/03/2011, which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Daraa, until 05/02/2015.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 100973 civilians, including 10664 children and 6783 women.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters: 35827
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2498
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian fighters from the ISIS, al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham Movement and al-Khadra' battalion: 24989
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 45385
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 29943
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 2502
- Fighters from Hezbollah: 640
- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 3130

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include more than 20000 detainees in regime prisons and thousands of those who disappeared during regime raids and massacres. It does not include more than 7000 regular soldiers and pro-regime militants and hundreds of "regime supporters" captured by IS, Islamic fighters, Al-Nusra front, rebel

and Islamic battalions on charge of “dealing with the regime”.

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

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Junoud al-Sham, al-Katiba al-Khadra', Jund al-Sham, rebel battalions, regular forces and pro-regime militants to be approximately 85,000 more than the documented number due to the extreme discretion by all sides on the human losses caused by the conflict, the difficulty of communication in Syria, and the difficulties to know identify the fate of 40,000 detainees.

Over 1.5 million Syrian civilians were seriously wounded or suffered from permanent disabilities, More than half of the Syrian people have been displaced, in addition to destroying the infrastructure of the country and the public and private properties during the past 47 months.

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

SOHR calls upon the UN Security Council to move immediately and urgently to stop the systematic killing in cold blood committed against Syrians, as well as to stop to displace our people who has still dreamed about disposal of injustice and darkness in order to reach to establish the state of democracy, freedom, justice and equality. We ask the members of the Security Council, is it not enough for you death and injure of about 2 million as well as displacing millions of Syrian people to make you move in order to stop the criminals from committing more and more crimes against the Syrians and to transfer the file of war crimes and crimes against humanity to the International Criminal Court?!

It is worth to mention that we in the Syrian Observatory has refused many times to provide an international organization our statistics of casualties in Syria since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution because we consider that the role of this organization is to work with the international community to transfer the file of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria to the competent international courts, and to promote the culture of democracy and human rights; its role not to publish the number of people who die in Syria, depending on opposition and pro-Syrian regime parties that disseminate statistics according to their political orientation or as their supporters request, before it verifies the credibility of such statistics and figures presented by such parties that could be fake. In addition to, the role of this

organization is not to disseminate the reports without documenting the information of these reports and reaching to correct conclusions that could be reliable for the international judicial organizations, which are able to activate the mechanism of international criminal prosecution.

"About 2 million people killed and wounded in 47 months, and it is still not enough...," [SOHR](#), 7 Feb 2015.

Reported by [Reuters](#); not reported by the Associated Press.

On 21 Feb, SOHR reported that more than 30,000 civilians had been killed in Syria in the year since the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution Nr. 2139:

More than 30000 civilians killed and wounded by the regime aircrafts and helicopters since the adoption of the resolution No. 2139.

SOHR could document death and in injuring of more than 30000 civilians due to attacks carried out by the aircrafts and helicopters on different areas all over Syria since 2/22/2014 until 2/21/2015, where SOHR demanded from all parties not to attack the civilians and stop indiscriminate use of weapons against the populated areas as well as to stop shelling and aerial bombardment.

SOHR documented death of 5812 civilians, including 1733 children and 969 women, due to aerial bombardment carried out by the aircrafts and barrel bombs dropped by the helicopters. The aerial bombardment led to wound more than 25 civilians too.

In addition too, SOHR could document death of 1102 civilians, including 234 children and 133 women, due to mortar and tank shells, rockets, explosive propane gas cylinders and shells of Jahannam Cannon launched by the Nusra Front, Jund al-Aqsa Organization, rebel and Islamic battalions on several areas in the Syria provinces.

SOHR calls upon the Security Council to work seriously and urgently in order to stop killing the Syrians by all kinds of weapons and adopt a binding resolution to stop killing after the failure of the resolution No. 2139 issued in 2/22/2014. We also re-call on the Security Council to adopt a resolution that allow to transfer the file of war crimes and crimes against humanity, which still committed until issuing this report, to the International Criminal Court that may prevent the murderers and their commanders to stop committing more and more crimes that horrify those who still have residues of humanity, and gives hope for the victims, their relatives and all Syrian people that justice is coming even it is long-standing.

SOHR renews its pledge for the Syrian people and to everyone in the International Community who still has residues [of humanity] to work on monitoring, disseminating and documenting all human rights violations committed in Syria, and we are going to work for the benefit of the Syrian people in order to reach to the state of democracy, freedom, justice and equality.

"More than 30000 civilians killed since the adoption of the resolution No. 2139," [SOHR](#), 21 Feb 2015. (Typographical errors corrected by Standler.)

On 1 March, SOHR posted the monthly death toll for February 2015:



The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 4075 people in February 2015.

The death toll is as follows:

- Civilians: 832
- YPG, Rebels and Islamist fighters: 594
- Non-Syrian fighters from IS, al Nusra Front, Jund al aqsa and al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army: 1265
- Defected soldiers: 6
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 568
- Fighters of the People's Committees and NDF as well as spies: 555
- Fighters of Hezbollah: 30
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters, vast majority of them from the Shia Sect: 37
- Unidentified victims (documented by photos and footages): 10

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights think that the real number of non-Syrian casualties from IS, Al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion and pro-regime militants is approximately 500 soldiers and fighters more than the documented number due to the extreme secrecy about casualties on both side and due to the difficulties of reaching to the outback and the difficulties to investigate about those who have died inside the regime and IS jails.

Although that the Security Council has not responded to our demands to work seriously and urgently to stop killing the Syrians by all kinds of weapons, We in SOHR are going to work with all parties that still have human conscience in order to urge the Security Council to move seriously, even for one time, in order to do justice to the Syrian people, who have dreamed about reaching to the state of democracy, freedom, justice and equality, as they moved for the sake of peoples who are less than half of the Syrian civilians who were killed and wounded in the last 4 years.

"SOHR calls upon the Security Council to move for the Syrian People as it moves for peoples who are less than half of the Syrian civilians who were killed and wounded over 4 years."  
[SOHR](#), 1 March 2015.

The SOHR issued a cumulative death toll of 210,060 dead from the beginning of the Syrian civil war in March 2011 until 5 Feb 2015. Then SOHR said 4075 people died during February 2015, an average rate of 145/day. Interpolating, approximately 3347 people died between 6 Feb 2015 and 28 Feb 2015. That means approximately 213,407 people died during the Syrian civil war from the beginning in March 2011 to 28 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.

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## 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 essay for [Dec 2014](#). Apparently, the new "Revolution Command Council" was stillborn.

In my essays for [March 2014](#), [August 2014](#), and [Dec 2014](#), I noticed that the leader of the Free Syrian Army had disappeared from public view, and particularly disappeared from the webpages of the Syrian National Coalition. The current leader of the Free Syrian Army remains hidden from public view. However, the former commander of the Free Syrian Army, General Salim Idris, has reappeared as the Defense Minister in the interim Syrian government, one of the least important organizations in the world. [SNC](#), 27 Jan 2015; [SNC](#), 2 Feb 2015; [SNC](#), 17 Feb 2015.

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## 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 18 Feb, the Pentagon announced the U.S. Military had vetted 1200 moderate rebels in Syria. The Associated Press says the actual training will begin in March or April of 2015.

[Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 19 Feb, the USA and Turkey signed an agreement that the U.S. would train Syrian rebels at a location in Turkey. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

The U.S. Congress approved the training and equipping of Syrian rebels on 18 Sep 2014. (See my [eleventh essay](#).) The Pentagon has moved with glacial slowness during the past five months on this project, and actual training is still at least one month in the future. I suspect the Pentagon is not eager to be blamed for either (1) the future defection of U.S.-trained rebels to jihadist or terrorist groups, or (2) the capture of U.S.-supplied equipment by Nusra Front or ISIL.

On 25 Feb, the U.S. Military reported great interest amongst Syrian rebels in being trained. The current plan seems to be to train 5000 rebels/year for each of the years 2015, 2016, and 2017. [Reuters](#).

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### **Ambassador Ford reverses his opinion**

Robert Ford, the former U.S. Ambassador to Syria, has publicly reversed his position and he no longer supports the U.S. providing weapons to rebels in Syria. I summarize his reasons, the quotations are from a McClatchy news article:

1. The rebels are "disjointed and untrustworthy because they collaborate with jihadists." "... Ford has accused the rebels of collaborating with the Nusra Front, the al Qaida affiliate in Syria."
2. "It makes no sense to keep sending help to a losing side."
3. There are now fewer than 20,000 rebels, too few to be able to defeat either the Islamic terrorists or Assad.
4. "... the so-called moderate rebel option is gone and the choices in Syria have narrowed to regime vs. extremists"

Hannah Allam, "Once a top booster, ex-U.S. envoy no longer backs arming Syrian rebels," [McClatchy](#), 18 Feb 2015.

Copy at [Miami Herald](#); [SOHR](#).

**My comment:** When we are a few months away from beginning to train rebels in Syria, we learn from Robert Ford that it is already too late. This is very bad news for Obama and Kerry.

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### **Hazzm (formerly part of Free Syrian Army) Joins Jihadists**

On 1 March 2015, Reuters reported that Hazzm, "one of the last remnants of non-jihadist opposition to" Assad, had dissolved and joined a jihadist alliance. Hazzm was essentially

defeated by Nusra Front, the Al-Qaeda group in Syria. [Reuters](#), 16:01 GMT, 1 March.

The Associated Press reported — at the end of a news story about a proposed U.N. freeze in Aleppo — the same story about the dissolution of Hazm:

Also Sunday [1 March], the U.S.-backed Hazm Movement rebel group announced it was dissolving and joining the Levant Front — an umbrella group of Islamist and mainstream brigades in Aleppo province.

Hazm said in a statement posted online that its decision was spurred by heavy fighting in recent days that saw its bases overrun by the al-Qaida-affiliated Nusra Front.

Hazm's move is unlikely to have a dramatic impact on the battlefield, but it highlights the struggles of Western-backed opposition factions to remain relevant in the face of Islamic extremists like the Nusra Front and Islamic State group.

"Syria agrees to UN fact-finding mission in Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 17:27 GMT, 1 March 2015.

Later, *The Daily Star* in Lebanon gave more details, including that the Hazm group was part of the Free Syrian Army (FSA):

A U.S.-backed Syrian rebel group under attack by Nusra Front fighters announced Sunday [1 March] that it had disbanded itself and joined a larger Islamist alliance based in the city of Aleppo.

....

The surprise collapse of the FSA-aligned group [Hazm] came as opposition figures based in Aleppo rejected a U.N. envoy's plan to "freeze" fighting in the northern city, and as government forces and their allies made gains in the south against rebel groups amid fierce clashes.

....

Hazm is one of several dozen rebel groups that have received U.S. anti-tank TOW missiles and training in the past.

Marlin Dick, "FSA's Hazm disbands after Nusra offensive," [Daily Star](#), 22:54 GMT, 1 March 2015.

Liz Sly, writing for *The Washington Post*, said:

The first Syrian rebel group to be given U.S. weapons collapsed Sunday after losing control of its headquarters to Syria's main al-Qaeda affiliate, further complicating American-led efforts to counter the rise of extremism in Syria.

The rout of Harakat Hazm, whose name means Steadfastness Movement, culminated months of clashes with the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra in which the moderate group first was pushed from its main headquarters in the northern Syrian province of Idlib and then was ousted Sunday from its new base in the province of Aleppo.

After losing this latest battle, Hazm said in a statement circulated on social media that the movement had been dissolved “in an effort to halt the bloodshed” and that surviving members would be absorbed into a new rebel coalition called the Shamiyah Front.

Nusra fighters boasted on Twitter that they had seized control of U.S.-made TOW anti-tank missiles and other American aid provided to Hazm when they overran the rebels’ headquarters in the town of Atarib in the province of Aleppo. The claims could not be verified, and American supplies of weaponry to moderate rebels in northern Syria had in any case been [scaled back](#) in recent months since the battles with Nusra began.

....

Created a little over a year ago, Hazm earned prominence as the first recipients of U.S.-made TOW anti-tank missiles, the most sophisticated weapons to be supplied directly by the United States and its allies to the Syrian battlefield.

But Hazm and other moderate groups that later received the weapons complained that the quantities were insufficient to make a difference in the fight against the government. And supplies were curtailed, further weakening the moderates.

Liz Sly, "Syrian rebel group that got U.S. aid dissolves," [Washington Post](#), 23:35 GMT, 1 March 2015.

There is no mention of what happens to weapons that the USA supplied to Hazzm that could now be in the hands of jihadist (i.e., "Islamist") groups. Indeed, the Associated Press article quoted above does not even mention these weapons. In my opinion, the dissolution of Hazzm on 1 March confirms what Ambassador Ford said on 18 Feb.

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## **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.

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On 10 Feb 2015 the [BBC interviewed](#) Assad and concluded: "Assad's end has been predicted repeatedly since the war started. Instead, he is looking as secure as ever." [BBC](#).

*The Telegraph* in London, England commented: "Compared with ISIL, Assad is someone the West can do business with." [Telegraph](#).

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On 18 Feb, Reuters reported that some European nations wanted diplomatic contact with Assad:

Some European Union countries which withdrew their ambassadors from Syria are saying privately it is time for more communication with Damascus even though Britain and France oppose it, diplomats said.

Those states have become more vocal in internal meetings about the need to talk to the Syrian government and have a presence in the capital. London and Paris reject this, saying President Bashar al-Assad has lost all legitimacy.

....

Diplomats say the calls have come from or would be supported by countries including Sweden, Denmark, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria and Spain, as well as the Czech Republic, which did not withdraw its ambassador. Norway and Switzerland, which are outside the EU, are also supportive.

....

While it is generally understood that there will have to be negotiations, diplomats said, Britain and France see Assad's departure as a precondition. But the collapse of his government has become less likely as the war rolls on.

"We've been waiting for it to fall like a house of cards, but the problem is that we've been waiting for that for four years and that isn't happening," a senior EU diplomat said.

Sylvia Westall & John Irish, "Four years on, some in Europe support talking to Assad," [Reuters](#), 16:53 GMT, 18 Feb 2015.

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## **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.

de Mistura was mostly absent from the news during January 2015. de Mistura either (1) did not attend the peace conference in Moscow on 26-29 Jan 2015 or (2) he was invisible. Also, de Mistura has no website — apparently refusing to use a powerful tool for building consensus.

On 5 Feb, Reuters reported that de Mistura's proposal for a freeze in Aleppo had been frozen by deadlocked negotiations.

A United Nations plan for local cease-fires in Syria is deadlocked, with Damascus feeling it does not need to make concessions to disparate armed groups, Western diplomats familiar with the talks said.

....

De Mistura's difficult start illustrates how hard it is to advance any kind of diplomatic initiative in Syria. The government sees no immediate need to make a deal on the ground while the other side is not one but many factions.

....

A diplomat said talks between the U.N. team and the government had reached a stalemate because Damascus wanted to model the plan on previous truces that effectively forced rebels to surrender and the United Nations wants to avoid this.

Sylvia Westall, "U.N. plan for Syrian cease-fires frozen," [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, 22:05 GMT, 5 Feb 2015.

There is a copy at the Reuters [Foundation](#), 15:05 GMT, 5 Feb 2015; and also at [Reuters](#).

On 10-11 Feb 2015, de Mistura visited Baghdad for the first time since November 2014. On 11 Feb, Mistura met with Assad. On 17 Feb, Mistura will report to the U.N. Security Council. Until that report to the U.N., Mistura's work is confidential. [U.N.](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Syrian Radio/TV](#).

On 13 Feb, de Mistura met with the Austrian Foreign Minister in Vienna. Afterwards, de Mistura said "President Assad is part of the solution. I will continue to have very important discussions with him." [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#).

De Mistura spoke to the U.N. Security Council on 17 Feb, and afterwards spoke to journalists. The Associated Press reports:

The United Nations envoy to Syria said Tuesday [17 Feb] he has received a

commitment from the Syrian government to suspend airstrikes and artillery shelling on the city of Aleppo for six weeks to allow a proposed U.N. plan to "freeze" hostilities in the country's largest city to be tested.

....

But questions remain. De Mistura now has to get the opposition's support for the plan, which includes a request for them to suspend rocket and mortar fire in the same period. And Syria's ambassador to the U.N. refused to comment after the council meeting.

"Let's be frank. I have no illusions," de Mistura told reporters. "Based on past experiences, it is a difficult issue to achieve."

....

But Aleppo-based opposition activists have expressed fears the government would exploit a truce to gather its forces to fight elsewhere, and they have questioned how a cease-fire could work with Islamic State fighters in the area. And the Nusra Front, the al-Qaida affiliate in Syria, recently dismissed de Mistura's proposal as a conspiracy that would allow Syrian government forces to regroup for more assaults.

Cara Anna, "UN envoy: Syria willing to suspend Aleppo strikes 6 weeks," [Associated Press](#), 23:59 EST, 17 Feb 2015.

Reuters reported:

The Syrian government is willing to suspend its aerial bombardment and artillery shelling of the northern city of Aleppo so that a local ceasefire can be tested, the United Nations mediator on Syria said on Tuesday [17 Feb].

Aleppo is at the forefront of clashes between pro-government forces and a range of insurgents, including Islamist brigades, al Qaeda's hardline Syria wing, Nusra Front, and Western-backed units.

....

U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura said opposition forces would be asked to suspend mortar and rocket fire.

....

"Every time there is a proposal of a ceasefire ... history has proven that there is some type of acceleration in order to take a better position," de Mistura said. "I fear that could be the case."

Michelle Nichols, "Syria willing to suspend Aleppo air strikes for six weeks - U.N.," [Reuters](#), 05:56 EST, 18 Feb 2015.

**My comment:** While the Syrian government is willing to be reasonable, the problem here is to get *all* of the opposition fighters to also agree to the ceasefire. The Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda) and the jihadists are the big problems. But even the Western-backed moderate rebels might



refuse the ceasefire.

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On 19 Feb, Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoabi told [Reuters](#) that the Syrian government hopes that foreign nations who sponsor insurgents in Syria will force those insurgents to agree to a ceasefire. These foreign nations include: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Jordan.

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On 21 Feb, the Syrian National Coalition objected to de Mistura's plan. According to the Coalition, "halting the bombardment must include all Syrian cities and not just Aleppo." [SNC](#). In each city there is a different mix of rebel and jihadist groups with whom to negotiate, so including *all* cities in the ceasefire greatly increases the complexity of the negotiations. In my opinion, this broadening of the plan by the Coalition is a polite way to kill it. Instead of yelling "NO!", the Coalition has increased the complexity of the plan to make it unworkable.

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On the evening of 28 Feb, Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid al-Moallem, met with de Mistura in Damascus. Mistura's office will send people "to Aleppo to inspect the situation there." [SANA](#). It was agreed to have a joint fact-finding team visit Aleppo with people from Mistura's office and the Syrian government. [Associated Press](#), 09:39 GMT, 1 Mar 2015.

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### **peace conference in Moscow**

At the end of the consultations in Moscow on 29 Jan 2015, suggestions were floated for another meeting at the end of February or early March 2015. (See my essay for [Jan 2015](#); [Reuters](#), 30 Jan.) But then there was silence about a second meeting.

On 10 Feb, Russian president Putin met with the Egyptian president, and Putin said he expected there would be another meeting in Moscow, but no dates were mentioned. [Reuters](#).

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## **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.)

### **Report for February 2015**

On 19 Feb 2015, Ban issued his monthly report required by Resolutions 2139 and 2165. This February 2015 report actually covers events in January 2015.

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

¶9. Parties to the conflict continued to attack civilian infrastructure and cut basic services, including electricity and water. For example, on 18 January, the Nusra Front and affiliated armed opposition groups cut the water supply to Idlib city. On 23 January, armed opposition groups in Kafr Najd targeted the electricity cables supplying Idlib city. Some 600,000 people were affected by the cuts. Electricity was restored on 6 February.

¶19. Armed opposition groups, particularly ISIL and the Nusra Front, continued to perpetrate violations of international humanitarian law as well as human rights abuses in areas where they exercise control. They carried out attacks against civilians, executions, abductions and imposed restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of civilians. ISIL reportedly executed some two dozen people on the grounds of apostasy, spying for the Government, or fighting for the Government or the Nusra Front, and also executed one person for posting a photograph of an ISIL militant on social media. Videos were posted on the Internet of the Nusra Front executing two women for alleged adultery.

¶24. The delivery of humanitarian assistance in the country remains extremely difficult as a result of violence and insecurity, shifting conflict lines, deliberate interference with and closing of operations, obstructive administrative procedures and financial shortfalls. The situation in hard-to-reach areas, especially those besieged by Government or armed opposition forces, continued to be of grave concern. In addition, a winter storm compounded the humanitarian plight of people and hampered access in parts of the country as many roads became inaccessible for several days.

¶55. After nearly four years of fighting and one year on from the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), the situation for people in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate. The parties to the conflict are failing to live up to their international legal obligations to protect civilians. Explosive weapons continue to be used in populated areas throughout the country, killing and injuring men, women and children and causing widespread damage. Hospitals and other protected facilities and infrastructure continue to be attacked. Some 212,000 people remain besieged.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)," United Nations Security Council, [S/2015/124](#), 19 Feb 2015.  
Copy at [rbs0.com](#).

For many months, I have believed that Assad's military and the rebels/jihadists are equally bad. Assad's military inflicts more damage because they have more sophisticated equipment (e.g., aircraft and helicopters), not because they are more Evil. My opinion was partly validated by reports that rebel forces had created a homemade howitzer that fired propane gas cylinders. The rebels used this howitzer on 18 Feb in Aleppo. [Daily Mail](#); [SOHR](#) ("Welcome to Hell").

In the same vein, U.N. Secretary General Ban — and Obama, Kerry, et alia — continue to

complain about Assad's military dropping barrel bombs on insurgents. Does anyone remember who invented barrel bombs? In 1968, the USA used barrel bombs as incendiary devices in the Vietnam war. [Washington Post](#), 16 Feb.

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### **Kasasbeh executed by ISIL**

On 24 Dec 2014, Muath al-Kasasbeh, a pilot in the Jordanian Air Force, ejected from his F-16 airplane in Syria and was captured by ISIL. (See my essay for [Dec 2014](#), at airstrikes for 24 Dec.) On 27 Jan, ISIL released a statement that the Jordanian government must release a failed suicide bomber from Jordanian prison within 24 hours, or else ISIL would execute al-Kasasbeh and a Japanese journalist, Goto. Jordan agreed, but demanded proof that al-Kasasbeh was still alive. ISIL never furnished proof, but released a video of the execution of Goto on 31 Jan. (See my essay for [Jan 2015](#).)

On 3 Feb, ISIL released a video showing al-Kasasbeh being burned to death. He was stuffed in a cage, had gasoline poured on him, and was then burned alive. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [McClatchy-Tribune](#), also at: [The State](#) and [Bradenton Herald](#).

Jordan State Television reported that the pilot was actually burned alive on 3 *January*. [Jordan News Agency](#); [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(Reuters); [Al-Bawaba](#); all on 3 February. If true, that would mean that ISIL engaged in fraud when they negotiated for the release of a female failed suicide bomber from a prison in Jordan, in exchange for ISIL releasing the pilot. While this fraud is trivial compared to the numerous atrocities committed by ISIL, this fraud does show that one can *not* trust ISIL in any negotiations. However, the McClatchy-Tribune news service story cited in the previous paragraph says: "... but at no time did the Islamic State promise to release Kasasbeh, but rather only promised to kill him if the exchange for Goto failed."

### **reaction**

The commander of CENTCOM released a statement condemning the brutal execution of al-Kasasbeh:

U.S. Central Command strongly condemns ISIL's savage murder of Jordanian pilot Moath al-Kasasbeh. This vicious act is yet another example of ISIL, or "Daesh's," brutality and warped ideology. First and foremost, our thoughts and prayers are with his family. Al-Kasasbeh served his country courageously and honorably, and as a part of the counter-ISIL Coalition he was an important member of our team. I spoke with General Mashal al-Zaben, Chief of Staff of the Jordanian Armed Forces, and assured him that we stand with our Jordanian partners and together we will fight this barbaric enemy until it is defeated.

Gen. Lloyd Austin, "Statement From General Austin on Murder of Jordanian Pilot," [CENTCOM](#), 3 Feb 2015.

Obama also condemned the execution of al-Kasasbeh. [White House](#).

Neither General Austin nor President Obama mention that it is unlawful to execute prisoners of war.

My comment is that ISIL appears to be increasing its brutality, cruelty, and suffering in its executions. One wonders if this revolting increase will discourage young Muslims from joining ISIL? Will Muslim clerics condemn these executions by ISIL? Burning prisoners of war alive is a barbaric act by the so-called "Islamic state" caliphate (ISIL). Because the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIL) claims to act in the name of Islam, their atrocities tarnish the entire Islamic religion. Islamic clerics need to [do something](#) about this tarnishing of Islam by ISIL.

At 04:00 Jordan time on 4 Feb, two Iraqi Al-Qaeda terrorists in Jordanian prisons — including Sajida al-Rishawi, the failed suicide bomber who ISIL wanted to exchange for Goto — were hanged in retaliation for the burning of Kasasbeh. [Jordan News Agency](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [BBC](#).

For reaction of Islamic clerics, see [below](#).

My comment: Will these hangings change the behavior of ISIL? No, because ISIL was deliberately intending to be brutally outrageous when ISIL burned Kasasbeh alive. But the hangings do properly express the outrage of the Jordanian people, and everyone else, at the brutal burning of Kasasbeh.

I hope Arab nations will execute *all* of the terrorists in their prisons, to deplete the supply of terrorists who ISIL could request for prisoner exchanges. Executing them means they will *never* appear in the general population, to commit more terrorist acts. Keeping terrorists in prison has many risks: escapes, attacks on the prison by terrorists, release in prison exchanges with terrorist groups, release on humanitarian grounds, etc.

On 5 Feb, Jordanian airplanes conducted airstrikes against ISIL at Raqqa in Syria. The Jordanians also conducted airstrikes against ISIL inside Iraq, the first time an Arab member of the U.S.-led coalition had bombed inside Iraq. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Jordan's Foreign Minister told CNN these airstrikes were "the beginning of our retaliation". [CNN](#); [BBC](#).

During the retaliation by Jordan on 5-7 Feb, the Jordanian Air Force conducted a total of 56 airstrikes against ISIL, at a rate of 18 or 19 airstrikes per day. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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## 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.

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## 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](#), [December](#) 2014, and [January](#) 2015 each chronicle more atrocities, including bombings of civilians by ISIL and executions of unarmed people by ISIL.

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On 4 Feb 2015, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child released a report on the treatment of children in Iraq by ISIL:

[¶23] The Committee abhors and condemns the targeted and brutal killings of children by the so-called ISIL and in particular:

(a) The systematic killing of children belonging to religious and ethnic minorities by the so-called ISIL, including several cases of mass executions of boys, as well as reports of beheadings, crucifixions of children and burying children alive;

"Concluding observations on the combined second to fourth periodic reports of Iraq," [U.N.](#), Advance Unedited Version, 4 Feb 2015.

Reported by [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

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On 5 Feb, ISIL set three living people on fire in a town in the Heet district of Anbar province in Iraq. Residents watched them burn to death. ISIL accused the three of cooperating with the Iraqi government's security forces. [All Iraq News](#)

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On 7 Feb, a series of three Islamic bombings in Baghdad killed at least 37 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Baghdad has had a curfew at night since the year 2003. With repeated attacks showing that Baghdad remains a dangerous place, Abadi on 5 Feb declared Baghdad safe, and he abolished the curfew at midnight on 7 Feb. [All Iraq News](#); [BBC](#); [Washington Post](#).

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On the morning of 9 Feb, there were two Islamic terror attacks in Baghdad: a suicide bomber at an intersection of two streets, and a bomb in the commercial district. At least 22 people died. [Associated Press](#) at 11:52 GMT; [Reuters](#) at 08:42 GMT.

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At night on Friday, 13 Feb, a prominent Iraqi Sunni tribal leader, his son, and at least six bodyguards were shot dead by a Shiite militia in Baghdad. The tribal leader's nephew, Member of Parliament Zeid al-Janabi, was kidnapped, but released on Saturday morning. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

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On 17 Feb, the BBC quotes Iraqi Police Col. Qasim al-Obeidi as saying that ISIL burned 45 people to death in the town of al-Baghdadi, in Anbar province of Iraq. [BBC](#); [The Independent](#). One day later, there is no independent confirmation, and Iraqi news sources have *not* reported this atrocity. At 19:30 EST on 18 Feb, [CNN](#) reported that Anbar provincial council chairman Sabah Karkhout verified this story. But neither Reuters nor the Associated Press reported this story, which may cast doubt on its reality.

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On 19 Feb, there is a terse report that more than 150 civilians from the Abu Ebaid tribe were executed by ISIL in the town of al-Baghdadi. [All Iraq News](#). This atrocity is distinct from the previous atrocity, which involved 45 members of the Iraqi army or police. Two days after it happened, the head of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, Ammar al-Hakim, condemned the burning of civilians. [All Iraq News](#). But neither Reuters nor the Associated Press reported this story, which may cast doubt on its reality.

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On 21 Feb, at least 19 people died from bombs in Baghdad and a checkpoint near Tikrit. An additional four people were shot to death and their bodies dumped in the streets of Baghdad. [Associated Press](#).

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On 24 Feb, a bomb detonated in Baghdad. As rescuers arrived, a second bomb near the same location detonated, slaughtering rescuers. At least 25 people died from this attack.

Elsewhere in and near Baghdad on 24 Feb, bombs killed at least 14 people. [Associated Press](#).

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On 26 Feb, ISIL released a video of its destruction of unique antiquities in Mosul, Iraq. ISIL was so proud of its vandalism that they made a video and posted it online. [Associated Press](#), 26 Feb; [Reuters](#); [CNN](#); [NY Times](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). On 27 Feb, the Dar al-Ifta in Egypt condemned the destruction of the antiquities. [Daily Star](#)(AFP). UNESCO condemned the "cultural cleansing" by ISIL in Mosul. [UN News](#).

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On 28 Feb, car bombs exploded near the market in the town of Balad Ruz, a suicide car bomb exploded at a checkpoint near Samarra, another suicide car bomb exploded at a checkpoint south of Samarra, two bombs exploded in Baghdad, and four mortar shells hit homes in Sabaa al-Bour. A total of 37 people died at these six scenes. [Associated Press](#).

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**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.

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## Islamic Public Relations Problem

### Introduction

Beginning in August 2014, I have included this section in my essays. Initially, I commented on the series of atrocities by Islamic terrorists, who acted in the name of their interpretation of Islam, and besmirched the reputation of Islam. That was a public relations problem for Muslims. But then some military leaders and politicians developed the notion that Muslim clerics needed to explain why so-called "Islamic terrorism" was unIslamic, to stop the flow of foreigners into Syria to fight for ISIL and Nusra Front, and to stop the financial support of terrorists. This exposure of the erroneous ideology of Islamic terrorism is a different kind of public relations problem from defending mainstream Islam.

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.) But beginning in September 2014, Muslim clerics 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](#).

In the context of the Islamic terrorist attack in Paris on 7-9 Jan 2015, my [essay](#) explains two different reactions by Christian politicians to Islamic terrorism:

1. Some Christian politicians have condemned Islamic terrorism as unIslamic, but I think it is inappropriate — and *not* credible — for Christians to say what is, or is not, proper Islam. Instead, such distinctions should come from Islamic clerics.
2. Other Christian politicians carefully refuse to make a connection between Islam and terrorism. This may be "politically correct", but it is factually wrong. The facts are obvious, but I will tersely review them anyway. Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.



It is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government.

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### **Obama will *not* admit Islamic terrorism**

The [Associated Press](#) reported that twice in January 2015, the "the White House has publicly grappled with the politically fraught language of terrorism." First, Obama avoided mentioning Islam in his condemnation of the terrorist attacks in Paris. Second, "the White House struggled to explain why the administration sometimes classifies the Afghan Taliban as a terrorist organization — and sometimes does not."

My comment is that the Associated Press should also have mentioned Obama's State of the Union [speech](#) on 20 Jan 2015, which nowhere mentions "Islam", and mentions "Muslim" in only one sentence: "It's why we continue to reject offensive stereotypes of Muslims, the vast majority of whom share our commitment to peace."

The U.S. Military has specifically identified "Islamic terrorism" as an enemy.

Recently, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn — the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency — publicly criticized Obama for failing to identify "Islamic terrorism" as an enemy. Flynn's remarks were reported by *The Weekly Standard*:

The Obama administration doesn't understand the threat, Flynn said, noting that the administration refuses to use "Islamic militants" to describe the enemy.

"You cannot defeat an enemy you do not admit exists," he said.

The administration, he continued, wants "us to think that our challenge is dealing with an undefined set of violent extremists or merely lone-wolf actors with no ideology or network. But that's just not the straight truth."

Stephen F. Hayes, "Former Defense Intel Chief Blasts Obama," [Weekly Standard](#), 27 Jan 2015.

Flynn's remarks were also reported by the [Wall Street Journal](#).

On 30 Jan 2015, Admiral Kirby was asked at a press briefing at the Pentagon about Flynn's remarks:

QUESTION [by Kim]: Sir, the DIA chief, retired Lieutenant General Mike Flynn said in comments earlier this week that he thought the campaign against ISIS and Al Qaida needed to be retooled, turning it into a multigenerational campaign, like the fight against the Soviets. He also said it was more important to address the enemy as Islamic militants, not criminal extremists, because that better enables you to choose the tools to fight against it.

Do you have any reaction to that?

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Well, obviously everyone has great respect for General Flynn, no question about that.



I — I think the way I would react to it is to say that we have been very honest from the very beginning about who these people are and about how hard and how long it's going to take to degrade and destroy their capabilities, to remove them as a threat in Iraq and in the region.

We've said it's going to take several years. I think we stand by that. I mean, just last week, you know, we got into this discussion here in the briefing room about square kilometers — kilometers, I remembered to say it this time, square kilometers possessed by ISIL and government forces and was very open and honest. I was very open and honest about the fact that the net changes have not been, you know, of great magnitude.

It just shows you, this is going to take awhile. We were seven months into this. And people are asking why it's not over. It's going to take awhile. Now, I — I can't predict, and I — I don't pretend to be smart enough to predict, you know, exactly how long, you know, on the calendar it's going to take. We've said it's probably going to take three to five years.

What makes this difficult, Kim, is that — that **what really has to happen here is the defeat of the ideology.** [boldface added] And that's not going to be done at the barrel of a gun. It can't be done at the barrel of a gun. It's going to have to take place over time, with good governance in both Iraq and Syria, political stability, to answer some of the needs, the requirements, the desires, the inclusive desires of the people that live in that region. And it's just going to — it's going to take awhile.

And we've — and as for, you know, what you call these guys, we've been nothing but honest about who they are and the brutal ideology that they're espousing. I mean I — I don't have any qualm at all with the way that we here in the Pentagon talk about ISIL and who they are, what their goals are.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 20 Jan 2015. [Boldface added by Standler.]

On 24 Oct 2014, Admiral Kirby said: "... the center of gravity, from a military perspective, in our view, was their ideology. .... That is their source of strength, is this warped, barbaric ideology that is attractive to these young men — men without — well, whatever reason they joined, for whatever fanaticism that draws them to it." [Pentagon](#).

On 20 Nov 2014, Admiral Kirby said: "the way to really defeat this threat is to defeat its ideology, and the best way to defeat the ideology is through good governance." [Pentagon](#).

Admiral Kirby identified the Islamic terrorists in Paris as "inspired by the ideology of ISIL. .... we know that Al Qaida and other radical Islam — Islamist groups desire to inspire and incite violence." [Pentagon](#) on 16 Jan 2015.

On 1 Feb 2015, *Fox News Sunday* interviewed three people — U.S. Senator Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., retired General Jack Keane, and former U.S. Ambassador Dennis Ross:

WALLACE: I want to go back, Senator Ayotte, to the big picture and to that map. And

the Obama administration's continued refusal to say that we are in a war with Islamic extremism. Here this week is Secretary of the State John Kerry.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOHN KERRY, SECRETARY OF STATE: Today, we are witnessing nothing more than a form of criminal anarchy, a nihilism, which illegitimately claims an ideological and religious foundation.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

WALLACE:

Senator Ayotte, why does it matter what we call our enemies in the region?

AYOTTE: It very much matters because you have to define your enemy. And here is the problem, I think they should spend less time on being worried about being politically correct about how we define our enemies and more time on a strategy to defeat them. One of the things we heard consistently this week from the national security experts, including General Keane, was a lack of a strategy. It was very disjointed what's happening and what we see is more outgrowth of these extremist groups in the region.

WALLACE: Well, I want to pick up on that. And in fact, the reason that I wanted to do the panel this week is because you had some of our leading national security thinkers, really sounding the alarm. It almost seemed in a way like a tipping point. Let's put some of them up on the screen. Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, retired head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said this, "You cannot defeat an enemy you do not admit exists."

....

WALLACE: ... General Keane, do we have a winning strategy at this point against Islamic extremism?

KEANE: Well, anybody looking at that map, our viewers just looking at it, would come to the conclusion, which is obvious — we do not. Al Qaeda has grown four-fold in five years. ISIS, which began when we pulled out politically and military from Iraq, grew from an organization less than 3,000 to an organization over 30,000 in three years. Radical Islamists spread from Western Africa through the Middle East, all the way to South Asia to sub-Indian continent.

What is the strategy to stop it? We have not stopped it and we certainly don't have a strategy to defeat it. It is absolutely compelling.

....

ROSS: Well, a couple of points. First, I think, Senator, your point not being reluctant to identify who the enemy is, is essential, because we have to say who it is that we're actually fighting.

And you look at that map and you see Iran being on the move, you see radical Islamism as reflected by Iran fighting radical Islamism as reflected, I would say, ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood.

We have to decide, radical Islam, whether it's Sunni or Shia, is the enemy. And we have to then begin to work with those who see that as a threat to them.

We shouldn't be reluctant to call it "Islamic radicalism", precisely because there are those in the Middle East who see it as a threat and they're the ones who ultimately have to discredit it. We cannot discredit radical Islam. They're going to have to discredit it.

....

Chris Wallace, "President Obama's foreign policy under fire," [Fox News](#), 1 Feb 2015.

My comment is that I do not like the term "Islamic extremist" or "Islamic radicalism". What is extremism or radicalism to one person may be either Holy Truth or idealism to another person. Ultimately, "extremism" and "radicalism" are propaganda words. What we should be opposing is "Islamic terrorism" — the *use of terrorism* to further goals that are justified by an interpretation of the Islamic religion.

On 18 Feb, Obama opposed "violent extremism", see [below](#), but this time Obama explicitly mentioned the connection between Islam and terrorism.

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### **Islamic Clerics Condemn Burning of Kasasbeh by ISIL**

[Above](#), I described the burning of Kasasbeh by ISIL. It was interesting to note that politicians promptly denounced this barbaric murder, but Muslim clerics were initially silent. [Al-Bawaba](#), 20:20 GMT, 3 Feb 2015.

About 22 hours after the video of the burning of Kasasbeh was released, Muslim clerics began to condemn this atrocity. (Although the clerics may have condemned the atrocity earlier, what matters is the time that journalists distribute the condemnation to people.)

Reuters reported:

Egypt's top Muslim authority, the 1,000 year old Al-Azhar university revered by Sunni Muslims around the world, issued a statement expressing "deep anger over the lowly terrorist act" by what it called a "Satanic, terrorist" group.

The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, said the killers themselves deserved to be "killed, crucified or to have their limbs amputated."

In Qatar, the International Association of Muslim Scholars, headed by prominent cleric Youssef al-Qaradawi and linked to the Muslim Brotherhood that has influence across the region, called the burning of Kasaesbeh a criminal act.

"The Association asserts that this extremist organisation does not represent Islam in any way and its actions always harm Islam," it said.

....

... senior clerics across the Islamic world argued that inflicting death by fire was always banned under Islam.

"The Prophet, peace be upon him, advised against burning people with fire," Sheikh Hussein bin Shu'ayb, head of the religious affairs department in southern Yemen, told Reuters in Aden.

Saudi cleric Salman al-Odah wrote on his Twitter account: "Burning is an abominable crime rejected by Islamic law regardless of its causes."

"It is rejected whether it falls on an individual or a group or a people. Only God tortures by fire," he added.

Sami Aboudi & Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Clerics denounce burning alive of pilot as un-Islamic," [Reuters](#), 15:04 GMT, 4 Feb 2015.

Earlier version at [Reuters](#), 12:25 GMT, 4 Feb.

Part at [Arab News](#).

The Associated Press reported:

The head of Sunni Islam's most respected seat of learning, Egypt's Al-Azhar, said the militants deserve the Quranic punishment of death, crucifixion or the chopping off of their arms for being enemies of God and the Prophet Muhammad.

"Islam prohibits the taking of an innocent life," Ahmed al-Tayeb, Al-Azhar's grand sheik, said in a statement, adding that by burning the pilot to death, the militants violated Islam's prohibition on the immolation or mutilation of bodies, even during wartime.

....

Burning to death as legal punishment, however, is unheard of in the contemporary Middle East, and a prominent Saudi cleric, Sheik Salman al-Oudah, wrote Wednesday that it is prohibited by Islam, citing what he said was a saying by the Prophet Muhammad that reserves for God alone the right to punish by fire in the after-life.

Youssef al-Qaradawi, a prominent Qatar-based cleric who is respected by the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists, issued a five-page statement on Wednesday in which he listed a number of Quranic verses and sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad telling Muslims to not mistreat prisoners of war.

"The laxity of the international community in dealing with a president who kills his people ... is what created these extremist groups and provided them with a fertile

environment," he said, alluding to Syria's President Bashar Assad. Hamza Hendawi, "Outrage in Mideast over IS killing of Jordan pilot," [Associated Press](#), 15:45 GMT, 4 Feb 2015.

My comment, in response to al-Qaradawi, is that any alleged atrocities by Assad most certainly do *not* justify other people (e.g., ISIL) using atrocities. Everyone is responsible for the methods that they use. Retaliating in kind lowers the retaliator to the original perpetrator's moral standards.

I also comment that Al-Azhar's recommendation of crucifixion for ISIL leaders is disgustingly cruel, even for scum like ISIL. There are decent methods of execution, such as hanging or gunshot to the head, that involve little suffering. But crucifixion is barbaric and involves hours of suffering. Al-Azhar should endorse a less cruel method of execution than crucifixion. Incidentally, ISIL itself used crucifixion in 2014. (Eight rebels crucified on [28 June 2014](#).)

Both Reuters and Associated Press mention the justifications offered by supporters of ISIL. I have omitted such justifications here, for two reasons. First, this section is about the response of mainstream Muslim clerics, *not* the justifications by Islamic terrorists. Second, I am *not* interested in how barbarians justify their atrocities.

On the evening of 4 Feb, *The New York Times* reported:

There was one feeling that many of the Middle East's fractious clerics, competing ethnic groups and warring sects could agree on Wednesday [4 Feb]: a shared sense of revulsion at the [Islamic State's latest excess](#), its video showing a Jordanian pilot being burned alive inside a cage.

....

"This vile terrorist act," [Grand Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the head of Cairo's thousand-year-old Al Azhar institute and a leading Sunni scholar] said in a statement issued by Al Azhar, "requires punishment as cited by the Quran for oppressors and spoilers on earth who fight God and his prophet, that they be killed, or crucified, or their hands and legs cut off."

Al Azhar, a seat of Islamic learning, considers itself a beacon of moderation and tolerance for the Sunni Muslim world, and the statement offered no explanation for the incongruity of Mr. Tayeb's advocating some of the same medieval punishments typically employed by extremists.

Rod Nordland & Anne Barnard, "Arab World Unites in Anger After Burning of Jordanian Pilot," [NY Times](#), 4 Feb 2015.

My comment on 4 Feb: In reading many news articles, I was impressed that most journalists quoted only two Muslim clerics: (1) al-Tayeb at Al-Azhar in Cairo, and (2) al-Qaradawi in Qatar. There is at least one respected Muslim cleric in each nation with a Muslim majority, and there are many Islamic universities and organizations. Why are they silent?

On 5 Feb, the Grand Mufti of Egypt said the murder of Kasasbeh by ISIL was a crime, and

not part of Islam. [CNN](#).

On 6 Feb, the Associated Press reported:

The immolation of a Jordanian pilot by the Islamic State group has brought a unified outcry Friday from top religious clerics across the Muslim world — including a prominent jihadi preacher — who insisted the militants have gone too far.

Abu Mohammed al-Maqdesi, considered a spiritual mentor for many al-Qaida militants, said the killing of Lt. Muath al-Kaseasbeh is "not acceptable in any religion." He spoke in an interview with Jordan's Roya TV a day after being released from more than three months in detention.

At Friday prayers in neighboring Iraq, where the militant group has seized territory in a third of the country, top Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani declared in a sermon that the "savage" act demonstrates the extremists know no boundaries and violate "Islamic values and humanity."

Religious groups, often at odds with one another over ideologies or politics, are increasingly speaking out in unison against the militants, who continue to enforce their rule in Iraq and Syria through massacres, kidnapping, forced marriages, stonings and other acts of brutality.

....

Pakistani Sunni cleric Munir Ahmed, in his sermon in Islamabad, also dismissed any theological basis for the crime, saying the "gruesome" death of the Jordanian pilot "is the most horrible act of cruelty." It's a punishment that "Allah has kept for its own authority and no human is authorized to do it," Ahmed said.

Vivian Salama, "In unison, Muslim clerics lash out against Islamic State," [Associated Press](#), 18:12 GMT, 6 Feb 2015.

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## 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."

On 21 Oct 2014, the Iraqi defense minister promised to investigate the failing of the Iraqi army and hold them accountable. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

On 12 Nov 2014, Iraqi prime minister sacked 36 Iraqi army officers. Note there was *no* attempt to punish these corrupt officers. (See my essay for [Nov 2014](#).)

On 23 Nov 2014, 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.

When I searched Google News on 2 Sep 2014, 19 Oct, 20 Dec 2014, and 27 Feb 2015, 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.

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## 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.

### 10 Feb 2015: Parliament meets

At 12:42 Baghdad time on 10 Feb, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 255 members (78%) present.

At 14:18, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 12 Feb.

The previous meeting of Parliament was on 29 Jan, followed by an 11 day vacation at a time when Iraq needs to form a National Guard, investigate desertion of army officers at Mosul in June 2014, assist refugees, reform the Iraqi army, ....

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### 12 Feb 2015: Parliament meets

At 12:06 Baghdad time on 12 Feb, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 240 members (73%) present.

At 14:43, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 14 Feb.

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### 14 Feb 2015: Parliament meets

At 14:31 Baghdad time on 14 Feb, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with an unknown number of members present.

During the session of Parliament, two blocs of mostly Sunni legislators walked out, in protest over the killing of a Sunni tribal leader and the kidnapping of a Sunni legislator (see [above](#)). The National Alliance legislators walked out. [All Iraq News](#). The Iraqiya Alliance legislators



also walked out. [Reuters](#), 14 Feb; [Washington Post](#), 14 Feb; [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP), 15 Feb. The walkout depleted the 328 member Parliament by a total of 73 members (22%) and threatened to end the allegedly inclusive government of Abadi that promised to reconcile Sunnis and Shiites.

At 16:33, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 16 Feb.

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#### **16 Feb 2015: Parliament meets**

At 12:00 Baghdad time on 16 Feb, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with an unknown number of members present.

The Minister of Defense answered questions in Parliament about the assassination of the Sunni tribal leader. [All Iraq News](#).

At 14:05, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 24 Feb.

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#### **24 Feb 2015: Parliament meets**

At 12:17 Baghdad time on 24 Feb, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 174 members (53%) present.

The Union of National Powers and the National Coalition refused to attend sessions of Parliament for the indefinite future. [All Iraq News](#).

At 17:06, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 26 Feb.

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#### **26 Feb 2015: Parliament meets**

At 12:10 Baghdad time on 26 Feb, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 200 members (61%) present.

At 18:13, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 28 Feb.

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#### **28 Feb 2015: Parliament meets**

At 12:12 Baghdad time on 28 Feb, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament convened with 185 members (56%) present.

At 16:29, [All Iraq News](#) reported that Parliament adjourned until 2 March.

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## **Daily News About Iraq & Syria**

## 1 Feb 2015: Robert Gates disputes policy goals

On 1 Feb 2015, the former U.S. Defense Secretary, Dr. Robert Gates, appeared on the NBC television program "Meet the Press" and said:

CHUCK TODD: So let's talk about ISIS. Is it fair to say we're not winning this battle against ISIS right now?

ROBERT GATES: I think that's correct. I think we've made some steps, some successful steps to contain it. But at the same time, in a way, ISIS has sort of reached the natural limits of where they would have sympathetic people, the Sunni areas of northern and western Iraq in particular. But I think that the airstrikes have contributed to containing them. But we're a long way, in my view, from being in a position to roll them back or push them out of Iraq.

....

GATES: .... And I think it will be very difficult to roll ISIS back without forward air controllers and spotters, without embedded trainers, with the Sunni tribes, with the Iraqi army, with the Peshmerga, the Kurds, and I think some limited use of special forces.

But what I'm talking about here is potentially a few hundred troops, not thousands of tens of thousands. And I think that the president has set an ambitious and, I think, under current circumstances, unrealistic goal when he talks about our intent being to destroy ISIS. With the news that he has approved so far, I think that's an unattainable objective.

CHUCK TODD: I was just going to say, we've killed a lot of Islamic radicals. Whether they were members of Al Qaeda, members of ISIS. But we don't seem to defeat this ideology. How do you defeat? Should we stop saying we're going to defeat? Because it seems like once you get rid of one group, another one pops up with another name, but the same radical ideology.

ROBERT GATES: I think we've set unrealistic goals for ourselves. When we say we're going to destroy the Taliban, we're going to destroy Al Qaeda, I mean, we've been after Al Qaeda with all the resources of an American military and intelligence community for 14 years now. And we haven't destroyed it.

....

ROBERT GATES: Well, I think you need to take a step back and realize the complexity and historical magnitude of the challenge we're facing. First of all, we have four conflicts going on simultaneously in the Middle East. Sunni versus Shia, authoritarians versus reformers, Islamists versus secularists. And then the question of whether artificially-created countries like Syria, Libya, and Iraq can hold together absent repression.

"Meet the Press Transcript — February 1, 2015," [NBC](#), 1 Feb 2015. (posted 7 Feb 2015.)

Inside the Beltway, this interview was summarized at [Politico](#); [Washington Post](#); [The Hill](#). This interview was the subject of an unusually long news article at [All Iraq News](#).

**My comment** is that Dr. Gates is probably correct when he says destroying ISIL is an "unattainable objective" with the current strategy used by the USA. His statement is contrary to rhetoric from the White House and the remainder of the U.S. Government. Before we spend billions of dollars on the war in Iraq and Syria, we should have an attainable goal.

Competent troops on the ground can stop ISIL from acquiring more land, but this is a policy of containment, and *not* a policy to defeat ISIL. And note that the history of fighting the Taliban and Al-Qaeda shows that when one leader is killed, another takes his place — when fighters are killed, new recruits appear. Because Islamic terrorism is *continuing* to attract fighters and support, it seems unlikely that purely military action can end Islamic terrorism.

If we really want to defeat Islamic terrorism, then we need to defeat the *idea* of Islamic terrorism, thereby ending the ability of current and future groups of Islamic terrorists to recruit fighters and attract funding. This goal requires that political leaders honestly identify the problem as "Islamic terrorism", and then honestly confront the role of Islam in Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and other terrorist groups. (See [above](#).) We especially need Muslim clerics to consistently and continually condemn terrorism in the name of the Muslim religion, to stop young Muslims from joining terrorist groups.

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## 2 Feb 2015: Obama's budget for FY2016

On 2 Feb 2015, Obama submitted a formal budget request to Congress for Fiscal Year 2016. The budget asks for US\$ 8,800,000,000 to fight ISIL in Syria and Iraq, of which \$5.3 billion goes to the Defense Department and \$3.5 billion goes to the State Department for humanitarian aid. [Reuters](#).

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## 4 Feb 2015: Obama's meeting with U.S. Muslim leaders

On 4 Feb, Obama met in the White House with 15 leaders of the U.S. Muslim community. The White House then issued a terse press release:

The President this afternoon met with American Muslim leaders to discuss a range of domestic and foreign policy issues. The President thanked the participants for their work in a variety of fields and for coming together to offer views on issues of importance to their communities, noting that his regular interactions with different faith communities provided him with valuable insights and feedback. Among the topics of discussion were the community's efforts and partnerships with the Administration on a range of domestic issues such as the Affordable Care Act, issues of anti-Muslim violence and discrimination, the 21st Century Policing Task Force, and the upcoming White House Summit on Countering Violence Extremism. The President reiterated his Administration's commitment to safeguarding civil rights through hate crimes prosecutions and civil enforcement actions. **The President discussed the need to continue countering ISIL and other groups that commit horrific acts of violence, purportedly in the name of Islam.** [Boldface added] Noting the remarkable

contributions of Muslim Americans to our country, the President also encouraged the participants to remain civically engaged in their communities, and told them that he looked forward to seeking additional opportunities to continue the discussion of these and other issues.

"Readout of the President's Meeting with American Muslim Leaders," [White House](#), 4 Feb 2015. (Boldface added by Standler.)

Later, it was alleged that the U.S. Muslim leaders had convinced Obama *not* to use phrases such as "Islamic terrorism", "Islamic extremism", or "radical Islam", because those labels would connect mainstream Islam with the despised terrorists, and offend the mainstream Muslims. (See, e.g., [Washington Post](#); [Hamilton Spectator](#); and see articles cited [below](#).) Refusing to label ISIL and Al-Qaeda as "Islamic terrorists" elevates a fictional political correctness over established facts. The leaders of ISIL and Al-Qaeda openly invoke their interpretation of Islam to justify their atrocities and violences. The mainstream Muslims *should* be able to distinguish their religion from the interpretation used by Islamic terrorists.

Obama is correct in the one sentence that I boldfaced in the above quoted press release: Muslims *must* continually condemn acts of Islamic terrorism and specifically refute the terrorists' use of Islamic theology.

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### **5 Feb 2015: U.K. committee report**

On 5 Feb 2015, the Defense Committee of the U.K. Parliament released a report that said: "we wonder whether containment and suppression of DAESH would not be a more realistic goal than total elimination." [Reuters](#). These remarks echo Dr. Gates remarks in his 1 Feb interview, which was quoted above.

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### **5 Feb 2015: Obama attacks Christians**

Every year the U.S. President attends the National Prayer Breakfast and says some platitudes about religion. But not this year. Obama — who can *not* say the phrase "Islamic terrorism" — attacked the Christian religion, in an effort to show that all religions are equally violent.

....

But we also see faith being twisted and distorted, used as a wedge — or, worse, sometimes used as a weapon. From a school in Pakistan to the streets of Paris, we have seen violence and terror perpetrated by those who profess to stand up for faith, their faith, professed to stand up for Islam, but, in fact, are betraying it. We see ISIL, a brutal, vicious death cult that, in the name of religion, carries out unspeakable acts of barbarism — terrorizing religious minorities like the Yezidis, subjecting women to rape as a weapon of war, and claiming the mantle of religious authority for such actions.

We see sectarian war in Syria, the murder of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, religious war in the Central African Republic, a rising tide of anti-Semitism and hate crimes in Europe, so often perpetrated in the name of religion.

So how do we, as people of faith, reconcile these realities — the profound good, the strength, the tenacity, the compassion and love that can flow from all of our faiths, operating alongside those who seek to hijack religious for their own murderous ends?

Humanity has been grappling with these questions throughout human history. **And lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ.** [Boldface added by Standler.] Michelle and I returned from India — an incredible, beautiful country, full of magnificent diversity — but a place where, in past years, religious faiths of all types have, on occasion, been targeted by other peoples of faith, simply due to their heritage and their beliefs — acts of intolerance that would have shocked Gandhiji, the person who helped to liberate that nation.

**So this is not unique to one group or one religion.** [Boldface added by Standler.] There is a tendency in us, a sinful tendency that can pervert and distort our faith. In today's world, when hate groups have their own Twitter accounts and bigotry can fester in hidden places in cyberspace, it can be even harder to counteract such intolerance. But God compels us to try. And in this mission, I believe there are a few principles that can guide us, particularly those of us who profess to believe.

....

Obama "Remarks by the President at National Prayer Breakfast," [White House](#), 5 Feb 2015. (Boldface added by Standler.)

**My comments:** I would not mention Obama's remarks at the Prayer Breakfast, except that Obama has steadfastly refused to recognize that "Islamic terrorism" is our enemy. By refusing to recognize a connection between Islam and the terrorists in Al-Qaeda and ISIL, Obama not only denies established facts, but also makes it more difficult to defeat the ideology of Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

Responding to his speech at the Prayer Breakfast, it is not for Obama — who attends a Christian church — to say that Islamic terrorists are "betraying" Islam. That is the job of Islamic clerics. Obama should be encouraging those clerics to denounce terrorism in the name of Islam. (On 18 Feb, Obama gave a speech — quoted [below](#) — in which Obama urged Muslims to denounce terrorism in the name of Islam.)

Obama asks rhetorically how terrorists can "hijack religious for their own murderous ends". Not just Islamic terrorists, but also "anti-Semitism and hate crimes in Europe".

Obama then reminds us that Catholics perpetrated "terrible deeds" "during the Crusades and the [Spanish] Inquisition", so Christians do *not* have a moral high ground to preach to Islamic terrorists. Obama also tersely mentions that the Ku Klux Klan and others justified racial discrimination, segregation, and slavery "in the name of Christ". Obama neglected to say that Christians in Germany murdered six million Jews just 75 years ago. Obama neglected to mention the recent pedophile priest scandal in the Catholic church.

Obama then concludes that Evil "is not unique to one group or one religion."

Obama has a lot of courage when he attended the National Prayer Breakfast and attacked the Christian religion for acts that happened long ago. The Crusades ended in the year 1291. The Spanish Inquisition ended in the year 1834. In contrast, Al-Qaeda and ISIL are killing people today and recently. Obama plainly wants to avoid offending Muslims, but Obama seems willing to offend Christians.

Journalists reported the criticism of Obama:

- Paul Mirengoff, "Obama Again Shows His Contempt For America And The West," [PowerLine blog](#), 5 Feb.
- "Critics pounce after Obama talks Crusades, slavery at prayer breakfast," [Washington Post](#), 6 Feb.
- "Critics Seize On Obama's ISIS Remarks at Prayer Breakfast," [New York Times](#), 6 Feb.
- "Obama draws ire for comparing Isil to Spanish Inquisition and Ku Klux Klan," [The Telegraph](#), 6 Feb.
- "Krauthammer 'Stunned' By Obama's 'Banal and Offensive' Prayer Breakfast Remarks," [Fox News](#), 6 Feb.
- Jonah Goldberg, "Obama's Comparison of Christianity to Radical Islam Defies Logic," [Real Clear Politics](#), 6 Feb.
- "White House defends Prayer Breakfast remarks about the Crusades," [The Hill](#), 6 Feb.
- Charles Krauthammer, "Crusaders and appeasers," [Washington Post](#), 12 Feb.
- Doyle McManus, "'Islamic' extremism or 'violent' extremism? The president is mincing words and there's a reason for that," [Los Angeles Times](#), 20 Feb.
- "Obama Crusade remarks spark firestorm of debate," [Al-Jazeera](#), 21 Feb.

But Obama's attack on the Christian religion misses the point. Obama is correct that followers of *all* religions have perpetrated Evil acts, but that does not make the problem of Islamic terrorism vanish. We still *need* Muslim clerics to condemn Islamic terrorism, to stop the flow of young Muslims who want to fight for ISIL and Al-Qaeda, and to stop the flow of financial support for Islamic terrorist groups.

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## 8 Feb 2015: Security Conference in Munich, Germany

John Kerry went to the Security Conference in Munich, Germany, to tell the Arabs to be grateful for U.S.-led airstrikes. Instead of being grateful, Arabs — including Qatar and Egypt — criticized the USA for failing to provide more weapons, and for failing to devise a real strategy for defeating ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon; all on 8 Feb 2015.

At the Security Conference, Kerry said about "the rise of violent extremism":

And if we needed more evidence, almost every single week brings new examples of how far the evil of these extremist groups reaches. Daesh's execution of a captured Jordanian pilot by burning him alive is a new level of depravity. And far from hiding

such a despicable act, they posted a video of it for all the world to see. And last week, the UN reported the horrifying ways that Daesh treats even its most vulnerable captives — crucifying children; burying children alive; handpicking mentally challenged children to serve as suicide bombers and kill even more innocent people. This is what we're up against.

....

Let me be clear, there are no grounds of history, religion, ideology, psychology, politics, economic advantage or disadvantage, or personal ambition that justify the murder of children, the kidnapping and rape of teenage girls, or the slaughter of unarmed civilians. These atrocities can never be rationalized; they can never be excused; they must be opposed with every fiber of our being, and they must be stopped. [Applause]

....

Today, the international coalition that we have built has grown to more than 60 active members, including dozens of allies and partners in Europe, all operating with the shared goal of disrupting, degrading, and destroying — ultimately destroying Daesh.

Since September, our coalition has pursued a carefully crafted, comprehensive strategy to weaken Daesh on multiple fronts. We have launched some 2,000 air strikes, retaken already 700 square kilometers of territory — one-fifth of the populated area that they had controlled. We have deprived the militants of the use of 200 oil and gas facilities that they were using to get their revenue. We've disrupted their command structure, undermined its propaganda, taken out half of their senior leadership, squeezed its financing, damaged its supply networks, dispersed its personnel, and forced them to think twice before they move in an open convoy.

We are forcing them to change tactics. Take the events in Kobani. Daesh had captured more than 300 Kurdish villages along the border of Syria with Turkey, including large swaths of Kobani itself. But thanks to diplomatic cooperation among coalition partners, targeted air strikes, and on-the-ground support from Iraqi Kurdish forces, together, we drove Daesh out. They expected an easy victory, and the media was predicting an easy victory only a month or weeks away. Instead, after a costly battle, in which they lost roughly a thousand of their fighters, they were forced to openly acknowledge defeat.

And as Daesh retreats to Syria, we will continue our fight and we will continue to put pressure on the Assad regime because there is no place for a brutal dictator who is a magnet for terrorism and allows those terrorists safe haven.

John Kerry, "Remarks at the Munich Security Conference Panel Discussion," [State Dept.](#), 8 Feb 2015.

**My comments:** Apparently Kerry can *not* say the words "Islamic terrorism". If Kerry can not recognize the connection of Islam with the scourge of Islamic terrorism, then he can not defeat the *idea* of Islamic terrorism. It is *not* "extremism" that we are fighting, but rather the use of terrorism to impose a particular interpretation of Islam on unwilling people. Minutes



earlier at this conference, the German Foreign Minister said the words "Islamist terrorist", as part of the problems the world faces. (See English translation at U.S. State Department, linked above, or German original — islamistischer Terrorismus — at the German [Auswärtiges-Amt](#).)

Kerry's swipe at Assad for allegedly being a "magnet for terrorism and allow[ing] those terrorists safe haven" is ridiculous. Lots of nations are a "magnet for terrorism" — the USA attracted the Islamic hijackers on 11 Sep 2001; France has Islamic terrorists from Algeria; Yemen, Libya, and Iraq are infested with Islamic terrorists; .... Assad definitely did *not* allow Al-Qaeda and ISIL to remain in Syria — indeed those Islamic terrorists are a big threat to the continued rule of Assad.

With Kerry misrepresenting facts about Assad, it is understandable why the Syria policy of the USA is ineffective.

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### **9 Feb 2015: ISIL in Afghanistan**

My essay for [Jan 2015](#) mentions the spread of ISIL into Afghanistan, thanks in part to Abdul Rauf, who was released from the U.S. prison in Guantanamo Bay in 2007. On 9 Feb, Rauf (and 7 other ISIL members) were killed by a missile fired from a drone in Afghanistan. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#).

On 10 Feb, the U.S. Government confirmed that Rauf was killed. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#).

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### **10 Feb 2015: ISIL recruited 20,000 foreigners**

On 10 Feb 2015, the Associated Press reported that 20,000 foreign fighters had joined ISIL in Syria and Iraq during an unspecified time.

Foreign fighters are streaming into Syria and Iraq in unprecedented numbers to join the Islamic State or other extremist groups, including at least 3,400 from Western nations among 20,000 from around the world, U.S. intelligence officials say in an updated estimate of a top terrorism concern.

Intelligence agencies now believe that as many as 150 Americans have tried and some have succeeded in reaching in the Syrian war zone, officials told the House Homeland Security Committee in testimony prepared for delivery on Wednesday [11 Feb]. Some of those Americans were arrested en route, some died in the area and a small number are still fighting with extremists.

The testimony and other data were obtained Tuesday [10 Feb] by The Associated Press.

Nick Rasmussen, chief of the National Counterterrorism Center, said the rate of foreign fighter travel to Syria is without precedent, far exceeding the rate of foreigners who went to wage jihad in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen or Somalia at any other point



in the past 20 years.

....

The estimate of 20,000 fighters, from 90 countries, is up from 19,000, Rasmussen will tell the House committee, according to prepared testimony. The number of Americans or U.S. residents who have gone or tried to go is up to 150 from 50 a year ago and 100 in the fall.

Ken Dilanian, "AP Exclusive: 20,000 foreign fighters flock to Syria, Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 21:20 GMT, 10 Feb 2015.

Also see update at [Associated Press](#), 17:29 GMT, 11 Feb 2015.

My comment is that the continuing success of ISIL in attracting fighters means that Muslim clerics *must* continually and consistently condemn ISIL and other Islamic terrorist organizations, to stop this flow of young Muslims to ISIL. See my remarks at "[Islamic Public Relations Problem](#)".

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### 10 Feb 2015: BBC interviews Assad

The British Broadcasting Corporation interviewed Assad, who seemed delusional when he denied the Syrian military was dropping barrel bombs on civilians. In another part of the interview, Assad said that Iraq was passing information to Syria about coalition airstrikes inside Syria.

QUESTION: There's the American military in the air above Syria and the Syrian Air Force. But there haven't been any incidents between the two, no shots seem to have been traded, no planes have been shot down. That suggests to me surely that someone is talking to someone here?

ASSAD: That's correct, that's correct. But again there's no direct co-operation... Through a third party - more than one party - Iraq and other countries. Sometimes they convey message, general message, but there's nothing tactical.

Jeremy Bowen, "Assad's BBC interview: Key excerpts," [BBC](#), 06:03 GMT, 10 Feb 2015.

Also see [BBC News Article](#).

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### 11 Feb 2015: Obama's draft AUMF

In December 2014, the U.S. Senate attempted to draft an AUMF, but failed, as described in my essay for [Dec 2014](#).

On 11 Feb 2015, Obama issued the following cover letter for his draft Authorization For Use Military Force (AUMF):

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

The so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) poses a threat to the people and stability of Iraq, Syria, and the broader Middle East, and to U.S. national security.

It threatens American personnel and facilities located in the region and is responsible for the deaths of U.S. citizens James Foley, Steven Sotloff, Abdul-Rahman Peter Kassig, and Kayla Mueller. If left unchecked, ISIL will pose a threat beyond the Middle East, including to the United States homeland.

I have directed a comprehensive and sustained strategy to degrade and defeat ISIL. As part of this strategy, U.S. military forces are conducting a systematic campaign of airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Although existing statutes provide me with the authority I need to take these actions, I have repeatedly expressed my commitment to working with the Congress to pass a bipartisan authorization for the use of military force (AUMF) against ISIL. Consistent with this commitment, I am submitting a [draft AUMF](#) that would authorize the continued use of military force to degrade and defeat ISIL.

My Administration's draft AUMF would not authorize longterm, large-scale ground combat operations like those our Nation conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan. Local forces, rather than U.S. military forces, should be deployed to conduct such operations. The authorization I propose would provide the flexibility to conduct ground combat operations in other, more limited circumstances, such as rescue operations involving U.S. or coalition personnel or the use of special operations forces to take military action against ISIL leadership. It would also authorize the use of U.S. forces in situations where ground combat operations are not expected or intended, such as intelligence collection and sharing, missions to enable kinetic strikes, or the provision of operational planning and other forms of advice and assistance to partner forces.

Although my proposed AUMF does not address the 2001 AUMF, I remain committed to working with the Congress and the American people to refine, and ultimately repeal, the 2001 AUMF. Enacting an AUMF that is specific to the threat posed by ISIL could serve as a model for how we can work together to tailor the authorities granted by the 2001 AUMF.

I can think of no better way for the Congress to join me in supporting our Nation's security than by enacting this legislation, which would show the world we are united in our resolve to counter the threat posed by ISIL.

Barack Obama, "Letter from the President — Authorization for the Use of United States Armed Forces in connection with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant," [White House](#), 11 Feb 2015.

Here is the text of Obama's draft AUMF:

**JOINT RESOLUTION**

To authorize the limited use of the United States Armed Forces against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

....

Whereas the United States is working with regional and global allies and partners to degrade and defeat ISIL, to cut off its funding, to stop the flow of foreign fighters to its

ranks, and to support local communities as they reject ISIL;

....

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That

§ 1. SHORT TITLE.

This joint resolution may be cited as the “Authorization for Use of Military Force against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.”

§ 2. AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES.

(a) AUTHORIZATION.—The President is authorized, subject to the limitations in subsection (c), to use the Armed Forces of the United States as the President determines to be necessary and appropriate against ISIL or associated persons or forces as defined in section 5.

(b) WAR POWERS RESOLUTION REQUIREMENTS.—

(1) SPECIFIC STATUTORY AUTHORIZATION.—Consistent with section 8(a)(1) of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. 1547(a)(1)), Congress declares that this section is intended to constitute specific statutory authorization within the meaning of section 5(b) of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. 1544(b)).

(2) APPLICABILITY OF OTHER REQUIREMENTS.—Nothing in this resolution supersedes any requirement of the War Powers Resolution (50 U.S.C. 1541 et seq.).

(c) LIMITATIONS.—

The authority granted in subsection (a) does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces in enduring offensive ground combat operations.

§ 3. DURATION OF THIS AUTHORIZATION.

This authorization for the use of military force shall terminate three years after the date of the enactment of this joint resolution, unless reauthorized.

§ 4. REPORTS.

The President shall report to Congress at least once every six months on specific actions taken pursuant to this authorization.

§ 5. ASSOCIATED PERSONS OR FORCES DEFINED.

In this joint resolution, the term “associated persons or forces” means individuals and organizations fighting for, on behalf of, or alongside ISIL or any closely-related successor entity in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners.

§ 6. REPEAL OF AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE AGAINST

IRAQ.

The Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 (Public Law 107— 243; 116 Stat. 1498; 50 U.S.C. 1541 note) is hereby repealed.

[White House](#), 11 Feb 2015.

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### **My comments on Obama's draft AUMF**

**My comments:** Obama is wrong when he says in his letter to Congress: "Although existing statutes provide me with the authority I need to take these actions, ...." The 2001 AUMF is for operations against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the 2002 AUMF is for deposing Saddam Hussein in Iraq — neither of which cover the current situation in Syria and Iraq. Section 6 of Obama's draft AUMF will repeal the 2002 AUMF.

One must admire Obama's arrogance in the final paragraph of his letter to Congress, which — translated into plain English — instructs Congress to pass the Obama's draft without any changes, because any change will ruin Obama's wonderfully crafted draft that is perfect.

Looking at Obama's draft, the first sentence needs improvement. Obama's draft is limited to using "the United States Armed Forces against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant." The scope needs to be broader. I suggest: "To authorize the limited use of the United States Armed Forces against any Islamic terrorist organization, specifically including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and/or Al-Qaeda." Throughout Obama's AUMF the phrase "ISIL" needs to be replaced with "Islamic terrorist". Already there have been several U.S. airstrikes in Syria against the Khorasan Group, and airstrikes in Syria against the Nusra Front, which is part of Al-Qaeda. The U.S. also has an active program of firing missiles from drones at Al-Qaeda in Yemen.

Section 2(a) of Obama's draft AUMF does *not* specifically say what is authorized. Obama's cover letter is better, where Obama gives some specific examples of permitted combat operations. But I am concerned with Obama's intent to have U.S. ground troops act against ISIL leaders, as that violates Obama's pledges in 2014 about "no boots on the ground". A specific list could be too restrictive, when Islamic terrorists create new ways of harming or threatening civilization. But the absence of a specific list invites mission creep at the discretion of the President, without Congressional approval. Giving the President sole authority to determine what is "necessary and appropriate" gives too much discretion to the President, and abdicates Congressional responsibility for checks and balances. I give my suggestions [below](#), but this part of the draft should be written by military officers with experience in Iraq.

Obama's draft neglects to say *where* military force is authorized. The AUMF should authorize military force *anywhere*, provided the local government consents in writing to use of U.S. Military. That would force Obama to obtain permission from Assad for future airstrikes in Syria. The USA *should not* be violating sovereign territory of foreign nations, when the USA has *not* declared war on those nations.

Section 2(c) limits the AUMF: "does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces

in enduring offensive ground combat operations." Personally, I like the concept of this limitation, as it makes it more difficult to have mission creep. But Obama's draft wording is vague. I give my suggestions [below](#).

Obama's draft AUMF fails to state a goal for the use of military force. (There is a mention that "the United States is working ... to degrade and defeat ISIL", but that mention is in the *Whereas* clauses at the beginning, which state facts.) Are we trying to contain or degrade ISIL? Or are we trying to destroy or defeat ISIL? The AUMF should clearly state a goal.

Section 3 makes this AUMF expire in three years. It is unlikely that Islamic terrorism can be defeated in three years. It is unlikely that ISIL in Iraq and Syria can be defeated in three years. The AUMF needs a longer time limit, perhaps ten years. On the other hand, it may be politically astute to have a three-year time limit, which would force the next President and Congress in 2018 to revisit the scope of the AUMF.

With my suggested revisions in scope, Obama's §5 about "associated persons" is unnecessary.

Finally, the more detail that is contained in the AUMF, the more difficult it will be to pass the AUMF in Congress. On the other hand, Obama's draft AUMF is easier to pass, because his draft is either vague or silent on so many critical issues — making the AUMF essentially meaningless.

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### **My suggested draft AUMF**

The following text is my suggested revision of Obama's draft AUMF.

To authorize the limited use of the United States Armed Forces against any Islamic terrorist organization, specifically including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and/or Al-Qaeda.

....

#### **§ 1. SHORT TITLE.**

This joint resolution may be cited as the "Authorization for Use of Military Force against Islamic terrorists."

#### **§ 2. AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES.**

(a) **AUTHORIZATION.**—The President is authorized, subject to the limitations in subsection (c), to use the Armed Forces of the United States

(1) to conduct airstrikes on Islamic terrorists, specifically including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and/or Al-Qaeda, anywhere in the world:

- A. to prevent terrorists from capturing a city, town, or village
- B. to protect critical infrastructure from capture by terrorists

- C. to protect U.S. personnel and/or U.S. facilities
- D. to prevent genocide of religious or ethnic groups by terrorists
- E. to kill Islamic terrorists
- F. to destroy or disable weapons controlled by terrorists
- G. to destroy or damage supplies controlled by terrorists
- H. to destroy checkpoints operated by terrorists on roads

provided the local government consents in writing to airstrikes in its territory by the U.S. Military.

(2) This AUMF authorizes delivery of humanitarian aid to anyone besieged by Islamic terrorists, provided the local government consents in writing to such delivery in its territory by the U.S. Military.

(3) This AUMF authorizes delivery of weapons and munitions to professional soldiers of any nation who are fighting against Islamic terrorists, provided that: (i) these soldiers are fighting with the approval of the lawful government of the land where the battles are occurring *and* (ii) the U.S. Military has carefully vetted the recipients and reasonably believes that the recipients of weapons or munitions will *not* cooperate with any Islamic terrorist organization. The lawful government of Syria is headed by Bashar al-Assad or his successor chosen by elections in Syria.

(b) . . . .

(c) LIMITATIONS.

This AUMF does not authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces in any ground combat operations, except:

1. brief rescue operations of either U.S. or coalition personnel
2. defense of the U.S. Embassy building, U.S. Consulates, and/or the Baghdad airport
3. defense of any location (e.g., training site, airport with U.S. aircraft) with U.S. Military personnel — the right of self-defense

(d) GOAL.

The goal of this AUMF shall be the total and complete annihilation of all Islamic terrorists, and the capture or destruction of all assets acquired by Islamic terrorists.

. . . .

#### § 6. REPEAL OF TWO PRIOR AUTHORIZATIONS FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE.

The Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 (Public Law 107-243; 116 Stat. 1498; 50 U.S.C. 1541 note) is hereby repealed.

The Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States, approved 18 Sep 2001, (Public Law 107-40; 115 Stat. 224 and 225) is hereby repealed.

Section 2(a)(3)(i) attempts to prevent the U.S. from training or equipping insurgents to fight Assad, thereby involving the USA in the Syrian civil war. Specifying the lawful government of Syria prevents the U.S. President from declaring that the Syrian National Coalition, or some other exile organization, is the lawful government of Syria.

In Section 2(c), the Baghdad airport is critical to the USA, because it is how we will withdraw most of our diplomatic and military personnel, in the event of a catastrophic failure of the Iraqi government.

In Section 6, we must repeal both of the outstanding AUMFs from the years 2001 and 2002, to prevent their misuse by the current and future presidents.

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### Reaction of U.S. Congress

One day after Obama's proposal, the Associated Press reported:

Congressional Republicans vowed Thursday to toughen President Barack Obama's day-old legislation to authorize military force against Islamic State fighters, and House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi warned, "It's going to be hard" to find common ground.

....

The Senate's three top Democrats, Harry Reid of Nevada, Dick Durbin of Illinois and Chuck Schumer of New York, have all refrained from commenting since the proposal was released, an unusual silence on an issue of such significance.

And Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said he hoped for a bipartisan measure to emerge.

....

Pelosi underscored the extent to which the war in Iraq is influencing Democrats. Recalling legislation sought for that war by President George W. Bush, she said she voted against the measure even though she had been warned it might mean the end to any thoughts she had of entering the party's leadership. In the end, she said, "some Democrats voted for it. They have said, 'I wish I hadn't.'"

David Espo & Matthew Daly, "Boehner says Obama military force proposal needs toughening," [Associated Press](#), 19:19 EST, 12 Feb 2015.

Then the [Associated Press](#) noted that any vote on the AUMF could haunt politicians if the American people later decide the war against ISIL was a bad idea. Apparently, it is a novel idea in the USA to hold Congress responsible for an expensive war that lasts for *many years*.

On 15 Feb, a law professor wrote a thoughtful analysis of Obama's AUMF in *The Washington Post*:

The Obama administration's proposed congressional authorization for the use of military force against ISIS has created a rare moment of unity among congressional Democrats and Republicans: [both groups seem to hate it](#) (or at least view it with suspicion), albeit for very different reasons. Democrats worry that it gives the president too much discretion to use ground troops and fight an open-ended war. Republicans have the opposite concern, believing that proposal's ban on "enduring offensive ground operations" is too restrictive.

Academic commentators have also been generally skeptical. Harvard law professor [Jack Goldsmith](#) argues that the proposal doesn't impose any meaningful limitations on the president, because it doesn't take back the administration's previous claims that it can wage war against ISIS based on the 2001 AUMF against the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks and the president's inherent authority. [Noah Feldman](#) has a similar view.

....

.....

Like Goldsmith and Feldman, I am troubled by the administration's refusal to repudiate [extremely dubious claims](#) that it already has the authority to wage war against ISIS under the 2001 AUMF and theories of inherent presidential power. Whatever the administration's intentions, it is possible that its request for an ISIS-specific AUMF and the enactment of such a measure by Congress will be perceived as a rejection of such claims of preexisting presidential authority. In any event, there is an easy fix for this problem: Congress can simply include a provision in the ISIS AUMF stating that this legislation is the exclusive source of presidential authority to wage war against ISIS and associated forces (perhaps with the exception of responding to direct attacks on US forces and territory). Such an amendment would also help mitigate my own concerns that enactment of the AUMF might legitimate Obama's previous unconstitutional actions in waging this war (and the 2011 war against Libya) without congressional authorization. To that end, Congress should also delete language in the AUMF's preamble implying that Obama had inherent authority to initiate the war.

.....

Overall, the Obama AUMF seems poorly drafted and designed. But its most serious flaws can probably be fixed — if Congress has the will to do so. Moreover, the debate over the draft AUMF does serve the useful function of focusing more attention on the limits of presidential power to initiate war. We are still a good distance from where we need to be on that score. But, hopefully, this debate will be a step forward towards reestablishing the norm that presidents may not start wars without congressional authorization. As then-Senator Obama [put it in 2007](#), "[t]he President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation."

Ilya Somin, "Reactions to the Obama administration's proposed ISIS AUMF," [Washington Post](#), 19:34 EST, 15 Feb 2015. [links in original]



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### 13 Feb 2015: ISIL attacks Iraqi Army Base

Approximately 20 to 25 ISIL fighters attacked the Iraqi al-Asad air base in Anbar province on Friday, 13 Feb. The ISIL fighters wore Iraqi army uniforms, which made the ISIL terrorists appear similar to Iraqi soldiers who were assigned to the base. The Iraqi army killed the ISIL terrorists, without any involvement of U.S. personnel. There are between 300 and 400 U.S. Military personnel training Iraqi army soldiers at the Asad air base. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

My comment is that it is surprising that ISIL has not previously attempted to attack a training facility for the Iraqi army. The training of the Iraqi army significantly endangers ISIL, because trained Iraqi soldiers will be ground force that liberates Iraqi cities and towns that are currently occupied by ISIL. I am also surprised that ISIL committed only 25 fighters to the attack on a large Iraqi military installation.

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### 13 Feb 2015: ISIL's logistics problem

A conventional army has a significant supply chain, including either government-owned arsenals that produce weapons and ammunition and/or contracts with civilian manufacturers. The supply chain includes cargo aircraft to deliver the equipment and supplies, and technicians to repair damaged equipment.

However, ISIL — and other Islamic terrorist organizations — have no organized supply chain. Instead, ISIL steals (or sometimes purchases) what it needs from local sources. That was acceptable when the terrorists were a small organization. But as ISIL expanded, this supply problem became a significant weakness for ISIL.

On 13 Feb 2015, Admiral Kirby held a press briefing at the Pentagon:

QUESTION: All right. One other thing is CENTCOM this week laid out — released its latest tally of destroyed targets. There's 4,800 tanks and VIBDs and just a whole catch-bin of targets. How should the public look at a list like this? I mean, what does it represent? And how do you square a list of destroyed vehicles and buildings with the offensives going on in al-Anbar? Are they — how does one look at it?

You've got a list of destroyed — a lot of destruction, but they're still able to take on the Iraqi army in various places.

REAR ADM. KIRBY: Well, they're not offensives. We're talking about, you know, one movement here in al-Anbar. I think it's important to keep that in perspective. The way I would look at a list like that is that those are things that ISIL no longer has. They're gone. They're destroyed. They can't use them anymore. And this is an enemy that has a limited ability to reconstitute strength, at least material strength.

It's not like they've got, you know, a ready supply chain of armored personnel carriers just streaming across, and, you know, manufacturing capability to replace this stuff. It's

not like they've got a team full of mechanics that can keep them running after they've been hit and broken.

These guys steal to survive. I mean, one of their chief sources of income is stolen money. They just move into an area and basically rob banks. And that's how they get a lot of their money. And when they're not capturing new territory, they're not robbing a whole lot of new banks.

So, there's a — there's a shelf life here on their material capability. They do not have the ability to reconstitute strength the way a normal armed force would be. So when CENTCOM put these numbers out, I think the way I look at them, and the way I'd want you to look at them is these are now assets that no longer belong to this group, and are not going to be easily replaced.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Admiral Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 13 Feb 2015.

Previously, Admiral Kirby made the same point on 15 Oct 2014:

Again, this is about getting at their ability to sustain themselves. And I think it's an important — you know, to remember — in this — they have had — they have enjoyed in early summer — they've enjoyed some lightning-fast success, no question about that. But there's a shelf life on that. It's not like they have — first of all, we're taking away a lot of their logistical and sustainment capability, and it's not like they have a whole heck of a lot of ability to reconstitute that.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 15 Oct 2014.

On 24 Oct 2014, Admiral Kirby said:

And I also think there's — there is a real shelf-life on [ISIL's] physical sustainability. Because as I said before, it's not like they've got teams of auto mechanics and weapons experts that are back there helping them fix the stuff that's getting blown up.

So when it's gone, it's gone for them. They're not like a traditional that has ability to sustain itself logistically over a long period of time. There's going to be a shelf life on it.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 24 Oct 2014.

On 23 Jan 2015, Admiral Kirby made the same point:

... we are seeing signs that would indicate to us that [ISIL is] struggling in certain ways, whether it's financing — and we know we've taken away millions of dollars of revenue from them just by the oil collection points and the refineries that we've hit.

And [ISIL's] inability to reconstitute machinery. They don't have a, you know, brigades, you know, of mechanics out there repairing the trucks and humvees and the other vehicles that are getting destroyed, or replacing them. And it's not like they have defense relationships with other countries where they can just acquire new stuff.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Rear Adm. Kirby in the Pentagon Briefing Room,"

[Pentagon](#), 23 Jan 2015.

**My comment:** ISIL stole equipment from the fleeing Iraqi army in Mosul in June 2014. Over subsequent days and weeks, ISIL moved much of this stolen equipment to Syria in large convoys that would have been lovely targets for airstrikes. But the Iraqi military was unable to attack any of those convoys, because of Iraqi corruption and incompetence. And the USA had withdrawn its military from Iraq in Dec 2011, so the USA had neither reconnaissance nor bombing capability in Iraq in June 2014. In this way, we lost the opportunity to engage in a wholesale destruction of equipment that ISIL stole. Instead, we must engage in a piecemeal destruction of this equipment, when ISIL uses the stolen equipment in battle.

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### **15 Feb 2015: ISIL beheads 21 Christians in Libya**

In my essay for [Jan 2015](#), I mentioned that ISIL had an affiliate in Libya. During Dec 2014 and January 2015, the Libyan ISIL captured 21 Coptic Christians from Egypt who were working in Libya. On 15 Feb 2015, ISIL released a video showing the simultaneous beheading of all 21 Coptic Christians. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star\(Reuters\)](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [Arab News](#).

When ISIL executes *one* U.S. or U.K. citizen, the execution is a major news item in the USA and Europe. But when ISIL executed 21 Egyptians, the news media in the USA and Europe barely noticed. When the news about 21 beheadings was released, people in Europe and the USA were already preoccupied by the murder of 2 people by a terrorist in [Copenhagen](#) on the previous day.

On an average day in the year 2014, more than 40 people/day died from terrorism in Iraq, and no one except the United Nations office in Iraq noticed. On an average day in the year 2014, more than 200 people/day died in the Syrian civil war, and no one except the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights noticed. Attention given to events is irrational.

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### **16 Feb: U.S. State Department Blames Lack of Jobs**

On 16 Feb, Deputy State Department Spokesperson, Marie Harf, appeared on MSNBC's Hardball television program with host, Chris Matthews. Harf said a "lack of opportunity for jobs" was one of the root causes why terrorists join ISIL.

MATTHEWS: Are we killing enough of [ISIL]?

HARF: We're killing a lot of them, and we're going to keep killing more of them. So are the Egyptians. So are the Jordanians. They're in this fight with us. But we cannot win this war by killing them. We cannot kill our way out of this war. We need, in the longer term — medium and longer term, to go after the root causes that leads people to join these groups, whether it's lack of opportunity for jobs, whether —

MATTHEWS: We're not going to be able to stop that in our lifetime, or 50 lifetimes! There's always going to be poor people. There's always going to be poor Muslims. And as long as there are poor Muslims, the trumpet's blowing! They'll join. We can't

stop that, can we?

HARF: Well, we can work with countries around the world to help improve their governance. We can help them build their economies so they can have job opportunities for these people.

[Harf continues:] You're right, there is no easy solution in the long term to preventing and combatting violent extremism, but if we can help countries work at the root causes of this — what makes these 17-year-old kids pick up an AK-47 instead of trying to start a business? ....

Chris Matthews, "'Hardball with Chris Matthews' for Monday, February 16, 2015," [MSNBC](#), 17 Feb 2015.

The video is at [MSNBC](#).

See also the following news articles and commentary: [Express](#); [Fox News](#); [WSJ](#).

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department on 17 Feb, the spokesperson agreed we need to solve the root cause of Islamic terrorism, but the spokesperson neither agreed with the need for jobs nor repudiated the need for jobs.

QUESTION: Great. Last one: Marie Harf, your colleague, last night I think it was, was on MSNBC saying that we can't win this war by killing them — when she was talking about ISIS — we cannot kill our way out of this war; we need a longer-term, medium-long-term get after the root causes. She talked about finding jobs for people in these countries where they see no hope. What was she trying to say there?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think, Ed, she — Marie, my colleague, was saying what we've said many times, which is this is not only a military solution. .... But again, I think this is something we've talked about quite a bit, and the need to make sure we're working with countries to address some of the root causes that have led to the ability to recruit.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 17 Feb, 2015.

My comment is that — beginning with President Lyndon Johnson — liberals love to advocate more education and job creation, which liberals allege will end poverty and reduce crime. The Truth about ending poverty, crime, and terrorism is more complicated than throwing money at the problem. As Chris Matthews said on his Hardball program on 16 Feb, there will always be poor people. Expanding on what Matthews said, some people in poverty are lazy, others are stupid, still others may have a mental illness or personality disorder that makes them unemployable.

Aside from sociology of terrorism, who would want to work alongside a morally defective person who is willing to kill an unarmed humanitarian? Or willing to kill someone for having a different religion?

I think the root cause of Islamic terrorism is the interpretation of the Islamic religion used by the terrorists. But my view requires that one recognize the connection between Islam and terrorism — something that neither Obama nor Kerry (and neither Psaki nor Harf) will admit. After recognizing the connection, Muslim clerics need to explain why Islamic terrorism has a false ideology.

There are some outstanding examples of Islamic terrorists who were *not* from poor families. Osama bin Laden, who founded Al-Qaeda, had a wealthy father. Osama studied at a university for at least three years.

The masked executioner in the ISIL videos has been named "Jihadi John" by journalists, because his accent hinted that he came from England to Syria. On 26 Feb 2015, "Jihadi John" was identified as Mohammed Emwazi, whose parents had emigrated from Kuwait to London. Mohammed is *not* a disadvantaged youth who needs a job — he had earned a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from the University of Westminster and the *The Washington Post* says Mohammed is "from a well-to-do family". [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#); [BBC](#); [The Guardian](#).

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### **18 Feb 2015: Obama opposes "violent extremism"**

On 18 Feb 2015, Obama spoke at the end of a conference on violent extremism:

But we are here today because of a very specific challenge — and that's countering violent extremism, something that is not just a matter of military affairs. By "violent extremism," we don't just mean the terrorists who are killing innocent people. We also mean the ideologies, the infrastructure of extremists — the propagandists, the recruiters, the funders who radicalize and recruit or incite people to violence. We all know there is no one profile of a violent extremist or terrorist, so there's no way to predict who will become radicalized. Around the world, and here in the United States, inexcusable acts of violence have been committed against people of different faiths, by people of different faiths — which is, of course, a betrayal of all our faiths. It's not unique to one group, or to one geography, or one period of time.

But we are here at this summit because of the urgent threat from groups like al Qaeda and ISIL. And this week we are focused on prevention — preventing these groups from radicalizing, recruiting or inspiring others to violence in the first place. I've called upon governments to come to the United Nations this fall with concrete steps that we can take together. And today, what I want to do is suggest several areas where I believe we can concentrate our efforts.

First, we have to confront squarely and honestly the twisted ideologies that these terrorist groups use to incite people to violence. Leading up to this summit, there's been a fair amount of debate in the press and among pundits about the words we use to describe and frame this challenge. So I want to be very clear about how I see it.

Al Qaeda and ISIL and groups like it are desperate for legitimacy. They try to portray themselves as religious leaders — holy warriors in defense of Islam. That's why ISIL presumes to declare itself the "Islamic State." And they propagate the notion that America — and the West, generally — is at war with Islam. That's how they recruit. That's how they try to radicalize young people. We must never accept the premise that they put forward, because it is a lie. Nor should we grant these terrorists the religious legitimacy that they seek. They are not religious leaders — they're terrorists.

(Applause.) And we are not at war with Islam. We are at war with people who have perverted Islam. (Applause.)

Now, just as those of us outside Muslim communities need to reject the terrorist narrative that the West and Islam are in conflict, or modern life and Islam are in conflict, I also believe that Muslim communities have a responsibility as well. Al Qaeda and ISIL do draw, selectively, from the Islamic texts. They do depend upon the misperception around the world that they speak in some fashion for people of the Muslim faith, that Islam is somehow inherently violent, that there is some sort of clash of civilizations.

Of course, the terrorists do not speak for over a billion Muslims who reject their hateful ideology. They no more represent Islam than any madman who kills innocents in the name of God represents Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism or Hinduism. No religion is responsible for terrorism. People are responsible for violence and terrorism. (Applause.)

And to their credit, there are respected Muslim clerics and scholars not just here in the United States but around the world who push back on this twisted interpretation of their faith. They want to make very clear what Islam stands for. And we're joined by some of these leaders today. These religious leaders and scholars preach that Islam calls for peace and for justice, and tolerance toward others; that terrorism is prohibited; that the Koran says whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind. Those are the voices that represent over a billion people around the world.

But if we are going to effectively isolate terrorists, if we're going to address the challenge of their efforts to recruit our young people, if we're going to lift up the voices of tolerance and pluralism within the Muslim community, then we've got to acknowledge that their job is made harder by a broader narrative that does exist in many Muslim communities around the world that suggests the West is at odds with Islam in some fashion.

The reality — which, again, many Muslim leaders have spoken to — is that there's a strain of thought that doesn't embrace ISIL's tactics, doesn't embrace violence, but does buy into the notion that the Muslim world has suffered historical grievances — sometimes that's accurate — does buy into the belief that so many of the ills in the Middle East flow from a history of colonialism or conspiracy; does buy into the idea that Islam is incompatible with modernity or tolerance, or that it's been polluted by Western values.

So those beliefs exist. In some communities around the world they are widespread. And so it makes individuals — especially young people who already may be disaffected or alienated — more ripe for radicalization. And so we've got to be able to talk honestly about those issues. We've got to be much more clear about how we're rejecting certain ideas.

So just as leaders like myself reject the notion that terrorists like ISIL genuinely

represent Islam, Muslim leaders need to do more to discredit the notion that our nations are determined to suppress Islam, that there's an inherent clash in civilizations. Everybody has to speak up very clearly that no matter what the grievance, violence against innocents doesn't defend Islam or Muslims, it damages Islam and Muslims. (Applause.)

....

Fourth, we have to recognize that our best partners in all these efforts, the best people to help protect individuals from falling victim to extremist ideologies are their own communities, their own family members. We have to be honest with ourselves. Terrorist groups like al Qaeda and ISIL deliberately target their propaganda in the hopes of reaching and brainwashing young Muslims, especially those who may be disillusioned or wrestling with their identity. That's the truth. The high-quality videos, the online magazines, the use of social media, terrorist Twitter accounts — it's all designed to target today's young people online, in cyberspace.

Obama, "Remarks by the President in Closing of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism," [White House](#), 16:20 EST, 18 Feb 2015.

**My comments:** I agree with Obama when he says:

... I also believe that Muslim communities have a responsibility as well. Al Qaeda and ISIL do draw, selectively, from the Islamic texts. They do depend upon the misperception around the world that they speak in some fashion for people of the Muslim faith, that Islam is somehow inherently violent, that there is some sort of clash of civilizations.

and

... Muslim leaders need to do more to discredit the notion that our nations are determined to suppress Islam, that there's an inherent clash in civilizations.

But I strongly disagree with Obama when he says the problem is "violent extremism". I think the problem is "Islamic terrorism" — the use of an interpretation of the Islamic religion to justify terrorism.

Muslims are perpetrating this violence in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, .... Neither Jews nor Christians are perpetrating this violence. That is why Obama, in the above quotation, calls on "Muslim communities" and "Muslim leaders".

See the section [above](#) on the Islamic public relations problem. I called it a "public relations problem" when Islamic terrorists were using their interpretation of Islam to justify terrorism, thereby besmirching all of Islam. But it is more than a public relations problem: refuting the ideology of Islamic terrorism is the key to defeating Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and other Islamic terror groups.

Obama refuses to mention Islam in connection with ISIL, because Obama does *not* want to "grant these terrorists the religious legitimacy that they seek." Suppose a respected Muslim cleric were to condemn ISIL for its perversion of Islam — how does that condemnation grant ISIL legitimacy?



Finally, in the part of Obama's speech quoted above, there are paragraphs that begin with "First" and "Fourth". Obama's second point is "address the grievances that terrorists exploit, including economic grievances." Obama's third point is "addressing the political grievances that are exploited by terrorists."

My comment is that poverty and discrimination do *not* justify terrorism and murder. However, it is easy to see how someone who is poor and who believes they have been discriminated against would be eager to join a terrorist organization that promised them wealth, honor, dignity, and glory.

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### 18 Feb 2015: Kerry's plan

On 18 Feb, John Kerry published an opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal* that is titled "Our Plan for Countering Violent Extremism". His plan is remarkable for failing to mention the relationship of Islam to terrorism, and for failing to mention the role of Muslim clerics in opposing the ideology of Islamic terrorism.

Kerry's *only* mention of "Islam" or "Muslim" was in one paragraph:

A safer and more prosperous future also requires us not to be distracted by divisions grounded in hatred or bias. There is no room in this fight for sectarian division. There is no room for Islamophobia or anti-Semitism. Violent extremism has claimed lives in every corner of the globe, and Muslim lives most of all. Each of us is threatened, regardless of ethnicity, faith or homeland. We must demonstrate to the terrorists that rather than divide us, their tactics unite us and strengthen our resolve.

Kerry's *only* mention of "ideology" was in one paragraph:

This week's summit won't solve all these problems, but it can catalyze a global effort. But let me be clear: We are in this for the long haul. We can send a clear signal to the next generation that its future will not be defined by the agenda of the terrorists and the violent ideology that sustains them; we will not cower, and we will prevail by working together. Indeed, there are roles for everyone, from religious and government leaders to academics, NGOs and the private sector. Our collective security depends on our collective response.

John Kerry, "Our Plan for Countering Violent Extremism," [State Dept.](#) and [WSJ](#), 18 Feb 2015.

**My comments:** At a meeting of the anti-ISIL Coalition on 3 Dec 2014, it was agreed that "Exposing ISIL/Daesh's true nature (ideological delegitimization)" would be one of five lines of effort in the attack on ISIL. (See my essay for [Dec 2014](#).) Two months later, Kerry has forgotten the importance of defeating the ideology of Islamic terrorism. Why have meetings and issue Communiqués when political leaders ignore what was decided?

Kerry says we need to "send a clear signal" about "violent ideology". But Kerry sends no signal about the critical role of Muslim clerics in defeating this ideology. Kerry assures us that "there are roles for everyone, from religious and government leaders to academics, ...." without specifying the role of religious leaders.



I conclude Kerry has no plan to defeat Islamic terrorism.

For more commentary, see [Breitbart](#); [Fox News](#). Mostly Kerry's plan was ignored by journalists.

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### **Sometime the Iraqi army might expel ISIL from Mosul**

On 19 Feb, an anonymous CENTCOM official told journalists that the battle to expel ISIL from Mosul will begin in the "April-May [2015] timeframe". The U.S. intends to have between 20,000 and 25,000 [Iraqi] troops. [Pentagon](#); [complete transcript](#). See also [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Voice of America](#).

Where will the Iraqi army find at least 20,000 trained troops by April or May 2015? The first class of 2000 Iraqi soldiers completed their basic training earlier in February 2015. Currently, the U.S. is training another 3200 Iraqi soldiers in a six-week basic training course that will end in March. These freshly trained soldiers will relieve experienced Iraqi army brigades, and the experienced brigades will be assigned to Mosul. But the freshly trained soldiers are fewer than half the number needed for an April start date. [The Telegraph](#) reports that the U.S. will *not* be able to train enough Iraqi troops to enable a battle for Mosul to begin in April or May 2015. Further, *before* attacking ISIL in Mosul, one needs to expel ISIL from Kirkuk, Diala, and Tikrit.

On 20 Feb, the Iraqi government responded they will *not* be ready to invade Mosul in the Spring of 2015, and August 2015 is more likely. [Associated Press](#); [Bloomberg](#).

It is obvious that the Iraqi army will need to invade Mosul sometime, and expel the ISIL terrorists. But invasion plans are normally kept secret, to avoid helping the enemy plan. So why would the Pentagon publicly disclose a date for the invasion to begin? I speculate that the U.S. announcement on 19 Feb might have been intended to light a fire under the complacent Iraqi government, who have done very little to force ISIL out of Iraq. As the Associated Press said on 20 Feb: "The [Iraqi] military, plagued by corruption, low morale[,] and insufficient training and equipment, has made little progress in regaining its footing since [June 2014]." (citation in previous paragraph)

On 22 Feb, the Iraqi minister of defense publicly criticized the USA for announcing a month for the invasion of Mosul. [Reuters](#).

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### **23 Feb 2015: Australian Prime Minister**

On 23 Feb 2015, the Prime Minister of Australia said:

No-one should make excuses for Islamist fanatics in the Middle East or their imitators here in Australia.

....

I've often heard Western leaders describe Islam as a 'religion of peace'.

I wish more Muslim leaders would say that more often, and mean it.

I have often cited Prime Minister Najib of Malaysia, who has described the Islamist death cult as 'against God, against Islam and against our common humanity'.

In January [2015], President al Sisi told the imams at Egypt's al Azhar university that Islam needed a 'religious revolution' to sweep away centuries of false thinking.

Everybody, including Muslim community leaders, needs to speak up clearly because, no matter what the grievance, violence against innocents must surely be a blasphemy against all religion.

Tony Abbott, "National Security Statement," [SMH](#) and [official](#), 23 Feb 2015.

My comment is that Abbott is more honest than Obama, in that Abbott is willing to recognize that the Islamic religion is related to Islamic terrorism.

Abbot has been calling ISIL a "death cult" since 1 Sep 2014. ([ABC](#), 1 Sep 2014.) It certainly seems that ISIL enjoys killing people — not just killing, but killing in particularly gruesome ways, such as beheading and burning alive.

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### **23 Feb 2015: ISIL kidnaps Assyrian Christians**

On 23-24 Feb, more than 90 Assyrian Christians were abducted by ISIL: 56 from the village of Tal Shamiram in Syria, and at least 34 from the village of Tal Hermez. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) explains that the abductions were in retaliation for Kurdish fighters killing 132 ISIL fighters during 21-24 Feb. The Assyrian International News Agency (AINA) reports that four Assyrian Christian churches were destroyed by ISIL, including one of the oldest churches in Syria.

On 22-23 Feb, U.S. conducted 22 airstrikes near Al-Hasakah. (See [below](#).)

On 25 Feb, the total number of Assyrians abducted by ISIL increased to "at least 150", following a report by Reuters. The Associated Press reports "at least 70" abducted.

On the morning of 26 Feb, the SOHR said 220 Assyrians had been abducted by ISIL during 23-25 Feb, while the Assyrian Human Rights Network counted 262.

On the morning of 27 Feb, the SOHR cheerfully reports: "[Islamic State] has not executed any of the Assyrians yet". [SOHR](#). It is sad that the best that can be said of ISIL is they have *not yet* committed an expected atrocity.

On the morning of 28 Feb, AINA reports that "prominent Arab sheiks" are negotiating with ISIL for the release of between 262 and 373 Assyrians.

**Sources:**

- "IS militants kidnap 56 Assyrian citizens in the countryside of al-Hasakah," [SOHR](#), 23 Feb.
- "ISIS Attacks Assyrian Villages in Syria, 4 Killed, Dozens Captured, Churches Burned," [AINA](#), 22:49 GMT, 23 Feb.
- "90 Assyrians were kidnapped by the IS in Tal Tamer countryside," [SOHR](#), 24 Feb.
- "Islamic State in Syria abducts at least 150 Christians," [Reuters](#), 22:21 GMT, 24 Feb.
- "Dozens of Christians abducted by ISIS in Syria," [Daily Star](#), 22:27 GMT, 24 Feb.
- "Dozens of Christians abducted by Islamic militants in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 04:43 GMT, 25 Feb.
- "Kurdish, Assyrian Forces Battle ISIS As Fate of 150 Reported Hostages Unclear," [AINA](#)(Fox News), 23:27 GMT, 25 Feb.
- "Islamic State in Syria abducts at least 150 Christians," [Reuters](#), 00:05 GMT, 26 Feb.
- "Abducted Syrian Christians moved to militant stronghold," [Associated Press](#), 00:53 GMT, 26 Feb.
- "The IS kidnaps 220 Assyrian civilians in Tal Tamir countryside," [SOHR](#), 26 Feb.
- "Activist: ISIS now holds 262 Assyrian hostages in Syria," [CNN](#), 11:08 GMT, 26 Feb.
- "Negotiations for the Release of Assyrians Captured By ISIS Still Ongoing," [AINA](#), 04:31 GMT, 28 Feb.

On 1 March 2015, ISIL released 19 Assyrian Christians. This is fewer than 9% of the more than 220 Assyrians who were abducted. [Associated Press](#), 18:15 GMT; [AINA](#), 20:35 GMT; [Reuters](#), 22:42 GMT; [BBC](#), all on 1 March. So, should the released Christians tell ISIL "thank you for not killing me"? One does not thank someone for failing to commit an additional crime. ISIL is already responsible for kidnapping hundreds of people, destroying churches, and burning some houses. There are reports that the 19 Christians were freed after a tax on non-Muslims was paid to ISIL, so ISIL perpetrated another crime on these Christians.

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## 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.

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#### 1 Feb 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 1 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 31, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct eight airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 26 airstrikes in Iraq, using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took

place between 8 a.m., Jan. 31, and 8 a.m., Feb. 1, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, seven airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area and four ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL staging area.
- Near Hit, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, 19 airstrikes struck four large ISIL units and 11 ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL staging position, eight ISIL vehicles, two ISIL armored vehicles, an ISIL building, and an ISIL tank.
- Near Mahmur, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings, an ISIL heavy weapon, an ISIL shipping container, and an ISIL modular structure.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

[Central Command](#), 1 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 1 Feb 2015.

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## **2 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Monday, 2 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 1, 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 17 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 1, and 8 a.m., Feb. 2, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, nine airstrikes struck three large ISIL tactical units, five ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL staging areas and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr as Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL checkpoint.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and one ISIL fighting position.
- Near Huwayjah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL tactical vehicle, one ISIL bunker, and three ISIL earth movers.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, one ISIL vehicle and destroyed eight ISIL vehicles.
- Near Haditha, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and one ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.

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

[Central Command](#), 2 Feb 2015.

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

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### 3 Feb 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 3 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 2, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter aircraft to conduct five 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., Feb. 2, and 8 a.m., Feb. 3, local time.

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

#### Syria

- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck multiple ISIL oil pump jacks and destroyed four ISIL mobile drilling rigs.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL building.

#### Iraq

- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL armored vehicles, an ISIL front end loader, and an ISIL building.

Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL bridge and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

[Central Command](#), 3 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 3 Feb 2015.

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### **4 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Wednesday, 4 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 3, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 11 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq, using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 3, and 8 a.m., Feb. 4, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, 11 airstrikes struck nine ISIL tactical units, an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL staging positions and an ISIL fighting position.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL guard facility.
- Near Al Huwayjah an airstrike destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, an ISIL guard tower, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL shipping containers.
- Near Mosul an airstrike struck an ISIL IED factory.

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

[Central Command](#), 4 Feb 2015.

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

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### **5 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Thursday, 5 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 4, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct three airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes in Iraq, using bomber, attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 4, and 8 a.m., Feb. 5, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL staging location.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL warehouse.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging location and seven ISIL vehicles.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike denied ISIL key terrain.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 5 Feb 2015.

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

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## **6 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Friday, 6 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 5, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber, fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 10 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 5, and 8 a.m., Feb. 6, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, nine airstrikes struck nine ISIL tactical units, and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.



- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck multiple storage and staging facilities.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck an ISIL road, an ISIL weapons cache and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL staging location.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike, struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah an airstrike, struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mahkmur, an airstrike struck an ISIL earth mover.

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

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

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

The Jordanian Air Force flew 19 airstrikes on Thursday, 5 Feb, in retaliation for the murder of their pilot by ISIL. [Associated Press](#).

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## **7 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Saturday, 7 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 6, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 11 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 15 airstrikes in Iraq, using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 6, and 8 a.m., Feb. 7, 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, an ISIL vehicle and destroyed five ISIL vehicles and two ISIL staging areas.
- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL mobile oil rig.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL weapons storage facilities.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Qaim, four airstrikes struck an ISIL headquarters building and destroyed three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL bunkers.

Near Mahkmur, four airstrikes struck two ISIL staging areas, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 28 ISIL vehicles, three ISIL armored vehicles, and an ISIL shipping container.

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed three ISIL boats and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes destroyed two ISIL IEDs, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL boat.

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

[Central Command](#), 7 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 7 Feb 2015.

The Jordanian Air Force flew 18 airstrikes on Friday, 6 Feb, and an additional 19 airstrikes on Saturday, 7 Feb, all in retaliation for the murder of their pilot by ISIL. [Associated Press](#).

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### **8-9 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Sunday, 8 Feb 2015, neither the U.S. Central Command nor the Pentagon reported airstrikes in Iraq and Syria.

On Monday, 9 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported:

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

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed four ISIL vehicles and neutralized four ISIL vehicles.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL earth mover, an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike denied the ISIL terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 9 Feb 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 9 Feb 2015.

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### **10 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

On Feb. 9, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack aircraft to conduct an airstrike. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes in Iraq, using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 9, and 8 a.m., Feb. 10, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, an airstrike struck an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker and neutralized an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Kirkuk, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL earth mover, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL building.
- Near Makhmur, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL bulldozer and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL shipping container, an ISIL tractor trailer, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL checkpoint.

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

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### **11 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

On Feb. 10, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber, attack and fighter aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. Separately,

U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq, using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 10, and 8 a.m., Feb. 11, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL storage and staging facilities.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL checkpoint.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL bulldozer and an ISIL building.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

[Central Command](#), 11 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 11 Feb 2015.

When the Jordanian Air Force F-16 crashed in Syria on 24 Dec 2014, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) suspended its participation in coalition airstrikes, because of the lack of rescue equipment. On 5 Feb, the USA moved rescue equipment to Iraq, near Syria.

[Associated Press](#). On Tuesday, 10 Feb, UAE aircraft resumed bombing missions, this time flying from bases in Jordan. [Reuters](#), 12:57 GMT; [Associated Press](#).

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## **12 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

On Feb. 11, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter aircraft to conduct three airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using fighter, attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 11, and 8 a.m., Feb. 12, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL oil pump jacks.

Near Kobani, two airstrikes destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Kirkuk, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, six ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL bulldozer and an ISIL trailer.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL staging area and destroyed two ISIL bulldozers, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck ISIL earthen berms used to control water.
- Near Makhmur, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## **13 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

The press releases for 13-16 Feb were *not* posted the CENTCOM website at midnight on 16 Feb, probably owing to a three-day federal holiday. At noon on 17 Feb, CENTCOM had still not posted its 13 Feb press release, so I used the copy at the Pentagon.

On Friday, 13 Feb 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 [13 Feb]. Officials reported details of the latest strikes, which took place between 8 a.m. yesterday [12 Feb] and 8 a.m. today [13 Feb], local time, noting that assessments of results are based on initial reports.

### **Airstrikes in Syria**

Attack, fighter and bomber aircraft conducted eight airstrikes in Syria:

- Near Raqqah, two airstrikes destroyed four ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL staging position.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike struck and destroyed multiple ISIL storage and staging facilities.

### **Airstrikes in Iraq**

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

- Near Asad, five airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle-borne improvised explosive device, an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL armored earth mover.

- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings.

[Pentagon](#), 13 Feb 2015.

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### **14 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

On Feb. 13, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct four 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., Feb. 13, and 8 a.m., Feb. 14, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Al Raqqa, four airstrikes struck an ISIL bulldozer, an ISIL tank and destroyed eight ISIL tanks and three ISIL bunkers.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL rocket system and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Hit, an airstrike struck an ISIL IED assembly factory.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL armored excavator.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Taji, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Tal Afar, 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](#), 14 Feb 2015.

Not posted at the Pentagon.

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### **15 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

On Feb. 14, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct three airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and

Coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 14, and 8 a.m. Feb. 15, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and two ISIL vehicles.

### **Iraq**

- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bulldozer and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and three ISIL structures.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL checkpoint.

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

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

Not posted at the Pentagon.

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## **16 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

On Feb. 15, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct two 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., Feb. 15, and 8 a.m. Feb. 16, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike struck and destroyed multiple ISIL oil pumps.

### **Iraq**

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

- vehicle.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
  - Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
  - Near Fallujah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL mortar position.
  - Near Haditha, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL building.
  - Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL vehicle.
  - Near Rawah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.
  - Near Tal Afar, 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](#), 16 Feb 2015.

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

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## 17 Feb 2015: airstrikes

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

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

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

### Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL vehicle.

### Iraq

- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL buildings and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.



Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 17 Feb 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 17 Feb 2015.

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### **18 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Wednesday, 18 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 17, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct two airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 17, and 8 a.m. Feb. 18, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL oil pump jacks.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed an ISIL mortar tube and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Al Qaim, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, an ISIL bulldozer and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Kirkuk, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL excavators.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, three ISIL fighting positions and destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 18 Feb 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 18 Feb 2015.

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### **19 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

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

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

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck multiple ISIL oil pump jacks and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL checkpoints.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL mortar tube.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL weapons storage and staging area and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL fighting position and destroyed three ISIL buildings.

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

[Central Command](#), 19 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 19 Feb 2015.

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## **20 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

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

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

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL mobile oil rig.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two

ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL building.

### **Iraq**

- Near Haditha, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL boats.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL building and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL buildings.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL culvert, an ISIL bunker and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

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## **21 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Saturday, 21 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 20, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber aircraft to conduct an airstrike. 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., Feb. 20, and 8 a.m., Feb. 21, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed six ISIL boats.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings.

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

[Central Command](#), 21 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 21 Feb 2015.

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## 22 Feb 2015: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 21, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six 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., Feb. 21, and 8 a.m., Feb. 22, local time.

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

### Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed an artillery system.
- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL counter mobility berm and destroyed two ISIL checkpoints.

### Iraq

- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area, an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed nine ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 22 Feb 2015.

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

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## 23 Feb 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 23 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 22, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct [19] airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted [8] airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 22, and 8 a.m., Feb. 23, local time.

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

### Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, 11 airstrikes struck ten ISIL tactical units and destroyed two

- ISIL vehicles, an ISIL bunker and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, four ISIL tactical units, an ISIL fighting position and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- [Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.]

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL fighting position and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed four ISIL armored vehicles.
- [Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.]

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 23 Feb 2015. (The totals and last entries for airstrikes in Syria and Iraq includes [corrections](#) issued on 24 Feb.)

Also posted without corrections at the [Pentagon](#), 23 Feb 2015.

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## **24 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

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

On Feb. 23, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 16 airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 23, and 8 a.m., Feb. 24, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, 10 airstrikes struck nine ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, three ISIL tactical units, two ISIL fighting positions and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL vehicle.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL IED location.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.

- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.  
[Central Command](#), 24 Feb 2015.

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

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## **25 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Wednesday, 25 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 24, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct nine airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes in Iraq, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 24, and 8 a.m., Feb. 25, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, an ISIL fighting position and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, multiple ISIL checkpoints, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 11 ISIL buildings, two ISIL armored vehicles and seven ISIL vehicles.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.  
[Central Command](#), 25 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 Feb 2015.

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## **26 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

At 18:30 EST on 27 Feb (and again at 11:45 on 1 March), the CENTCOM 26 Feb press release gave a "Page Not Found" error message, so I used the version at the Pentagon.

On Thursday, 26 Feb 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Officials reported details of the latest strikes, which took place between 8 a.m. yesterday [25 Feb] and 8 a.m. today [26 Feb], local time, noting that assessments of results are based on initial reports.

**Attack and fighter aircraft conducted five airstrikes in Syria:**

- Near Hasakah, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.

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

- Near Asad, four airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings, an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL boat and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL training camp.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck two ISIL excavators.

[Pentagon](#), 26 Feb 2015.

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**27 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

On Friday, 27 Feb 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 26, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct 20 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., Feb. 26, and 8 a.m., Feb. 27, local time.

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

**Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike struck a crude oil collection point.
- Near Kobani, 13 airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, eight ISIL tactical units, three ISIL fighting positions and destroyed 21 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL staging areas, two ISIL tanks and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Tal Harris, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL checkpoint.

**Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL

building.

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.

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

[Central Command](#), 27 Feb 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 27 Feb 2015.

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### **28 Feb 2015: airstrikes**

At 13:20 EST on Monday, 2 March, CENTCOM had not yet posted its press release for 28 Feb, so I used the version at the Pentagon. On Saturday, 28 Feb 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Officials reported details of the latest strikes, which took place between 8 a.m. yesterday [27 Feb] and 8 a.m. today [28 Feb], local time, noting that assessments of results are based on initial reports.

#### **Attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft conducted nine airstrikes in Syria:**

- Near Kobani, four airstrikes destroyed two ISIL tactical units and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Tal Hamis, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Aleppo, one airstrike struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL HQ building.

#### **Attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 11 airstrikes in Iraq:**

- Near Asad, four airstrikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed one ISIL building, damaged another, and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and damaged another.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL mortar and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL humvee and an ISIL front-end loader.
- Near Huwayjah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL tactical unit.

[Pentagon](#), 28 Feb 2015.



Eventually posted at [Central Command](#).

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## 14 Feb 2015: Copenhagen

On the afternoon and night of 14 Feb 2015, a 22 y old named Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein ran amok in Copenhagen, killing two people and wounding five policemen. Police in Denmark intermittently released information in small amounts, so the following summary was written several days after the events. All times are Danish local time, which is GMT+1. There are three significant events:

1. Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist who parodied the prophet Mohammed in 2007, came down to Copenhagen Denmark for a free-speech festival that had 30 guests. Some assassin appeared at 15:30 on 14 Feb and shot four people: wounding three policemen and killing one guest. The assassin used an assault rifle to fire 27 bullets through windows. Commentators noted this attack was similar to that at *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris on 7 Jan 2015, except that Danish police prevented the assassin from entering the building.
2. At 00:55 on 15 Feb, a gunman appeared outside the main synagogue in Copenhagen and shot three people: wounding two policemen and killing one Jewish volunteer guard at the synagogue.
3. At 04:50 on 15 Feb, police at a location near the railroad station in Copenhagen shouted at a suspect, who then began shooting at police. The police SWAT team killed the suspect. Later on the morning of 15 Feb, police said the dead suspect was believed to be the assassin at the free-speech festival and also the gunman at the synagogue.

Hussein the terrorist was born and raised in Denmark, his parents were from Palestine. Hussein was a member of a criminal gang. He had a series of arrests for violent crimes and weapons violations, dating back to 2011. Hussein stabbed a person on the subway in the thigh in Nov 2013. Prosecutors charged Hussein with attempted homicide, but in Dec 2014 a judge convicted Hussein on a reduced charge of aggravated assault. Hussein was in pre-trial detention for the stabbing, then sentenced to time served plus approximately one month. Hussein was released from jail two weeks before he ran amok on 14 Feb. There is suspicion that Hussein was radicalized during the summer of 2014, while he was in jail.

### Sources:

- [The Guardian](#), 17:08, 15 Feb.
- [The Telegraph](#), 21:00, 15 Feb (live blog).
- [The Local](#), 19:19, 15 Feb (early mention of gunman's name).
- [BBC](#), 15:59, 16 Feb (Hussein's background).
- [The Guardian](#), 18:20, 16 Feb (Hussein's background).
- [The Local](#), 21:22, 16 Feb (live blog 14-16 Feb).
- [Associated Press](#), 17 Feb (biography of Hussein).
- [Associated Press](#), 18 Feb (weapons used)

- [The Guardian](#), 28 Feb (three arrested for providing weapons and bullet-proof vest).

In reading news stories, I was struck by one quotation from a 26 y old woman who knew Hussein: “For me he’s not a terrorist. He’s someone who felt finished with life and decided to go out with a big bang.” [Guardian](#). Her assertion that Hussein is "not a terrorist" is wrong. Hussein disrupted life in Copenhagen for more than 14 hours, and he had enough firepower to kill dozens of people at the free-speech festival. That is terrorism. To show the effect of this terrorism on Copenhagen, approximately 30,000 people attended a candlelight vigil on the night of 16 Feb to commemorate the victims and condemn this terrorism. [The Telegraph](#); [BBC](#). However, Hussein had dropped out of school and became a habitual criminal, so it is probably true that his future was dim (i.e., "felt finished with life"). His parents, his teachers, and his religion, all failed to instill enough human values in Hussein to prevent him from murdering innocent strangers.

Hussein swore fidelity to ISIL on his Facebook webpage. [CNN](#); [YnetNews](#). But it appears that ISIL neither supported nor trained Hussein.

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### Terror in Europe

After the Islamic terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper in Paris on 7 Jan, there was much discussion about Islamic terrorists returning from the civil war in Syria and carrying out attacks in Europe. (See my essay for [Jan 2015](#).) Hussein did *not* travel to any foreign nation for training or jihad. But Hussein is an example of a young Muslim who engaged in terrorism and murdered two people.

When a host nation accepts foreign immigrants, the host nation typically has expenses of providing subsidized housing and food, plus training in the local language and perhaps also vocational training. Experience shows that not all of the immigrants are assimilated into the host nation. And experience is beginning to show that some of the Muslim immigrants — or their children — become radicalized and a few commit acts of terrorism. The [Associated Press](#) reports on 17 Feb that France is currently surveilling 400 people who are members of terrorist cells. The cost of this monitoring will add to the cost of accepting immigrants.

On 20 Feb, *The New York Times* published a thoughtful article on the causes of Hussein's terrorism. [NY Times](#). On 21 Feb, the [Associated Press](#) reported on the relationship between criminal gangs and Islamic radicals in Denmark.

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### 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 Abrahamson, "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.

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## 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 Islamic terrorists defeat Assad, which is bad, 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 28 Feb 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 in Syria,
- 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) in Syria, and
- a huge refugee problem that has swamped Jordan and Lebanon.

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## 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.

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### **Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism**

Beginning in August 2014, my essays on Syria and Iraq have had a section titled "[Islamic Public Relations Problem](#)", in which I have chronicled reaction by Muslim clerics and the need for these clerics to *continually* condemn Islamic terrorism.

Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

These facts clearly show that an interpretation of Islam is central to the ideology of the terrorists who have infested Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, .... The problem is "Islamic terrorism" — the *use of terrorism* to further goals that are justified by an interpretation of the Islamic religion.

To defeat the *idea* of Islamic terrorism, and to stop young Muslims from joining terrorist organizations, it is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism in the name of Islam, and especially condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government. Instead, Muslim clerics have only sporadically condemned Islamic terrorism, typically after some atrocity committed by Islamic terrorists.

Instead of writing only in the Arabic language, websites of major Islamic organizations (e.g., Al-Azhar University in Egypt) should also post webpages in French and English languages to discourage Europeans and nonArabs from joining Islamic terrorist organizations.

Just to be clear, Western Civilization is *not* at war with *all* Muslims. I suggest that Western Civilization — *and* also mainstream Muslims everywhere — should be at war with Islamic terrorists. Indeed, mainstream Muslims are most affected by Islamic terrorism, as death tolls in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq show.



begun 1 Feb 2015, last modified 11 March 2015

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

[my homepage](#)