

# Syria & Iraq: March 2015

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## Table of Contents

1. [Chemical Weapons](#)
2. [Syria](#)
  - United Nations [Diverted](#) from Syria
  - war [damage](#) in Syria
  - [death toll in Syria](#) now over 215,518 (14 Mar)
  - [Rebels](#) in Syria
    - [training of FSA](#)
  - Recognition that Assad is [Winning](#) the Civil War
  - [Peace Negotiations](#) for Syria
  - U.N. Security Council Resolutions [2139 and 2165](#)
3. [Iraq](#)
  - Iraq [death toll](#)
  - [atrocities](#) in Iraq
  - Islamic public relations [problem](#)
  - No Criminal [Prosecution](#) of Cowardly Iraqi Army Officers
4. [Daily News](#) about Syria & Iraq (including press briefings & press conferences, speeches)
  - ISIL abducted [Assyrian Christians](#) in Syria
  - Iraqi army attempts to liberate [Tikrit](#) (1-31 March)
  - Iraq chooses [Iran](#), Iraq rejects USA, then Iraq chooses USA
  - Shiite [Revenge](#) for Massacre at Speicher Base
  - [AUMF](#) for anti-ISIL campaign
5. [Airstrikes](#) in Iraq & Syria
6. [Conclusions](#)

## Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 16 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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 Daylight Savings Time in Boston is -4 hours from GMT. Beginning 8 March, the USA was on Daylight Savings 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.

I notice that those Americans who watch the news on network television are receiving only a very superficial view of what is happening in Syria and Iraq, and very little exposure to facts that show that the Obama/Kerry policy is a disaster. Even people who read a good newspaper like *The Washington Post* are exposed to only some of the relevant facts about Syria and Iraq.

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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

As chronicled in my previous essays, someone used canisters of chlorine gas on civilian towns in Syria beginning on 11 April 2014. Politicians and diplomats were hysterical about "war crimes", but OPCW was slow to investigate and returned empty-handed from its first fact-finding mission.

On Friday, 6 March 2015, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2209, which was drafted by the USA, that criticizes the use of toxic chemicals (e.g., chlorine gas) as a weapon in Syria. The Resolution does *not* say *who* used chlorine. The Resolution threatens the possibility of unspecified military action if chlorine is used again by someone in Syria. [U.N. News](#); [Associated Press](#), 16:33 EST; [Reuters](#), 22:52 EST, all on 6 Mar.

My comment is that every United Nations Resolution about Syria has been ignored, and this

one appears ignorable too.

Official text of U.N. Security Council Resolution [2209](#).

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On 14 March, the Kurdish government in Iraq complained about alleged use of chlorine gas by ISIL during a 23 Jan suicide bomb attack on peshmerga. Approximately twenty chlorine cylinders were loaded on a truck full of explosives. The suicide bomber was the only person who died in this incident. The Kurds did *not* ask OPCW to investigate. (Note that an Associated Press journalist incorrectly says chlorine gas was also used in a suburb of Damascus in 2013 — but that gas was actually Sarin, a nerve gas, which is different from chlorine.) [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#)(AP) in Kurdistan.

My comment is that this complaint, coming two months after the event, is stale and now impossible for an independent, reliable, forensic investigation. Further, we already have reasons to give ISIL leaders multiple consecutive death sentences for war crimes, so we do *not* need evidence of more atrocities.

Humanitarians and politicians have been bleating about "war crimes" by Islamic terrorists for more than two years, but the threats of war crime prosecutions have *zero* effect on the perpetrators. Futile threats are ineffective in changing behavior, and expose that the threatener is impotent, feeble, and ignorable.

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On 17 March, there were allegations that use of chlorine gas had killed 6 people in Sarmin town in Idlib Province of Syria. [SOHR](#); [NY Times](#); [The Guardian](#); [MSF](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 25 March, the Director of OPCW decided to continue the existing fact-finding team that has investigated allegations of chlorine gas use in Syria. [OPCW](#); [Reuters](#).

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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**

Various major problems in the world diverted attention of politicians and diplomats away from Syria, and also diverted resources that might have helped the crisis in Syria. There are at least nine of these major problems in the world:

1. Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the **Ukraine**, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. 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. On 20 March, ISIL attacked two Shiite mosques in Yemen during Friday prayers, killing at least 137 people. [AP](#). On 26 March, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

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## Damage & Deaths in Syria

### 11 March: War Damage to Syria

The English-language webpages of the SOHR website did not commemorate the beginning of the fifth year of the Syrian civil war on 11 March 2015. For that reason, I looked at news articles by journalists. The Associated Press reported on the accomplishments of four years of civil war in Syria:

The war in Syria has plunged 80 percent of its people into poverty, reduced life expectancy by 20 years, and led to massive economic losses estimated at over \$200 billion since the conflict began in 2010, according to a U.N.-backed report circulated Wednesday [11 March].

The Syrian Center for Policy Research painted a devastating picture of the "systematic collapse and destruction" of Syria's economic foundations in the report, saying the nation's wealth, infrastructure, institutions and much of its workforce have been "obliterated."

Almost three million Syrians lost their jobs during the conflict, which meant that more than 12 million people lost their primary source of income, it said, and unemployment surged from 14.9 percent in 2011 to 57.7 percent at the end of 2014.

"As huge swatches of the community have lost the opportunity to work and earn an income, just over 4 in 5 Syrians now live in poverty," the report said. "As it has

become a country of poor people, 30 percent of the population have descended into abject poverty where households struggle to meet the basic food needs to sustain bare life."

....

As violence intensified, it said, the number of deaths in the conflicts rose dramatically to 210,000. Together with the 840,000 wounded, this represented 6 percent of Syria's population killed or injured during the conflict, it said.

"Equally horrendous is the silent disaster that has reduced life expectancy at birth from 75.9 years in 2010 to an estimated 55.7 years at the end of 2014, reducing longevity and life expectancy by 27 percent," the report said.

It said education is also "in a state of collapse" with 50.8 percent of school-age children no longer attending school during 2014-2015 and almost half losing three years of schooling.

Edith M. Lederer, "UN report: War plunged 80 percent of Syrians into poverty," [Associated Press](#), 18:01 EDT, 11 March 2015.

The full report from The Syrian Center for Policy Research, titled "SCPR Alienation and Violence Report 2014", is available at [SCPR](#).  
Copy at [ReliefWeb](#); [UNRWA](#); [UNDPI.org](#).

The Associated Press also reported a scientist at the University of Maryland who analyzed nighttime photographs of Syria from satellites, to determine the amount of artificial light that had been extinguished by the civil war in Syria.

Over the four years that researcher Xi Li [a visiting scholar at the University of Maryland's Department of Geographic Sciences] has watched Syria's civil war unfold through nighttime satellite imagery, he has seen the pinpricks of light that dotted the north and east fade and the Mediterranean coast darken until 83 percent of the country's lights have gone out.

....

[Li] has measured the levels of nighttime light across Syria since the conflict began in March 2011. His findings were published last year in the International Journal of Remote Sensing and came to the attention of the [#withSyria](#) coalition after a friend who does similar work at Columbia University put them in touch.

Because single images can be affected by cloud cover or other factors, Li came up with a monthly average image of nighttime light so it could be compared over the course of Syria's conflict.

Li said 97 percent of the lights in Aleppo, Syria's once-largest city, have gone out since the conflict began.

In the images released late Wednesday [11 Mar], the bright light of Aleppo shown in March 2011 is almost entirely gone by February of this year. Even the government-controlled capital, Damascus, is 35 percent dimmer.

Raqqqa, the new de facto capital of the Islamic State group, is also almost in complete darkness with 96 percent of its lights out, Li said.

[Li] blamed the displacement of people as the main factor behind the darkening, as 3.8 million people have fled the country. He also blamed power shortages and infrastructure damage.

Cara Anna, "Satellite images show Syria conflict leaves country in dark," [Associated Press](#), 00:16 EDT, 12 March 2015. [Link to #withSyria added by Standler.]

Also reported by [Reuters](#).

See the paper by Xi Li, "Satellite images shed light, or lack thereof, on the impact of the Syrian conflict," *International Journal of Remote Sensing*, Vol. 35, pp. 6648-6661 (Nov 2014) [Taylor&Francis](#).

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### 15 March: 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 15 March, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported a new cumulative death toll since 18 March 2011.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 215518 persons since 18/03/2011, which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Daraa, until 03/15/2015.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 102831 civilians, including 10808 children and 6907 women.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters: 36722
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2505
- 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: 26834
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 46138
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 30662
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 2727
- Fighters from Hezbollah: 674

- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 3147

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include more than 20000 missed detainees inside the regime jails and other 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 the 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.

"The international community let the Syrian people down; millions of people killed, wounded and displaced over 4 years," [SOHR](#), 15 March 2015. [Typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

Reported by [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#).

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### 31 March: Death Toll in Syria

On 1 April, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 4973 people in March 2015.

The death toll is as follows:

- Civilians: 1135; 172 children and 124 women.
  - 338 civilians (75 children, 45 women) killed by aerial bombardment, including a woman, man, his wife and his 3 children killed by inhaling the toxic gas that emitted from the barrel bombs dropped on the town of Sarmin in Idlib.
  - 68 civilians, including 16 children and 7 women, die due to firing and shelling by the Nusra Front, Islamic State, rebel and Islamic battalions.
  - 36 people executed by IS militants.
  - 106 citizens, including 23 children and 22 women, died in 2 massacres committed by IS militants in the two provinces of al-Hasakah and Hama as well as during IS attack on a village in Hama.
  - 587 people, including 58 children and 50 women, died due to the regime firing and shelling, explosion of mines and IEDs, firing by the border guards and unknown gunmen, torturing to death inside the regime jails, poor healthy conditions, lack of medicines and necessary treatment.
- [Combatants: 3838]
  - YPG, Rebels and Islamist fighters: 762, including 21 fighters from YPG and 3 Kurdish female fighters executed by IS.
  - Non-Syrian fighters from IS, the Nusra Front, Jund al-Aqsa and al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army: 1490
  - Defected soldiers: 5
  - Regular regime soldiers and officers: 691
  - Fighters of the People's Committees and NDF as well as spies: 714

- Hezbollah militiamen: 13
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 145
- Unidentified victims (documented by photos and footages): 18

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, Al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion and pro-regime militants is approximately 1000 soldiers and fighters more than the documented number because of reticence about casualties by all parties, the difficulties of reaching to the outback and the difficulties to investigate about those who have died inside the regime jails and destiny of the detainees.

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

"About 5000 people killed in Mar 2015," [SOHR](#), 1 April 2015. (formatting added by Standler)

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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

### Syrian Kurds more worthy than moderate rebels

My previous essay have documented the fragmentation and disorganization of the moderate rebels (e.g., Free Syrian Army) in Syria. Occasionally a group of moderate rebels abandons the organization and joins a jihadist group, as happened on 1 March 2015 when Hazzm dissolved and joined jihadists. (See my essay for [Feb 2015](#).) At least since January 2014 — and possibly earlier — the so-called moderate rebels have been the weakest of the insurgent groups, and are growing weaker.

In contrast to the moderate rebels, we have the Syrian Kurds. The Kurds distinguished themselves by defeating ISIL in Kobani, and then the Kurds chased ISIL out of villages surrounding Kobani. [Associated Press](#), 11 Feb 2015.

Given Obama's obsession with deposing Assad, which prevents Obama from partnering with Assad, perhaps Obama should consider partnering with the Syrian Kurds. On 4 March, [Reuters](#) reported more cooperation on airstrikes between the USA and Kurds in Syria.

One reason why Obama has not partnered with Syrian Kurds is that Turkey considers those Kurds as terrorists. But on 21 March, the leader of the Turkish Kurd insurgency called for an end to the armed rebellion. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The end of the armed rebellion in Turkey would make it easier for Obama to partner with Syrian Kurds.

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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.

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.

My essay for [Feb 2015](#) mentions the dissolution of Hazzm, formerly part of the Free Syrian Army. On 4 March, Agence France-Presse reported that the disintegration of Hazzm "has dealt a major blow to U.S. efforts to build up a force of moderate fighters to take on ISIS." [Daily Star](#). On 5 March [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Syria strategy falters with collapse of [Hazzm]".

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On 11 March, Reuters reported that the U.S. Secretary of Defense had noticed a big problem for future support of rebels in Syria.

The United States does not appear to have clear-cut legal authority to protect Syrian rebels it trains from attack by forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, even under new [i.e., proposed] war powers, U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said on Wednesday [11 March].

....

The top U.S. military officer, General Martin Dempsey, testifying alongside Carter, warned that the United States would need to give some assurances of protection to the new recruits it is injecting into Syria's messy civil war.

"Now the scope and scale of that protection is the part of this that's being actively debated," Dempsey said. "But the program won't succeed unless they believe themselves to have a reasonable chance of survival."

Phil Stewart & Patricia Zengerle, "U.S. may be unable to defend its Syria recruits against Assad," [Reuters](#), 18:32 GMT, 11 Mar 2015.

Also at [Al-Arabiya](#); [Daily Star](#).

**My comments:** Currently, the USA is conducting airstrikes against ISIL inside Syria, without the approval of the lawful government of Syria. Technically, these airstrikes constitute a violation of the sovereignty of Syria, and ordinarily would be considered an act of war. But the current airstrikes are directed only against ISIL, which is also an enemy of the Assad government, so there has been little protest from Syria about the airstrikes.

The current official plan is for the USA to train and equip rebels to attack only ISIL on the

ground in Syria. But the main goal of the rebels — since the rebellion began in March 2011 — has been to end the Assad government. So it is foreseeable that these U.S.-trained rebels will sometime attack Assad's army. Carter is correct that the U.S. Military has no legal authority to attack Assad's military — for any reason, including to protect U.S.-trained rebels. Such an attack by the U.S. military would be a direct intervention in the sectarian civil war in Syria and a very significant escalation of the war in Syria.

I think it would be really stupid for the U.S. to intervene in the sectarian civil war in Syria.

But the USA would be delusional to train-and-equip Syrian rebels and expect those rebels to fight only against ISIL (and against other Islamic terrorist organizations). When the rebels attack Assad's military, Assad will probably annihilate the rebels, and the U.S. investment in the rebels will evaporate. Given that likely result, we are forced to the conclusion that the U.S. should *not* be wasting its money on training and equipping Syrian rebels.

Stopping the training of Syrian rebels also solves several other vexing problems: after being trained and armed by the USA, the rebels may defect to Islamic terror groups. And the current goal of training 15,000 rebels by the end of the year 2017 is too little, too late.

The Associated Press reminds us of the history:

November 2012: The Syrian National Coalition is created, bringing together the main opposition factions. The umbrella group is hampered from the outset by infighting and accusations that its members are out-of-touch exiles.

....

September 2013: Around a dozen rebel groups abandon the Syrian National Coalition and reject its calls for a civil, democratic government. Seven of them later form their own alliance, the Islamic Front, intended to eventually create a state governed by Islamic law.

"A look at key events in Syria since March 2011," [Associated Press](#), 02:34 EDT, 12 March 2015.

My essay for [Feb 2015](#) mentions the dissolution of Hazzm, formerly part of the Free Syrian Army. The remnants of Hazzm joined jihadists, taking U.S.-supplied weapons with them.

On 11 March, [Reuters](#) reported that approximately 70 Syrian rebels from the Anfal brigade in Damascus had defected to the Syrian army.

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On 13 March, the U.S. Government announced it was giving more non-lethal aid to moderate rebels in Syria. Reuters reported:

The U.S. State Department said on Friday [13 March] it was working with Congress to provide about \$70 million in new non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition fighting President Bashar al-Assad.

....

The non-lethal aid, announced on the fourth anniversary of the revolution against Assad, brings total U.S. support to the Syrian opposition to nearly \$400 million since the start of the revolution, the State Department said.

"U.S. to send \$70 million in non-lethal aid to Syrian opposition," [Reuters](#), 14:24 EDT, 13 March 2015.

This Reuters news story caused me to look at the U.S. State Department press releases, where I found:

As Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken announced today [13 March] at an event marking the fourth anniversary of the Syrian revolution, the U.S. Department of State is working with Congress to provide nearly \$70 million in new non-lethal assistance. Deputy Secretary Blinken told Syrian opposition and Syrian-American participants in the event that with this additional funding, the United States will have committed nearly \$400 million in assistance that supports the Syrian opposition since the start of the revolution.

This new non-lethal assistance includes:

- Nearly \$30 million to continue and enable the opposition and local governance structures inside Syria to provide basic services and governance to their communities, as well as ongoing support for civil defense workers who play a critical role in emergency first response in Syria.
- \$25 million in non-lethal support to vetted units of the armed opposition to help enhance their operational capabilities as they seek to protect their communities from the dual threat posed by the Assad regime and extremist groups.
- Digital security training and tools to keep activists, civil society members, journalists, and other opposition actors safe as they seek to network with each other and share information, including about regime and other atrocities.
- Support for the documentation of war crimes, human rights violations, and abuses by the Syrian regime, as well as armed and extremist groups in Syria, in order to facilitate accountability.

Looking ahead, these efforts will help inform future reconciliation initiatives and engender a lasting peace.

"New Non-Lethal Assistance for the Syrian Opposition," [State Dept.](#), 13 March 2015.

**My comment:** Since I began writing essays about Syria in September 2013, the moderate rebels have been clamoring for weapons and ammunition. Instead, the U.S. Government provided blankets and bandages. After 18 months of paltry military aid, the moderate rebels in Syria have dwindled, as their fighters defected to insurgent groups that have better weapons and more support.

Previously, the U.S. Government has stated that it wanted the moderate rebels to focus solely on fighting Islamic terrorism (e.g., ISIL). Now the USA has broadened the goal to also fighting against Assad. This is a dangerous intervention in the sectarian Syrian civil war.

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On 27 March, [Reuters](#) reports that training of Syrian rebels has been delayed again, for

unspecified reasons.

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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 7 March, Reuters issued an insightful news article about some European nations wanting to engage with Assad against Islamic terrorists in Syria.

Syria's envoy to the United Nations says it's time for the United States and other Western powers to accept that President Bashar al-Assad is here to stay, and to abandon what he suggested was a failed strategy of trying to split the Middle East into sectarian enclaves.

Speaking to Reuters on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the Syrian war, Assad's long-serving U.N. ambassador Bashar Ja'afari said his president was ready to work with the United States and others to combat terrorism in the Middle East.

....

Some European Union countries that withdrew their ambassadors from Syria are saying privately it is time for more communication with Damascus, diplomats said in February.

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.

Such countries say that the threat from Islamic State has made Assad the lesser of two evils, seeing a need to re-engage with Damascus as a potential ally against the extremists, according to the diplomats.

....

Ja'afari said that "many European delegations" had visited Damascus to ask for strengthened anti-terrorism cooperation, without specifying which countries.

"We are telling everyone ... if you want this cooperation to be fruitful you need to get back to Syria, to reopen your embassies."

Indicating that Damascus wants Assad restored to international political legitimacy in exchange for security cooperation, Ja'afari said that "the benefit of such cooperation should be mutual ... not only unilateral."

Samia Nakhoul & Louis Charbonneau, "Syria to West - Accept that Assad is here to stay," [Reuters](#), 02:37 GMT, 7 March 2015.

Copy at [Jerusalem Post](#), with title: "In private, some in European mull repairing relations with Assad to fight ISIS."

Later version at [Reuters](#), 12:03 GMT, 10 March.

My essay for [Feb 2015](#) cited a similar Reuters article on 18 Feb.

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### **CIA opposed to quick removal of Assad**

On 13 March, Central Intelligence Agency director John Brennan publicly acknowledged that if the Assad regime were to "collapse" today, the government of Syria would be replaced with either ISIL or Nusra Front (i.e., Al-Qaeda in Syria). Brennan said: "None of us — Russia, the United States, coalition, and regional states — wants to see a collapse of the government and political institutions in Damascus." [Council Foreign Relations](#); [Bloomberg](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Jerusalem Post](#); [Daily Beast](#).

My comment is that the U.S. Government *pretends* that if Assad were replaced as leader of Syria, all of Syria's problems would vanish. That would have been an oversimplification in the year 2011. But, by mid-2013, Al-Qaeda and ISIL were firmly involved in the Syrian civil war, seeking to impose an extremist Islamic government on everyone in Syria, in place of Assad's secular government. The involvement of Islamic terrorism changed the nature of the Syrian civil war. Regardless of one's personal opinion of Assad, it is clear that an ISIL caliphate or Nusra emirate would be worse than Assad. Further, the strong leadership of Assad is everyone's best hope of defeating Islamic terrorism in Syria.

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### **Kerry wants to negotiate with Assad**

On the night of 14 March, U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, gave an interview to Margaret Brennan, CBS News. The interview was broadcast on the CBS television program [Face the Nation](#).

MR. SCHIEFFER: One of the things that Secretary Kerry also talked about in addition to this when he talked to our Margaret Brennan last night was Syria and the whole situation there. And I want to just play a portion of what he said on that.

SECRETARY KERRY: We are working very hard with other interested parties to see

if we can reignite a diplomatic outcome. Why? Because everybody agrees there is no military solution. There is only a political solution. But to get the Assad regime to negotiate, we're going to have to make it clear to him that there is a determination by everybody to seek that political outcome and change his calculation about negotiating. That's underway right now. And I am convinced that with the efforts of our allies and others, there will be increased pressure on Assad.

MARGARET BRENNAN: And you'd be willing to negotiate with him?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, we have to negotiate in the end.

MR. SCHIEFFER: So there you hear the Secretary of State saying we may have to negotiate with Assad.

"Interview With Margaret Brennan of CBS," [State Dept.](#), 15 March 2015.  
CBS also posted a [transcript](#).

Reaction to Kerry's rather innocuous — and logical — comments was swift. The United Kingdom, Turkey, and France all rigidly demand the resignation of Assad, *without* negotiating with Assad:

1. The USA — Marie Harf, Kerry's own press spokeswoman — said the USA would negotiate with people in the Syrian government, but "*never*" negotiate with Assad himself. Harf's actual words in a Twitter announcement: "By necessity, there has always been a need for representatives of the Assad regime to be a part of this process. It has never been and would not be Assad who would negotiate — and the secretary was not saying that today." [Guardian](#); [CNN](#). The Russian and Iranian newsmedia used this apparent gaffe by Kerry to embarrass the USA. [Russia Today](#); [PressTV](#) in Iran.
2. A spokeswoman for the United Kingdom Foreign Office tersely reiterated: "Assad has no place in Syria's future." [Daily Star](#)(AFP).
3. The foreign minister of Turkey asked incredulously: "What is there to negotiate with Assad?" [Anadolu Agency](#); [Hurriyet](#). [Reuters](#) reports: "Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Tuesday [17 March] negotiating with President Bashar al-Assad would be like shaking hands with Adolf Hitler." See also [Anadolu Agency](#); [Today's Zaman](#).
4. France declared Assad can not be part of any negotiated solution. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP). Then the French Foreign Minister "regretted" Kerry's statement about negotiating with Assad. [Reuters](#).
5. [Reuters](#) has a story titled: "Gulf Arabs respond with alarm to Kerry comment on Assad talks". See also [Washington Post](#).

**My comments:** Diplomats routinely negotiate with "bad people" who rule nations.  
For example:

- Note that Iran never apologized for unlawfully kidnapping U.S. Embassy personnel in 1979-1981. Further, Iran is well known as a state sponsor of terrorism. But that bad conduct by Iran does *not* prevent Obama and Kerry from negotiating with the Iranian government to stop the Iranian program for developing nuclear weapons.
- As recently as 2012, the USA negotiated with North Korea about suspending North Korea's program to develop nuclear weapons. North Korea is a rogue nation.
- During World War II, the USA and the United Kingdom cooperated with Stalin in fighting against Germany. Stalin was arguably one of the two worst people of the Twentieth Century, after Stalin murdered millions of Kulaks in the Ukraine during 1929-1933.

I do not see a principled distinction between (1) negotiating with Assad in Syria and (2) negotiating with either Iran or North Korea.

The U.S. Government has vilified Assad since mid-2011, arrogantly asserting that Assad has lost his legitimacy to rule Syria. (See quotations from Hillary Clinton beginning in June 2011 and quotations from Obama beginning in July 2011 in my separate [document](#).) After years of vilification of Assad by the U.S. Government, it would be very difficult now for any U.S. diplomat to negotiate with Assad. I suggest that the negotiation task will fall on some United Nations diplomat (e.g., currently de Mistura) or on some diplomat from a nation that has been friendly to Assad (e.g., Russia or Iran). In exchange for resigning, Assad should receive immunity from prosecution for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and any crimes under Syrian law. Assad and his family will probably receive asylum in some nation. Assad speaks Arabic and English, but nations with those native languages would be unlikely to grant asylum to Assad. Asylum in Russia or Iran would be like house arrest for Assad, because of language differences.

Kerry's comments on 14 March are similar to de Mistura's comment in Vienna on 13 Feb 2015: "President Assad is part of the solution." (See my essay for [Feb 2015](#).)

Commentators noted that Kerry on 14 March did *not* repeat the U.S.-dogma that Assad had lost his legitimacy to rule Syria. See, e.g., [Reuters](#); [The Guardian](#); [NBC News](#); [France24](#). By omitting the standard dogma, it appeared that Kerry was taking a new position.

Nations of the world — and especially the Syrian people — are in deep trouble when politicians and diplomats are so rigid that they can not negotiate with their enemy. As long as ISIL and/or Nusra Front exists, I believe Syria is better with Assad in power. *After* terrorism has been defeated in Syria, then maybe the Syrian people should elect a different leader. But it is *not* appropriate for foreign powers (e.g., the USA, UK, France, Turkey) to say who should lead Syria.

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### Assad interview by CBS television

On 26 March, Charlie Rose of CBS News interviewed Assad in Damascus. The interview was broadcast on the "60 Minutes" program on 29 March, but excerpts were released by CBS

on 26 March. [CBS](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); all on 26-27 March.

President Assad: We are always open [to negotiations with the USA]. We never close our doors. They should be ready for the talk, they should be ready for the negotiation. We didn't make an embargo on the United States. We didn't attack the American population. We didn't support terrorists who did anything in United States. Actually, the United States did. We were always — we always wanted to have good relation with the United States. We never thought in the other direction. It's a great power. Nobody — not a wise person think of having bad relation with United States.

Charlie Rose: Yeah, but can you have good relationship with a country that thinks you shouldn't be in power?

President Assad: No, that's not going to be part of the dialogue that I mentioned earlier. This is not their business. We have Syrian citizens, who can decide this. No one else. Whether they want to talk about it or not. This is not something we're going to discuss with anyone.

Charlie Rose: This cannot end militarily. Do you agree with that?

President Assad: Yeah, definitely. Every conflict, even if it's a war, should end with a political solution.

"Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on 60 Minutes", [CBS](#), 29 March 2015.

In another part of the interview, quoted elsewhere, Assad says:

ASSAD: As principle, in Syria we could say that every dialogue is a positive thing, and we are going to be open to any dialogue with anyone, including the United States, regarding anything based on mutual respect.

[Fox News](#), 30 March 2015. Also see [CBS News](#), 26 March 2015.

My comment is it would be difficult for any U.S. negotiator to have "mutual respect" for Assad after the U.S. Government has [vilified](#) Assad since June 2011.

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### **Nusra Front seizes Idlib city**

In a defeat for Assad, on 28 March Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda) seized control of the city of Idlib. The Associated Press estimates that Nusra Front and ISIL now control approximately half of Syria. [Reuters](#), 15:03 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 18:06 GMT; each on 28 March. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [SOHR](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).

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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. But on 11 Feb 2015, Assad agreed to suspend airstrikes and artillery attacks on Aleppo for six weeks after the freeze begins. (See my essay for [Feb 2015](#).)

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.

On the evening of 1 March, the Syrian National Coalition and rebels fighting in Aleppo rejected Mistura's freeze. The Coalition refused to meet with Mistura, unless Mistura sought: (1) the removal of Assad, (2) the prosecution of war criminals, and (3) a ceasefire over *all* of Syria. [SNC](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#).

**My opinion:** The rejection by the rebels makes Mistura's proposed freeze simpler — the freeze is dead. One way forward would be for John Kerry and other Western leaders to coerce the Syrian National Coalition into accepting the freeze by threatening withdrawal of *all* political and financial support, and coerce the rebels into accepting the freeze by threatening to end the train-and-equip program. I doubt that Kerry would go that far, as that could leave the USA and other Western nations without any influence in Syria.

On the other hand, the USA is already rapidly progressing to the point where it has no influence in Syria:

1. The USA had repeatedly insulted Assad by saying he lacks legitimacy and Assad must be removed from office.
  2. The USA can not possibly support Islamic terrorists (e.g., jihadists, Nusra Front, ISIL).
  3. At least since January 2014 — and possibly earlier — the so-called moderate rebels (e.g., Free Syrian Army) have been the weakest of the insurgent groups, have been fragmented and disorganized, and are growing weaker. Obama has chosen to support these moderate rebels, but with piddling support. (Obama chose to support them because they were the only palatable choice after Obama's obsession with removing Assad. Obama's support was piddling because Obama correctly feared that weapons and supplies given to moderate rebels would be acquired by Islamic terrorists.)
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On 3 March, a delegation from de Mistura's office met with the governor of Aleppo to discuss the freeze. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

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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](#).

On 5 March, Agence France-Presse reported that the Russian government was attempting to arrange another conference sometime in April 2015. [Daily Star](#).

On 16 March, Moscow invited de Mistura to attend the next set of meetings in Moscow, sometime during "the first ten days of April." [Reuters](#).

On 24 March, [Reuters](#) reports that the next round of discussions in Moscow will be held during 6-9 April 2015.

On 25 March, the Syrian National Coalition announced it would *not* attend the discussions in Moscow in April. [Associated Press](#).

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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.)

On 12 March, the Associated Press reported that 21 humanitarian aid organizations had criticized the United Nations Security Council for failing to implement Security Council Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191.

More than 20 international aid groups sharply criticized the United Nations Security Council on Thursday [12 March], saying it has failed to implement three resolutions passed last year seeking to boost humanitarian assistance to Syrian civilians caught in the country's civil war.

....

Since the conflict began, more than 220,000 people have been killed and 1 million wounded. Nearly 4 million Syrians have fled and registered as refugees in neighboring countries, while another 7.6 million people are displaced inside Syria. All told, an estimated 12.2 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the U.N.

Ryan Lucas, "Aid groups criticize UN Security Council over Syria," [Associated Press](#), 13:39 EDT, 12 March 2015.

Reuters reported the same facts:

Aid agencies said on Thursday that 2014 was the worst year of the Syrian conflict so far and that three United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at alleviating the suffering had failed.

....

Gorevan [a Syria policy advisor at British charity Oxfam] said Security Council members, which include Russia and the United States, had not implemented their own resolutions by failing to pressure warring parties to stop indiscriminate killing and increase aid access.

Oliver Holmes, "Aid groups say U.N. Security Council failed Syria, 2014 worst year yet," [Reuters](#), 07:35 EDT, 12 March 2015.

See also [Al-Arabiya](#).

The scathing report is posted on the Internet at [Oxfam](#) and [ReliefWeb](#).

**My comments:** It is not enough for a diplomat to travel hundreds of thousands of kilometers each year to attend meetings and eat donuts. My [webpage](#) links to 15 Communiqués issued at meetings of Friends of the Syrian People from Feb 2012 to Nov 2014 — now historical relics and already unimportant. But the real problem at the Security Council has been the veto by Russia (and sometimes also China).

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On 23 March, [Human Rights Watch](#) issued a 3-megabyte report about "opposition groups" — including the Free Syrian Army — who had "indiscriminately attacked civilians in government-held territory with car bombs, mortars, and rockets" from January 2012 to April 2014. See also [Reuters](#); [HRW News](#); [Gulf News](#)(Reuters); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

**My comments:** I see Assad's military and most of the insurgents in Syria as having common cultural values, probably because they all grew up together and attended similar schools. So it is *not* surprising that Assad's military, the moderate rebels, and the jihadists all commit similar atrocities. Insurgents do not drop barrel bombs, not because insurgents are morally superior, but because insurgents lack airplanes and helicopters. ISIL is the worst because of their adoption of an extreme view of Islamic theology that justifies extermination of those who have a different religion.

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On 28 March, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, gave a speech at the Arab

League meeting in Egypt. Ban said he felt "anger at observing the Syrian Government, extremist and terrorist groups and terrorists relentlessly destroy their country". And Ban said he was "ashamed" at the international community's failure to end the civil war in Syria. [U.N. News](#); [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). On 30 March the full text of this speech was posted at the [U.N.](#) website. Ban said: "I am instructing my Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to intensify our political efforts.... Specifically, he and his team will work to operationalize and flesh out elements in the Geneva communique."

My comment is that, as long as the United Nations adheres to the flawed Geneva Communiqué of 2012, there will be no good results from U.N. peace negotiations. My [essay](#) discusses reasons why the Geneva Communiqué is flawed — it was the product of a *one day* meeting that included no one from Syria, at a time before the intervention of Al-Qaeda and ISIL into the insurgency.

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### U.N. Report for March 2015

On 23 March 2015, Ban issued his monthly report required by Resolutions 2139 and 2165. This March 2015 report actually covers events in February 2015.

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

¶16. Civilian infrastructure continued to be targeted, and basic services, including electricity and water, continued to be cut. For example, water supplies to Dar'a city and western Dar'a governorate were cut from 12 to 24 February, affecting some 450,000 people, after the Nusra Front seized a government diesel tanker during a routine delivery of fuel to water pumps in Mzayrib. The affected communities negotiated with the parties to connect the water pumps to an alternative electricity supply.

¶25. ISIL executed a number of men, some of whom were beheaded, in areas that it controlled, for allegedly collaborating with the Government or YPG. Human rights defenders report that a man accused of practising sorcery was beheaded in Raqqa on 7 February. On 10 February, ISIL stoned a man to death reportedly on the basis of his sexual orientation. On 23 February, ISIL militants punished a man in Al-Sarb, Al-Hasakeh, on the grounds that his wife apparently did not meet the strict dress code applied by ISIL. A number of people in Deir ez-Zor governorate were publicly flogged for alleged alcohol and drug consumption.

¶26. ISIL abducted a number of civilians during the reporting period. Between 23 and 26 February in Al-Hasakeh governorate, ISIL militants attacked about a dozen villages in the area of Tal Tamer and abducted more than 200 Assyrian inhabitants. ISIL militants have reportedly accused Assyrians of collaborating with both government and YPG forces. The ISIL attacks on Assyrian villages have triggered the displacement of Assyrians to areas under the control of YPG. It is alleged that a number of the Assyrian detainees were released on 6 March. [Note by Standler: see [below](#)]

¶28. Some 12.2 million people require humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic. About 7.6 million people are internally displaced, and more than 3.9 million

people have fled the Syrian Arab Republic to neighbouring countries and North Africa.

¶46. Of the 4.8 million people in hard-to-reach areas, some 212,000 people remain besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic, including 185,500 people besieged by government forces in eastern Ghouta, Darayya and Yarmouk and 26,500 people besieged by non-State armed groups in Nubul and Zahraa. During the reporting period, parties further restricted access to besieged and other areas in the country.

¶62. The Syrian people feel increasingly abandoned by the world as they enter the fifth year of the war that has torn their country apart. Today, more than 220,000 Syrians have been killed. Almost half of the country's men, women and children have been forced to flee their homes. Some 4 million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, while a further 7.6 million are displaced within the Syrian Arab Republic. Every day brings more death, displacement and destruction.

¶64. Despite the demands of the Security Council to end the conflict, events and attacks that should shock our collective conscience and spur us into action have become a daily occurrence, often without comment or attention being paid to them. Explosive weapons continue to be fired into populated areas, leading to indiscriminate killing and injury to people. The destruction and damage to housing and vital civilian infrastructure on which ordinary Syrians depend is also deeply worrying.

¶67. My Special Envoy continues to work to bring about a suspension of violence in Aleppo. The proposed freeze is not an end in itself; rather, it is meant as a confidence-building step leading to an inclusive, Syrian-led political process based on the Geneva communiqué of 2012. The ultimate objective is ambitious but achievable: an end to violence and a credible political transition to a country in which the rights of all communities are protected and the legitimate aspirations of all Syrians to freedom, dignity and justice are met.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)," United Nations Security Council, [S/2015/206](#), (first posted online: 30 March 2015).

Copy at [rbs0.com](http://rbs0.com).

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## Debacle in Iraq

### Death Toll in Iraq

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

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### Atrocities in Iraq

My previous [essays](#), beginning in June 2014, documented numerous atrocities by Islamic terrorists:

- ISIL executed hundreds of captured Shiite soldiers in Mosul and Tikrit during 11-14 June 2014.
- ISIL *crucified* eight rebels near Aleppo in Syria on 28 June 2014.
- ISIL threatened genocide of Yazidis in Iraq during August 2014 and 20-22 Oct 2014.
- an attack on a Sunni mosque in Iraq on 22 Aug 2014.
- ISIL executed captured Syrian soldiers in Raqqa, Syria in August 2014.
- Shiite militias in Iraq are murdering innocent Sunnis (reports: 14 Oct 2014, 26 Jan 2015).
- ISIL burned alive al-Kasasbeh, a pilot in the Jordanian Air Force, (see my essay for [Feb 2015](#)).
- ISIL in Libya beheaded 21 Christians on 15 Feb 2015.
- and — beginning with my essay for [Oct 2014](#) — I documented some of the car bombs in Iraq that killed large numbers of people, most commonly in or near Baghdad.

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On 5 March, five bombs in or near Baghdad killed at least 16 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 8 March, a series of four bombs in or near Baghdad killed at least 11 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 17 March, three bombs in or near Baghdad killed at least 9 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 19 March, the United Nations Human Rights Office in Geneva issued a report that accused ISIL of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, *and* genocide in Iraq between June 2014 and February 2015. [Report](#). Press releases: [UNAMI](#); [U.N. News](#); [OHCHR](#). The United Nations wants Iraq to join the International Criminal Court, so that court could prosecute ISIL for crimes in Iraq. But if Iraq joins the ICC, then that court could *also* prosecute the Iraqi army and affiliated Shiite militias for massacring unarmed Sunnis.

On 23 March, three bombs in Baghdad killed at least 19 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 30 March, two car bombs in a suburb of Baghdad killed at least 11 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 31 March, a Sunni suicide bomber attacked a bus 20 km north of Baghdad. The bus was carrying Shiite pilgrims from Iran, killing at least 7 pilgrims and also killing 3 Iraqis. [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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## Archaeological Sites in Iraq

On 5 March, it was reported that ISIL had bulldozed an archaeological site at the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, near Mosul. [Associated Press](#). UNESCO condemned the destruction of unique historical treasures at Nimrud as a "war crime". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#); [Associated Press](#); [UNESCO](#). The U.N. Secretary General called ISIL's activity at Nimrud a "war crime". [U.N.](#), 6 Mar.

My comment is that UNESCO and others are urging an end to the trafficking of antiquities. But ISIL selling antiquities to collectors or museums may be the only way to preserve these antiquities. If ISIL is unable to sell them, then ISIL will probably smash them. Given the likely alternative of destruction, trafficking is preferable, because trafficking will put the artifacts in the hands of people who will take good care of them.

Since the Taliban destroyed two giant statues of Buddha in Afghanistan in March 2001, Islamic terrorists have been destroying unique historical treasures, as a demonstration of their extreme intolerance of other religions. In Iraq, ISIL has destroyed historic mosques of the Shiite sect, and destroyed antiquities at several sites.

On 7 March, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL was destroying an archaeological site at the ancient city of Hatra, Iraq. See also [Reuters](#). UNESCO condemned the destruction of Hatra. [UNESCO](#), 7 Mar; [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 8 Mar. The U.N. Secretary General called ISIL's activity at Hatra a "war crime". [U.N.](#), 8 Mar.

On 8 March, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL had begun demolishing the archaeological site of Khorsabad, 15 km northeast of Mosul.

On 7 March, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Adel Shirshab, Iraqi Tourism and Antiquities Minister, said on the Ministry's Facebook webpage (AP paraphrase?) "the global community should hasten its response to the crisis in Iraq in order to prevent these types of atrocities." On 8 March the [Associated Press](#) reported that Adel Shirshab said: "The world should bear the responsibility and put an end to the atrocities of the militants, ...." My comment is *why* is the world responsible for ISIL's atrocities in Iraq? It was the incompetence, corruption, and cowardice of the Iraqi army that allowed ISIL to capture part of Iraq and then operate with impunity. Iraq pretends to be a sovereign nation, and with that sovereignty comes the responsibility for enforcing laws within its borders, including protecting archaeological sites from vandalism or looting. Iraq's failure to protect its cultural heritage is another failure by the Iraqi government.

Later on 8 March, [Reuters](#) reported that Adel Shirshab implored the USA to use airstrikes to protect Iraq's archaeological sites from destruction by ISIL. So should we protect Baghdad or an archaeological site? Iraq is *not* paying for any U.S. airstrikes. It is easy to ask for more and more when something is free.

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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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On 11 March, a group of 38 imams in Canada issued a [Fatwa](#) against joining or supporting ISIL. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Calgary Herald](#).

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On 25 March, the President of Afghanistan, Ghani, gave a speech to the U.S. Congress, in which he called on Muslims to speak with "a consensus that rejects intolerance, extremism, and war." And he said "hatred must be challenged and overcome from within the religion of Islam."

To date, Afghanistan's people have rejected the allure of violent movements. We are willing to speak truth to terror.

Military fighting may stem the advance of extremism, but it will not put an end to the anger and hatred being promulgated across Muslim majority countries by these groups. That hatred must be challenged and overcome from within the religion of Islam.

The heart of the issue remains who is entitled to speak for Islam. Leaders, intellectuals, and those many millions of Muslims who believe that Islam is a religion of tolerance and virtue must find their voice. Silence is not acceptable.

But silence is not what the world will hear from us. Afghanistan is joining a new consensus that is emerging in the Muslim world, a consensus that rejects intolerance, extremism, and war. Scholars such as Fredrick Starr have documented beautifully central Asia's long tradition of rationalism and scientific inquiry. During Islam's Golden Age, Muslim scholars synthesized and recorded all known knowledge of the medieval world, giving the world advances in algebra, astronomy, water resource management, printing, and positive science. This is the Islamic civilization that needs to reinvent itself.

The Islamic world must understand its own gloriously tolerant and inquisitive past. It must reengage with the world openly and without paranoia of encirclement. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, [Congressional Record](#), H1906, 25 March 2015.

Other transcripts at [Afghanistan](#); [NATO](#).

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

On 22 March, John Brennan, the CIA Director, appeared on "Fox News Sunday". The host of the news program tried to get Brennan to say the phrase "Islamic extremist", but Brennan refused. Brennan insisted that ISIL and Al-Qaeda use a corruption or distortion of Islam. [Fox News](#). Anyone who listens to propaganda from ISIL or Al-Qaeda can plainly hear their religious message, in which they claim to speak for true Islam. And it *not* appropriate for a U.S. government official to declare what is, or is not, a corruption of Islam.

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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.");
  - [CNN](#), ("As then Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki tightened his grip on power between 2006 and 2013, the high command of the Iraqi military became a political football — with loyalty to al-Maliki prized above competence.");
  - [Washington Post](#) (General Petraeus: "The proximate cause of Iraq's unraveling was the increasing authoritarian, sectarian and corrupt conduct of the Iraqi government and its leader [Maliki] after the departure of the last U.S. combat forces in 2011.").

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.

### **No Criminal Prosecution for Employing "Ghost Soldiers"**

My essays for [Nov 2014](#) and [Dec 2014](#) mention that corrupt Iraqi army officers maintained *at least* 50,000 fictitious "ghost soldiers" on the payroll, then pocketed the salaries of these fictitious soldiers. I have seen no reports of criminal prosecutions of any of these corrupt army officers.

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### **Meetings of Iraqi Parliament**

I 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.

My essays during [November 2014](#), [December 2014](#), [January 2015](#), and [February 2015](#) chronicle the meetings of the Iraqi Parliament. Again, Parliament met infrequently, had low attendance, and failed to complete needed legislation in a timely way.

Having made my point, there is no need for further documentation of the failings of the Iraqi

Parliament.

Despite urgently needing to (1) create an Iraqi national guard that incorporates and regulates Shiite militias, and (2) investigate and end corruption in the Iraqi military and government, on 2 March, the Iraqi Parliament took a one-week vacation and will reconvene on 10 March. [All Iraq News](#).

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## Daily News About Iraq & Syria

### 23 Feb 2015: ISIL kidnaps Assyrian Christians

On 23-24 Feb, more than 220 Assyrian Christians were abducted by ISIL in Syria, as cited in my essay for [Feb 2015](#).

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. The amount of tax was *not* reported, but back in November 2014 the tax was US\$ 1700/person. [Daily Star](#).

This story was widely reported by journalists from 24 Feb to 1 March. On 2 March, this story disappeared from the news.

On 3 March, 4 Christians were released by ISIL. *The New York Times* reports an Associated Press story that admits "At least 190 Assyrian Christians remain captives of the Islamic State group, ...." [NY Times](#), 18:40 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 18:37 GMT, 3 March. I think the news should emphasize the "at least 190" who are still captive, *not* the 4 people who were released today.

On 4-5 March there was more silence by journalists about the abducted Assyrians.

Then on 6 March [SOHR](#) reported that all of the abducted Assyrians have been released by ISIL, but remain "in areas under ISIS control in al-Hasakah." But the Assyrian International News Agency ([AINA](#)) could not confirm the SOHR report.

On 7-8-9 March there was more silence about the abducted Assyrians. I was surprised by the lack of news coverage of the Assyrians, beginning 2 March. The Iraqi army's attempt to liberate Tikrit and ISIL's attacks on three of Iraq's archaeological sites pushed the Assyrians out of the news.

The silence about the Assyrians continued on 10-15 March.

On 16 March, [AINA](#) reported tersely: "ISIS is still holding 52 Assyrian families, nearly 300 people, who were captured in the initial attacks on February 23. No progress has been made in the negotiations for their release in the last three days."

On 17 March, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "Around 25 [of at least 220 Christians hostages] have been released since [February 2015], but the fate of the remaining captives is unclear."

**My comments:** Islamic terrorists have a long history of abducting people, then selling them for ransom. Back on 2 Dec 2013, Nusra Front kidnapped a dozen nuns from a Greek Orthodox convent. (See my [second essay](#) about Syria.) The nuns were released on 9 March 2014, in exchange for the release of women from Syrian prisons. (See my [fifth essay](#) on Syria.) Beginning in March 2014, the monthly reports by the United Nations Secretary General mention many other kidnappings by Islamic terrorists in Syria.

It may be necessary to maintain silence about the remaining Assyrian hostages, to avoid jeopardizing negotiations about their release, and to avoid increasing the value of the hostages. Nonetheless, we should not forget about these hostages.

This topic will be continued in my essay for April 2015.

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### **Iraqi Army Attempts to Liberate Tikrit**

To fully understand what happened in Tikrit, one also needs to understand the (1) tension between [Iran](#) and the USA in Iraq, which prevents Iran and the USA from cooperating on the fight against ISIL, and (2) the Shiite desire for [revenge](#) against the Sunnis in Iraq.

On 1 March, Abadi visited Samarra in Salahuddin Province and declared the beginning of the Iraqi army's (including Shiite militias supported by Iran) effort to push ISIL out of that Province, which includes Tikrit. Abadi also called on Sunni tribes to abandon their support for ISIL, in a last chance to avoid criminal prosecution. [All Iraq News](#), 16:50 GMT; [Reuters](#), 19:27 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 20:37 GMT; [Daily Star](#), 22:07 GMT; all on 1 March.

On 2 March, the Iraqi army clearly stated that it would liberate Tikrit from ISIL. However, the invasion of Tikrit would occur at some unspecified future time. On 2 March, there were battles outside of Tikrit. [Associated Press](#), 06:42 GMT; [Gulf News](#)(AFP), 11:50 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 20:32 GMT; [Washington Post](#); all on 2 March 2015. [Reuters](#), 05:39 GMT, 3 March.

On 3 March, the Iraqi army admitted that minefields, roadside bombs, and suicide car bomb attacks had slowed the army's march toward Tikrit. [Associated Press](#), 18:19 GMT, 3 March. Erin Cunningham, writing for the [Washington Post](#), says "Iraqi forces face a prolonged fight to reclaim the northern city of Tikrit". "... the attacks against government forces Tuesday signaled that the battle could morph into an urban war of attrition, with the potential for significant casualties."

On 4 March, the [BBC](#) reports the Iraqi army and Shiite militiamen "are seeking to encircle" Tikrit. See Agence France-Presse in [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 4 March. Also see *The Washington Post* for 3 March, cited in the previous paragraph, Although journalists did not say it, once surrounded, the Iraqi army could starve ISIL into submission, using the same method Assad uses in Syria.

On 5 March, ISIL set some oil wells to the northeast of Tikrit on fire, apparently using the smoke from fires to obscure targets from airstrikes by Iraqi air force airplanes. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). Given the long string of atrocities by ISIL, a waste of natural resources and some air pollution are small wrongs.

On 6 March, the Iraqi army retook the town of al-Dour, to the south of Tikrit. [Reuters](#).

On 7 March, the Iraqi army is stalled at the towns of al-Alam and al-Dour. Yesterday, the Iraqi army only "entered the southern and eastern parts of al-Dour". [Reuters](#).

On 8 March, the Iraqi army made some progress in the towns of al-Dour and Albu Ajil, both to the south of Tikrit. [Reuters](#).

On 9 March, [Reuters](#) reports that the Kurds — aided by U.S. airstrikes — repelled ISIL along the road from Kirkuk to Mosul.

On 10 March, the Iraqi army and Shiite militias retook the town of al-Alam. [Reuters](#), 22:28 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 17:54 GMT, both on 10 Mar.

On 10 March, Iraqi news sources reported that the army had began the liberation of Tikrit, with assaults from several directions. [All Iraq News](#), 09:22 GMT; [Iraqi News](#); both on 10 March. The [NY Times](#) reported the the Iraqi government had "seized large parts of Tikrit" on 10 March. But Reuters and the Associated Press, cited in the previous paragraph, reported that the assault on Tikrit may begin on 11 March.

On 11 March, [Iraqi News](#) reports that the commander of one militia says "The city has become completely under [Iraqi] security forces and the Volunteer Fighters control." The [Washington Post](#) reports that Iraq has broken ISIL's hold on Tikrit: "Iraqi security officials said later Wednesday [11 Mar] that the majority of Tikrit had been freed from Islamic State control but that battles continued in parts of the city." The [Associated Press](#) at 19:00 GMT and [Reuters](#) at 18:21 GMT both reported that Iraqi army and militias entered Tikrit on 11 March, but they did not mention the "complete control" claim.

On 12 March, [All Iraq News](#) reported a local security official in Tikrit said: "The Iraqi forces have completely controlled over Tikrit and killed some of the terrorists of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant and some of them ran away yet some are still in the town." But the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL was using "snipers, suicide car bombs, heavy machine guns and mortars" to repel the Iraqi army. The Associated Press quoted the commander of the Iraqi operation in Tikrit as predicting his troops would reach the center of Tikrit on 15 or 16 March. See also [Reuters](#).

At 12:40 GMT on 13 March, [Reuters](#) reported that "the offensive to retake Tikrit appeared to stall" with ISIL continuing to control approximately half of Tikrit. At 23:11 GMT, Reuters (same URL) reported: "Frustrated by guerrilla tactics from Islamic State militants, Iraqi forces paused for reinforcements on Friday [13 March] in a major offensive to take back the city of Tikrit." The [BBC](#) reported that the commander of one Shiite militia "hope[d] to retake the city of Tikrit from Islamic State within a week". The BBC says ISIL controls 70% of the center of Tikrit.

At 08:57 GMT on 14 March, Agence France-Presse reports that a leader of a Shiite militia vowed to liberate Tikrit no later than 17 Aug. He claims there are only 60 or 70 ISIL fighters now in Tikrit. [Al-Arabiya](#). My comment is that 25,000 pro-government fighters is a bit excessive to defeat 70 ISIL fighters — that is a 350 to 1 ratio. Why do the pro-government fighters need reinforcements?

At 16:04 GMT on 14 March, [Reuters](#) reports pro-government forces "paused their offensive for a second day on Saturday [14 March] as they awaited reinforcements". Reuters quotes an anonymous military source in Tikrit as explaining: "More 'well-trained forces' were needed for the street-by-street battles that recapturing the city would require. .... 'We do not need a large number, just one or two thousand. We need professional personnel and soldiers.' "

On 15 March, [Reuters](#) has a story titled: "Iraqi offensive on Tikrit stalled for third day". Reuters says: "Islamic State fighters traded sniper fire and mortar rounds with Iraqi troops and allied Shi'ite militia forces on Sunday [15 March] in the city of Tikrit but no major advances were made by either side...." The Iraqi army in Tikrit is still waiting for reinforcements. [Reuters](#). My comment is that the Iraqi army must be really weak if it takes them more than two days to deliver 1000 reinforcements. The [Associated Press](#) was concerned that the fighting in Tikrit had "virtually leveled" Saddam Hussein's tomb.

On 16 March, [Reuters](#) reports that Iraq has "paused" its offensive in Tikrit, waiting for reinforcements and hoping for more airstrikes against ISIL in Tikrit. Reuters says: "In Tikrit, military officials said there was no fighting on Monday [16 March]." The [Washington Post](#) reports: "The Iraqi forces' operation to retake the city of Tikrit has stalled as troops suffer heavy casualties at the hands of Islamic State militants, raising concerns over whether the pro-government fighters are ready for major offensives." The pro-government forces have lost about 60 fighters per day, mostly from Shiite militias.

**My comments on 16 March:** On 10 March, the assault on Tikrit began. After one day, some militia commanders were boasting to journalists that pro-government forces had "complete control" of Tikrit — a statement that was false even one week later. Then on 13 March, the assault stalled, as pro-government forces wanted more Iraqi army troops. On 16 March, there were hints that the pro-government forces really wanted precision U.S.-airstrikes in Tikrit, but — as long as Iranian officers were supervising Shiite militias in Tikrit (see [below](#)) — the USA would be unlikely to provide airstrikes. As Loveday Morris wrote in *The Washington Post* on 16 March, there are concerns about the readiness of the Iraqi army to fight against ISIL. Note that the Iraqi government has had nine months — since June 2014 —

to prepare to push ISIL out of Tikrit. The Iraqis have *not* used those nine months wisely.

On 17 March, there was no news from Tikrit from either Reuters or the Associated Press, probably because fighting had paused. Agence France-Presse reported: "Iraq's huge offensive to retake Tikrit from the Islamic State group is being stalled by bombs planted by the jihadists holding out in the city". [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 18 March, there was no news from Tikrit from either Reuters or the Associated Press, probably because fighting had paused. The big story today was that ISIL terrorists in Tunisia attacked an museum and killed 17 (later increased to 20) foreign tourists. On 18 March, I noticed that [All Iraq News](#) quit covering the liberation of Tikrit sometime around 13 March, when the Iraqi military campaign began to sour.

On 18 March, Abadi issued an official [press release](#) that says "the security and military operations in Salah Al-Deen province are being implemented according to the schedule." [All Iraq News](#) reported that the liberation of Tikrit was proceeding on schedule. The Truth is that the liberation is not only behind the schedule announced by militia leaders earlier in March, but also indefinitely stalled.

On 19 March, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan tells us that ISIL has constructed an earthen wall around Mosul to protect Mosul from invasion. This "Caliphate wall" will at least frustrate the liberation of Mosul later this year.

On 19 March, there was no news from Tikrit from either Reuters or the Associated Press, probably because fighting had paused. [Reuters](#) reports "there have been no major advances [in Tikrit] since [13 March]", but Tikrit is surrounded by pro-government forces.

On 20-21 March, there was again no news from Tikrit from either Reuters or the Associated Press, probably because fighting in Tikrit had paused. The killing of 20 foreign tourists at a museum in Tunisia on 18 March, and the slaughter of at least 137 Shiites at two mosques in Yemen on 20 March, pushed Tikrit out of the news.

### **21 March: U.S. Military becomes involved in Tikrit**

On 22 March, Agence France-Presse reported that the commander of a Shiite militia criticized the commander of the Iraqi army in Tikrit. Hadi al-Ameri told journalists: "Some of the weaklings in the army... say we need the Americans, while we say we do not need the Americans...." [Daily Star](#). The Iraqi army in Tikrit appears to want the superior airstrikes from the USA, but the Iraqi government in Baghdad is *not* passing those requests for U.S. airstrikes to the U.S.-led Coalition. In contrast, al-Ameri and his Shiite militia are confident that they are receiving good support from their Iranian advisors.

On 23, March, again no news from Tikrit from either Reuters or the Associated Press.

On 24 March, [All Iraq News](#) quotes a reliable source as saying "The next few days will witness liberating Tikrit city ...."

On 24 March, the [Associated Press](#) and the [Daily Star](#) reported that the U.S.-led coalition began reconnaissance flights over Tikrit on 21 March, and the coalition is sharing the data with the Iraqi army. [Reuters](#) also reports that the Iraqi government will soon request airstrikes in Tikrit by the U.S.-led coalition.

At 19:38 GMT on 25 March, the [Washington Post](#) reported that the USA had begun airstrikes in Tikrit, although the campaign in Tikrit is "dominated by Iranian-backed militiamen." Other journalists reported the same facts: [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). The U.S. Military press release is quoted [below](#). On the night of 25 March, there were 17 airstrikes on Tikrit by the U.S.-led coalition. (See U.S. Military press release, [below](#).)

On 26 March, it was announced that the Iraqi government had agreed to pull the Shiite militia from Tikrit as a condition for the U.S. providing airstrikes in Tikrit, as explained [below](#). On 26 March, the Iraqi army began the "second phase" (also called the "final phase") of the liberation of Tikrit. [All Iraq News](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Voice of America](#). The [Washington Post](#) says: "U.S. officials estimate that there are only around 300 Islamic State fighters in [Tikrit]".

On 27 March at 13:53 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) reports: "Militants holed up in the center of Tikrit fired mortars at the military, slowing its progress despite the new aerial campaign. A senior military commander told The Associated Press that roadside bombs and booby traps planted by the Islamic State militants demanded extreme caution."

On 28 March, there was little news from Tikrit, as the crisis in Yemen dominated the news from Arab nations. [Al-Arabiya](#), citing Reuters, reported that an Iraqi army officer said "major sacrifices" would be required by the Iraqi forces during the liberation of Tikrit. [Reuters](#).

On 29 March, [Reuters](#) reports that ISIL sniper fire, booby traps, and bombs are delaying the liberation of Tikrit.

On 30 March, there was no news from Tikrit from either Reuters or the Associated Press.

On 31 March, the Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, said that Iraqi army had captured central Tikrit. However, ISIL terrorists remain in parts of Tikrit. The Iraqi army is now searching individual buildings for booby traps, roadside bombs, and a few ISIL snipers. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Washington Post](#).

This topic will be continued in my essay for April 2015.

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### **3 March 2015: Pentagon admits mistakes in 19 Feb CENTCOM briefing on Mosul**

My essay for [Feb 2015](#) cites a 19 Feb briefing by an anonymous CENTCOM official about a planned liberation of Mosul to begin in April or May 2015.

The next day, the new U.S. Defense Secretary, Ashton Carter, was traveling to Afghanistan

when he said it was for the Iraqis — *not* the USA — to determine when to begin the assault on Mosul. Carter's exact words were: "... the only thing I would like to say about that is that is one that will be Iraqi-led, and U.S.-supported. And it's important that it be launched at a time when it can succeed. And I — even if I knew exactly when that was going to be, I wouldn't tell you." [Pentagon](#), 20 Feb 2015.

On 27 Feb, Admiral Kirby gave a press briefing at the [Pentagon](#), where he summarized Carter's remarks: "I think Secretary Carter spoke to this very well on our trip out to the region that this is going to be and must be an Iraqi-led operation, and that more critically, we're not going to be able to go, nor do we want to go any faster than the Iraqis are ready to go."

On 3 March, Carter told the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that the April/May dates in the CENTCOM briefing "... clearly was neither accurate information nor, had it been accurate, would have been information that should be blurted out to the press. So it's wrong on both scores." [Associated Press](#), 18:13 EST; [Reuters](#).

There are three reasons why it was a mistake for CENTCOM to give that briefing on 19 Feb. First, CENTCOM offended the Iraqi government, by invading a decision that was solely for the Iraqis to make. Second, CENTCOM improperly disclosed military secrets. Third, CENTCOM disclosed wrong "facts" — journalists immediately mentioned that the CENTCOM dates were *not* plausible. Why would any senior official be so stupid as to make those three mistakes? In my previous essay, I suggested that CENTCOM "intended to light a fire under the complacent Iraqi government, who have done very little to force ISIL out of Iraq." That seems to have succeeded, because the Iraqis declared the beginning of the liberation of Tikrit on 1 March. On the other hand, the liberation of Tikrit might have begun on 1 March even without the inept CENTCOM briefing.

On 4 March, Iraq's Defense Minister declared Iraq alone would decide when to attack Mosul. [Reuters](#).

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### **Iraq chooses Iran, Iraq rejects USA, then Iraq chooses USA overview of problem**

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was the king of Iran from 1941 until 1979. The Shah was supported by the U.S. Government, but deposed by the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Because the U.S. Government had supported the Shah, and because the U.S. Government had allowed the Shah to seek treatment for cancer in the USA, in Nov 1979 the Islamic Republic of Iran seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostage for 444 days. The unlawful seizure of the U.S. Embassy and hostage taking caused a break in diplomatic relations between the USA and Iran. That is one reason that why the USA does not want to cooperate with Iran in the fight against ISIL.

After the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 and deposed Saddam Hussein, Iran advised Shiite militias who were attacking U.S. troops in Iraq approximately during the years 2004 to 2008. That is another reason why the USA does not want to cooperate with Iran in the fight against ISIL, despite the fact that ISIL is the common enemy of both Iran and the USA.

One of the big problems in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003 is that Shiite militias have massacred civilian Sunni Iraqis, which greatly increased sectarian tensions in Iraq. As explained [below](#), the Shiite militias have openly called for revenge against the Sunnis in Tikrit. Iran, which has a majority of Shiite Muslims, is advising and supporting the Shiite militias in Iraq, who are massacring unarmed Sunnis. This is third reason why the USA does not want to cooperate with Iran in the fight against ISIL.

Back in June 2014, the Iraqi army proved itself incompetent, corrupt, and cowardly when the army vanished, instead of fighting ISIL. While Abadi has replaced a few leaders of his army, and the U.S. Military has trained a few thousand Iraqi soldiers beginning in late December 2014, the Iraqi army is still weak. Abadi compensates for this weakness of the Iraqi army by relying on Shiite militias, which are allied with Iran and advised by Iranian professional soldiers. Note that if Abadi wants to liberate Tikrit anytime soon, Abadi *must* rely on Shiite militias, because the Iraqi army is too weak to do this job.

Abadi's reliance on Shiite militias and their Iranian advisers initially meant that the U.S.-led coalition will *not* cooperate with the liberation of Tikrit. Beginning on 21 March 2015, the U.S. provided some cooperation to the Iraqi army in Tikrit, but *not* to the Shiite militias in Tikrit.

### **Daily News about Iran vs. USA in Tikrit**

On 3 March, Vivian Salama, the Associated Press chief in Baghdad, reported that the U.S.-led coalition is *not* providing airstrikes to support the Iraqi march on Tikrit. Salama notes: "The campaign for Tikrit is a dress rehearsal for the real contest: The fight to recapture Mosul, ...." [Associated Press](#), 17:40 EST.

On 4 March, *The New York Times* published an insightful article by Anne Barnard that explains why the Iraqis are not relying on the US-led coalition airstrikes in the campaign for Tikrit.

Tensions between Iraq and the United States over how to battle the Islamic State broke into the open on Tuesday [3 March], as Iraqi officials declared that they would fight on their own timetable with or without American help, and as United States warplanes conspicuously sat out the biggest Iraqi counteroffensive yet amid concerns over Iran's prominent role.

On Monday [2 March], Iraq launched a politically sensitive operation to oust Islamic State militants from Tikrit, the birthplace of Saddam Hussein, without seeking American approval, officials said. Even as Iraq was taking a first step into a bigger battle to oust the Islamic State from the northern city of Mosul, it was also signaling that its alliance with the United States might be more fraught than officials had let on.

American officials, for their part, voiced unease with the prominent role of Iran and its allied Shiite militias in the Tikrit operation. Shiite militia leaders said that their fighters made up more than two-thirds of the pro-government force of 30,000, and that the Iranian spymaster Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani was helping to lead from near the front

lines.

Alongside them were advisers and troops from Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, operating artillery, rocket launchers and surveillance drones, according to American officials, who said that the Iranian forces' participation in the assault in Iraq's Sunni heartland could inflame the sectarian divide that the Islamic State has exploited.

The operation comes against the backdrop of Iraqi irritation with American officials after they declared that the assault against the Islamic State in Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, would begin in April and then backpedaled, saying Iraqi forces would not be ready until fall, if then.

Ali al-Alaa, a close aide to Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, expressed frustration with what he described as a sluggish American pace and pessimistic American estimates of how long it would take to drive the Islamic State from Mosul and the western province of Anbar.

Anne Barnard, "Iraqi Campaign to Drive ISIS From Tikrit Reveals Tensions With U.S.," [NY Times](#), 4 March 2015.

See also the article by Michael Pizzi in [Al-Jazeera America](#), 6 Aug 2015. In Pizzi's discussion of the influence of Iran in Iraq, Pizzi concludes with a quotation from "Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, an analyst with the Middle East Forum" in [The Daily Beast](#), 2 March, who says: "Concern has been expressed that the U.S. 'risks' losing Iraq to Iran in the fight against IS, but it is probably more accurate to say the U.S. has *already* lost Iraq to Iran."

**My comments on 6 March:** So the USA is unwilling to play in the same sandbox as the Iranians. Further, the USA seems to have insulted the incompetent Iraqis, who are unwilling to recognize problems with their army. And there is the possibility that the Shiite militias will massacre Sunni civilians, provoking more sectarianism in an already divided Iraq. What a mess!

Robert Burns of the Associated Press quotes a professor at George Washington University, who gives a bleak forecast for Iraq:

Stephen Biddle, a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and an occasional consultant to U.S. commanders, said the Iraqis see the Iranians as a convenient alternative to the Americans as Washington pushes Iraq to be more accepting of Sunni political interests.

"So if we push them too hard they can just go to the Iranians," Biddle said. "The Tikrit offensive is a terrific example of that in practice."

....

Biddle, for one, is skeptical of chances that the Iraqi government under Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a Shiite, will make the political reforms Washington thinks are necessary, including replacing sectarian military and police commanders.

"The Iraqis don't want to make those changes for a variety of perfectly understandable

reasons." he said, and the Americans may not have sufficient leverage to force them to change, given Iran's willingness to provide an easy alternative.

Robert Burns, "Iranian role in fighting IS in Iraq: Where will it lead?" [Associated Press](#), 03:27 EST, 6 March 2015.

On 11 March, General Dempsey told Congress that the Iraqi forces attacking ISIL in Tikrit were composed of 20,000 Shiite militiamen advised by Iran, plus only 3,000 Iraqi army troops. [Reuters](#). This means that there are not enough Iraqi troops to stop Shiite militias from slaughtering Sunni citizens. There are also a few thousand Iraqi federal police and 1000 Sunni tribal militias involved — and an unknown number of Iranians — for a total between 25,000 to 30,000. [Washington Post](#). These numbers show the weakness of the Iraqi army: nearly all of the pro-government fighters are Iranian-backed Shiite militias.

On 12 March, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Abadi was making little progress in reconciling with "Iraq's deeply alienated Sunni population".

On 19 March, [Reuters](#) reports that the Iraqi government has *not* requested airstrikes in Tikrit from the U.S.-led coalition.

On 22 March, John Brennan, the CIA Director, appeared on "Fox News Sunday". Brennan spoke about the "destabilizing" influence of Iranian military advisers in Iraq. [Fox News](#); [Associated Press](#).

**My comment** is that the Iranians probably feel the same way about the U.S. presence in their neighbor, Iraq, as we feel about the Iranian presence in Iraq. Neither Iran nor the USA trusts the other.

On 24 March, the Iraqi foreign minister met in Damascus with Assad, where Assad urged a "united front" in the fight against ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Syria Times](#) (Syrian propaganda). This reminds us that some minimal level of cooperation is necessary not only between Iran and the USA in Iraq, but also amongst Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the USA in Syria. Syria and Iran have been cooperating extensively, and Iraq has been communicating with Syria. But any cooperation between the USA and Syria is prohibited by Obama's obsession with deposing Assad.

On 26 March 2015, the Associated Press reported the Iraqi government had agreed to pull the Shiite militia from Tikrit as a condition for the U.S. providing airstrikes in Tikrit:

Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, head of U.S. Central Command, told a Senate hearing that he had insisted that Iranian-backed militias pull back before the U.S. began flying intelligence-gathering flights over the weekend [21 March] and dropping bombs Wednesday [25 March] in support of a reconfigured Iraqi force of soldiers and federal police.

Spokesmen for a number of the Shiite militias fired back, saying they chose to withdraw from the battle for Tikrit in protest of the United States entering the fray.

Either way, the conditions set for US airstrikes were an important turn of events, given U.S. concerns that Iran's role in Tikrit had unsettled its anti-Islamic State group

coalition of Sunni Arab states like Saudi Arabia, that see Iran as an adversary and worry about spread of Iran's Shiite influence.

....

The predominant role of Iranian-backed militias in the early stages [1-13 March] of the battle to retake Tikrit from IS fighters also raised concerns that the offensive could deepen Iraq's sectarian divide and drive Sunnis to the militants, who already control large swaths of the country.

While the U.S. has bombed IS targets in much of northern and western Iraq nearly every day since August, it had until now been a bystander in Tikrit, saying Baghdad had not requested help. The Iraqis said they intended to liberate the city on their own, while acknowledging they were getting help from Iranian military advisers and arms.

....

Austin cited not only what he called the militia's ineffective leadership in the Tikrit offensive but also his painful recollection of how American troops fighting under his command during the Iraq war had been "brutalized" by Shiite militias.

"I will not, and I hope we never, coordinate or cooperate with Shiite militias," the general told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Austin said there now are about 4,000 Iraqi regular military troops, special operations commandos and federal police involved in the battle for Tikrit. He said some Shiite militias were in the general area, including across the Tigris river from the main part of the city. And he added that, as best he knew, Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Revolutionary Guard's elite and Quds Force, was no longer in the area.

Austin said the Iraqi government accepted as a condition of U.S. airstrikes not only a pull-back of Shiite militias in the current stage of the ground campaign but also that they not be part of the effort to stabilize the city once it is recaptured.

Robert Burns And Lolita C. Baldor, "US sees opportunity in Iran's pullback in Iraq," [Associated Press](#), 19:54 GMT, 26 March 2015.

**My comment** is that the Iraqi army, and Iraqi government in Baghdad, *really* wanted U.S. airstrikes in Tikrit, given that they agreed to exclude 20,000 Shiite militiamen, thereby reducing the number of pro-government fighters in Tikrit from approximately 30,000 to 4,000. On the other hand, the Shiite militia are poorly trained, and many of them lack experience in combat.

On 26 March, Reuters reported:

The United States conditioned its entry into Iraq's battle to retake Tikrit from Islamic State on the withdrawal of Iran-backed Shi'ite militias from the clearing operation, and they are no longer there, [General Lloyd Austin, head of U.S. CENTCOM] told

Congress on Thursday [26 March].

....

Austin told a Senate hearing, however, that the clearing forces in the city were now composed entirely of Iraqi forces and federal police, not Shi'ite militia.

....

"And I'd just like to highlight, sir, that three tours in Iraq, commanding troops who were brutalized by some of these Shi'ite militias, I will not — and I hope we never — coordinate or cooperate with Shi'ite militias," [Gen. Austin told Congress].

"U.S. ruled out Shi'ite militias before joining Tikrit strikes - U.S. general," [Reuters](#), 19:59 GMT, 26 March 2015.

On Friday, 27 March 2015, the Pentagon reported:

Several thousand regular Iraqi security forces and troops from the Popular Mobilization Forces have resumed their offensive operations on the ground in Tikrit, Iraq, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren said today.

Some Shiite militia units have withdrawn from the battlefield, Warren added.

"These are primarily the Shia militia units that we had no interest in being on the battlefield in the first place," he said. "These are the Shia militia that are clearly linked or often infiltrated by Iran, so their departure from the battlefield is welcome."

The withdrawal of militia groups with links to Iran was a precondition of U.S. air support for the effort to retake Tikrit from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorists, who have held the city since June, Warren said.

"The Iraqis had a decision to make," he said. "They were able to observe firsthand exactly what Iran brought to the table as they conducted operations in and around Tikrit. They have also been able to observe firsthand what the coalition brings to the table, based on operations throughout the rest of the Iraq. The Iraqis obviously have made a decision."

The forces that remain on the battlefield are loyal to the government of Iraq and under the direct control of Iraq's Ministry of Defense, the colonel said.

"Prime Minister [Haider] al-Abadi has made it very clear to them that ... there is a zero-tolerance policy for any sectarian improprieties," he said.

U.S., coalition and Iraqi airstrikes against ISIL targets continue in the region, Warren said, noting that the effectiveness of the air campaign has been clearly demonstrated by the fact that the ground offensive in Tikrit has resumed. The colonel cautioned against attempting to guess at a timeline for offensive operations inside the city.

"Urban warfare is difficult. It is rough, hot, bloody, tiring, exhaustive work, and so no

one should expect this to be an overnight thing," he said. "This is a hard fight that the Iraqis are going to have to go through and it will be difficult."

"Coalition Airstrikes Enable Renewal of Tikrit Ground Offensive," [Pentagon](#), 27 March 2015.

"Popular Mobilization Forces" are mostly Shiite militia, some of whom are apparently *not* supported by Iran. There are approximately 2000 Sunni militiamen amongst these Forces. Reliable information is difficult to find.

On 31 March, when the Iraqi army captured central Tikrit, some Shiite militias rejoined the fight. Agence France-Presse reports:

Badr [militia] spokesman Karim al-Nuri also said that the government headquarters was recaptured, and that Popular Mobilization members fought alongside federal police in the operation.

Key Shiite militia forces said they were halting Tikrit operations when a U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition began air strikes in the area after weeks in which Iran was the main foreign partner in the operation.

The coalition strikes started last Wednesday [25 March], angering Shiite militiamen who accused Washington of attempting to hijack their victory.

....

After giving themselves political cover by declaring that they do not want to work with each other, both sides [i.e., USA and Shiite militia] are still taking part in the Tikrit operation.

"Iraq forces retake government HQ in Tikrit," [Al-Arabiya](#), 11:25 GMT, 31 March 2015.

The Associated Press reports:

The leader of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units, a collaborative force made up mostly of Shiite militias, also said his fighters had rejoined the Tikrit operation, less than a week after announcing a boycott over U.S. involvement.

Abu Mahdi al-Mohandis told the AP that his fighters participated in the southern offensive and would be joining the offensive on the northern and western fronts shortly.

"Iraq premier: Troops in center of Islamic State-held Tikrit," [Associated Press](#), 18:48 GMT, 31 March 2015.

*The Washington Post* reports:

The inclusion of Iranian-backed militias in the Iraqi government's offensive, however, is likely to cause some consternation in Washington, where there were concerns about U.S. planes serving as a vanguard strike force for paramilitary groups accused of human rights abuses. Both the United States and the Shiite militias had [balked](#) at working together on the offensive, but they ended up doing so tacitly.

....

The Shiite militias involved in the offensive announced Monday that they were [rejoining](#) the fight, after initially drawing back when the United States launched airstrikes.

Loveday Morris, "Iraqi prime minister claims victory against Islamic State in Tikrit," [Washington Post](#), 21:21 GMT, 31 March 2015. (links in original)

Reuters reports that the Shiite militias claim that Abadi had halted U.S.-led airstrikes, while both the Iraqi government and the U.S. Military deny any halt in U.S. airstrikes:

Tuesday [31 March] saw Shi'ite militia groups return to the battle after suspending operations last Thursday [26 March] when U.S.-led air strikes were requested by Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi.

The Iranian-backed armed factions had opposed U.S.-led strikes, insisting that their paramilitary forces could retake Tikrit, seized last June by Islamic State militants as they raced across northern Iraq.

Anti-American groups Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq said they had joined federal police and army forces in going deeper into the city on Tuesday after Abadi, a moderate Shi'ite Islamist who became prime minister last year, agreed to halt U.S. air strikes.

They said air strikes in the city on Tuesday were being carried out only by the Iraqi military. A federal police officer made a similar claim.

But the prime minister's office said no such order had been issued and U.S. officials said they were not aware of any military freeze.

The U.S. government, which deeply mistrusts the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias, has sought ways to participate in the Tikrit battle without acknowledging working with forces backed by Tehran.

Mahdi Talat, "Iraqi forces drive Islamic State out of central Tikrit: PM," [Reuters](#), 01:01 GMT, 1 April 2015.

**My comments:** In all of the propaganda, it is unclear what is happening or why. The U.S. Military claims, and I believe them, that the Iraqi government ordered the Shiite militia to stop fighting in Tikrit, in exchange for the U.S. beginning airstrikes in Tikrit. But the Shiite militia said they were voluntarily quitting the fight, because they opposed the U.S.-airstrikes. Now the Shiite militias say they are rejoining the battle in Tikrit, which, if true, would violate the U.S. agreement with the Iraqi government. The Iraqi government is probably unable to force the Shiite militia to obey the Iraqi government, partly because the government is weak and ineffective, and partly because the Shiite militias in Tikrit outnumber the Iraqi army in Tikrit by approximately five-to-one.

*The Washington Post* and Reuters agree that the militias claim Abadi had halted U.S. airstrikes in Tikrit. That might be a false claim by the militias, to justify their returning to the battle. Or Abadi might be saying different things to the militias than to the U.S. Military.

Adding to the confusion, on 31 March [All Iraq News](#) reports that Abadi's government "requested from Iran to send Iranian military advisors to assist Iraqi Security Forces in their war against terrorism despite our disagreement with them over interference of the international coalition in Iraq." Understandably, Abadi wants help from *both* Iran and the USA. But Iran-supported Shiite militias and the U.S. Military are incompatible. One of the reasons for the incompatibility is the history of atrocities perpetrated by these Shiite militias, as discussed in the next section of this essay.

This topic will be continued in my essay for April 2015.

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## Shiite Revenge for Massacre at Speicher Base

Back in 11-14 June 2014, ISIL massacred hundreds — possibly as many as 1700 — Shiite recruits at Speicher Air Force Base near Tikrit. (See my essay for [June 2014](#). My essay for [Sep 2014](#) cites a Human Rights Watch report that concludes "between 560 and 770 Iraqi soldiers" were executed by ISIL.) This atrocity has *not* been forgotten. Leaders of Shiite militias have explicitly called for "revenge" during the liberation of Tikrit from ISIL. See, e.g.,

- [PressTV](#) in Iran, 28 Feb, ("The commander of the Badr organization, Hadi al-Ameri, issued an ultimatum Saturday [28 Feb]: 'We call on the people of Tikrit to leave their city within 48 hours to wrap up the battle of the revenge for Speicher'.").
- [The Telegraph](#)(AFP), 2 March, ("Shia militias in particular have vowed to avenge the Speicher executions, sparking fears of mass killings against Sunnis if Tikrit were to be recaptured.").
- [The Guardian](#), 2 March, ("Abadi is clearly worried about possible atrocities, especially after Amiri [leader of the Badr Organisation, a Shiite militia], speaking at the weekend, urged Tikrit residents to flee their homes so his forces could 'wrap up the battle of the revenge for Speicher'.").
- [Washington Post](#), 3 March, ("Shiite militia leaders have painted the new offensive as revenge for the Speicher massacre, raising fears of attacks on Sunni residents.").
- [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters), 3 March, ("Several Shiite Hashid Shaabi fighters have described this week's campaign as revenge for the Speicher killings.").
- [Human Rights Watch](#), 4 March, (predicts revenge on Sunni civilians).
- [BBC](#), 5 March, ("Militia leaders have vowed to seek revenge for the massacre of hundreds of soldiers, most of them Shia, at Camp Speicher near Tikrit in June.").
- [Associated Press](#), 8 March, ("Last week, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, a powerful Shiite militia taking part in the Tikrit offensive, posted a statement on Facebook vowing 'a battle to impose justice and avenge the martyrs of Camp Speicher.' ").

**My comment** on 6 March: This is like watching a train wreck occur: journalists and commentators foresee Shiite militias massacring unarmed Sunni civilians. It is easy to foresee — the Shiite militias openly speak of revenge, and these militias have a history of killing unarmed Sunni civilians. Despite the foreseeability, the Iraqi government is apparently failing to prevent the future massacre of Sunni civilians. With more atrocities by Shiites against Sunnis, some of the Sunnis will probably react by either supporting ISIL or by creating new

terrorist organizations. So there will be continuing terrorism in Iraq.

As Obama and Kerry have been saying since June 2014, the Iraqi government *must* be more inclusive of the Sunni minority, and the Iraqi government *must* stop atrocities by Shiite militias.

As Shiite militias liberated villages surrounding Tikrit, there were occasional terse mentions by journalists that the militias have burned or looted Sunni houses, but nothing was confirmed. [Al-Arabiya](#), 13 Mar; [Daily Star](#), 13 Mar; [Reuters](#), 22 March.

On 18 March, [Human Rights Watch](#) issued a report about atrocities committed by Shiite militia near Amerli in Sep 2014.

On 19 March, the United Nations Human Rights Office issued a report on atrocities by ISIL in Iraq up to Feb 2015, which also included some atrocities by the Iraqi army and allied militias. See [above](#) for citations.

On 30 March, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, visited Baghdad. In addition to spewing platitudes, Ban said: "I am also concerned by allegations of summary killings, abductions and destruction of property perpetrated by forces and militias fighting alongside Iraqi armed forces. Civilians freed from the brutality of Daesh should not have to then fear their liberators. One form of violence cannot replace another." [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#); [Gulf Times](#)(Reuters).

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### **6 March 2015: Iraq reclaims town of Al-Baghdadi**

In February 2015, ISIL captured the town of Al-Baghdadi in Iraq. The U.S.-led coalition delivered 26 airstrikes between 22 Feb and 6 March, which helped the Iraqi army retake the town on 6 March. [Central Command](#); [Pentagon](#).

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### **7 March 2015: Boko Haram Joins ISIL**

In my essay for [Jan 2015](#), I mentioned the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.

On 7 March 2015, Boko Haram in Nigeria pledged allegiance to ISIL. [Reuters](#), 22:11 GMT, 7 Mar; [Associated Press](#), 01:29 GMT, 8 March; [NY Times](#).

My comment — as a parody of commercial merger announcements — is that this merger is advantageous for ISIL, because Boko Haram brings proven expertise in the slaughter of unarmed civilians, destructions of schools, and appalling barbaric values unmatched since Vlad the Impaler ruled Transylvania. Boko Haram also assures ISIL a supply of brutal executioners for captured humanitarian aid workers, journalists, women, and children. ISIL can provide Boko Haram with an intelligent military strategy, cheerful public relations, unmatched crisis management, good weapons, stolen property to sell, and an iconic black flag.

On 12 March, ISIL accepted Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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## Training of Iraqi army by USA

On 8 March, General Dempsey was visiting Iraq, where he told journalists of problems with the training of the Iraqi army:

"We've got trainers and advisers that are waiting for some of the Iraqi units to show up, and when they've shown up — a handful of them — they've shown up understrength and sometimes without the proper equipment. The Iraqi government can actually fix that themselves."

Robert Burns, "Dempsey: Some Iraqi troops show up for training ill-prepared," [Associated Press](#), 18:14 GMT, 8 March 2015.

On 9 March, General Dempsey visited Abadi and the Iraqi defense minister in Baghdad.

Afterwards, General Dempsey talked to journalists. The Associated Press reported:

"Militarily, I was clear that there still are some leaders who need to be replaced" because of incompetence, [Dempsey] said. "There still is a shortage of recruits. There are still instances where those recruits are not being paid on time, equipped properly."

Dempsey said U.S. military officers have tried to push the Iraqis into installing more competent commanders. He said they have told Iraq "which leaders in our assessment are capable of the task and which ones are not. That dialogue hasn't produced the kind of change that I think it needs to produce in order to have a campaign-quality military."

Robert Burns, "Iraqi minister: We're comfortable receiving aid from Iran," [Associated Press](#), 17:25 GMT, 9 March 2015.

**My comments:** It is an indication of ingratitude and lack of care when the Iraqi government sends troops for training late, understrength, and without proper equipment. In other words, obtaining a professional army seems to be a low-priority item for the Iraqi government. These problems with training are consistent with the [failure](#) of the Iraqi government to prosecute army officers for desertion at Mosul in June 2014, and the failure of the Iraqi government to prosecute army officers for maintaining "ghost soldiers".

On 31 March CENTCOM announced that more than 5000 Iraqi soldiers had been trained, and another 4700 Iraqi soldiers were currently being trained.

Though airstrikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant may be the most visible portion of coalition support in Iraq, about a dozen countries are contributing to the training of Iraqi soldiers, an effort that so far has produced more than 5,000 newly trained Iraqi soldiers, with another 4,700 currently in training.

The coalition nations who are part of Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve have committed more than 1,500 troops of their own to train, advise and assist Iraqi security forces at four locations in Iraq, according to a CJTF-OIR news release.

"We want to do what we can to help change the conditions inside of Iraq and Syria so that what we see happening there now, does not happen again in the future," said Gen.

Lloyd J. Austin III, U.S. Central Command commander, in his posture statement March 26 to the Senate Armed Services Committee. "The key to doing so is enabling indigenous forces to defend their own borders and provide for the security of their sovereign territory. This is the goal of our advise and assist and build partner capacity efforts currently underway in Iraq, and soon in Syria."

The training courses in Iraq are six weeks long and cover some broad topics, such as leadership, ethics and law of war training, as well as practicing such tactics as reacting to ambushes, moving in different formations, and moving safely through roads and other areas where they might be exposed to enemy fire.

In noting the graduation earlier this month of about 1,500 forces from a six-week training course, Maj. Gen. Paul E. Funk II, commander of the Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command-Iraq, said, "these proud Iraqi soldiers will soon be on the front line, taking the fight to the enemy, and in time ensuring the liberation of their country."

"Coalition assists in training thousands of Iraqi soldiers," [CENTCOM](#), 31 March 2015.

My comment is that I hope the U.S. is teaching the Iraqis *not* to strip off their uniforms and flee, as they did in June 2014 to their perpetual embarrassment.

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### **AUMF for anti-ISIL campaign**

The USA has been bombing ISIL in Iraq since August 2014. This program continues without the required Congressional Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF). Congressional approval of all wars is specified in the U.S. Constitution, Article I, § 8, clause 11. See also War Powers Act, 50 U.S.C. § 1541, et. seq. (enacted 1973). Ironically, Obama is now seeking Congressional approval for something that Obama has been doing nearly every day for the past seven months.

My essay for [Dec 2014](#) described the failure of Congress to pass an AUMF and my essay for [Feb 2015](#) quoted and criticized Obama's draft AUMF.

On 6 March, [The Hill](#) reports: "Republicans have suggested that the AUMF doesn't go far enough, and want a stronger U.S. role. Some Democrats, however, have balked over supporting a proposal that doesn't expressly forbid the use of ground combat troops." On 10 March, [Reuters](#) reports that there is no consensus in Congress about the AUMF. Reuters says Obama's proposal "met with instant, deep disapproval." Republicans generally want few limits on the use of military force, while Democrats want limits to prevent another prolonged war (e.g., Afghanistan 2001-2014 and Iraq 2003-2011).

On 11 March, hearings on the draft AUMF began in the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. [Kerry's](#) opening statement was posted by the State Department. General [Dempsey](#) testified that Obama's draft AUMF was "suitable". [Reuters](#) reports that " 'Democrats are not willing to ... give this or any other president an open-ended authorization for war, a blank check,' Senator Robert Menendez, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee, .... Obama's request for an AUMF against Islamic State has made little progress since he sent it to Congress a month ago, and may never pass, due largely to opposition from his fellow Democrats."

On 17 March, [The Hill](#) has an insightful article titled: "The AUMF: Obama fails to get Congress on his side". The article comments that Obama's "draft is not only getting picked apart by lawmakers, but trashed as insufficient to the monumental task at hand or so vague to render any limits on military force irrelevant."

On 18 March, [Politico](#) reports that the AUMF has "stalled" in Congress. Politico quotes the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee as saying: "I just don't hear many people standing up for what the president has proposed, so I think we're kind of moving beyond that."

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### **Vatican calls for military force against ISIL**

On 13 March, the Vatican's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, gave an interview to [Crux](#) in which he noted the genocide by ISIL. The ambassador said that if negotiations with ISIL fail, "then the use of [military] force will be necessary." Crux reports "any anti-ISIS coalition has to include the Muslim states of the Middle East, and can't simply be a Western approach." "

On 15 March, both Agence France-Presse [Daily Star](#) and [Reuters](#) covered this story. Both AFP and Reuters initially reported the Archbishop was speaking for the Vatican, when he apparently made an extemporaneous remark in an interview with *Crux*.

[Vatican Radio](#) covered this story, but without mentioning the Archbishop's rather bellicose statement that military force may be "necessary".

Back on 7 September 2013, Pope Francis called for a prayer vigil to end the violence in Syria. [Catholic News Service](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). The prayers had no effect on insurgents in Syria. Obama decided not to attack Syria, because Assad agreed to surrender all of his chemical weapons.

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### **16 March 2015: ISIL commander dies in Afghanistan**

My essay for [Jan 2015](#) mentions the spread of ISIL into Afghanistan. My essay for [Feb 2015](#) mentions that Abdul Rauf, an ISIL recruiter, was killed in Afghanistan.

On 16 March, the Afghani Ministry of Defense claimed to kill Hafiz Wahidi, the nephew and successor of Addul Rauf. Hafiz was a military commander of ISIL in Afghanistan. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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### **26 March 2015: Assad criticizes airstrikes against ISIL**

On 26 March 2015, Assad had an interview with Charlie Rose of CBS News:

Charlie Rose: How much of a benefit are you getting from American airstrikes in Syria reducing the power of ISIS?

President Assad: Sometimes you could have local benefit but in general if you want to talk in terms of ISIS actually ISIS has expanded since the beginning of the strikes. Not like some— American— wants to sugar coat the situation as the— to say that it's getting better. As— ISIS is being defeated and so on. Actually, no, you have more recruits. Some estimates that they have 1,000 recruits every month in Syria. And Iraq— they are expanding in Libya and many other al Qaeda affiliate organizations have announced their allegiance to ISIS. So that's the situation.

Charlie Rose: How much territory do they control in Syria?

President Assad: Sorry?

Charlie Rose: ISIS. Controls how much territory. 50 percent?

President Assad: Yeah, it's not regular war. ....

"Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on 60 Minutes," [CBS News](#), 29 March 2015.

**My comments:** From the beginning, military experts said that airstrikes alone would *not* defeat ISIL. Assad has concentrated his military in the Western part of Syria, where the large cities (e.g., Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, Latakia) are located. Aside from Assad and Kurdish forces, there are no other ground force battling against ISIL in Syria. So it should be no surprise that the airstrikes have not defeated ISIL.

When Assad says "local benefit", I think he means the defeat of ISIL at the town of Kobani on 26 Jan 2015. That defeat involved Kurdish ground troops, including peshmerga from Iraq.

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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 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 28, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using remotely piloted aircraft to conduct two airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., Feb. 28,

and 8 a.m., Mar. 1, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed an ISIL storage facility and two ISIL boats.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL storage containers.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL building, an ISIL excavator and destroyed an ISIL building.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 1 March 2015.

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

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## **2 March 2015: airstrikes**

Although I looked at least twice each day on 2-4 March, CENTCOM never posted its 2 March press release at its website. At 16:45 EST on 4 March, I used the version at the Pentagon.

On Monday, 2 March 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 [1 March] and 8 a.m. today [2 March], local time, noting that assessments of results are based on initial reports.

### **Fighter and bomber aircraft conducted four airstrikes in Syria:**

- Near Dayr az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL bunker.

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

- Near Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL boats and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL checkpoints and fighting positions.

- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL vehicles and two ISIL pieces of engineer equipment.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike struck an ISIL compound.

[Pentagon](#), 2 March 2015.

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### **3 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 2, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 2, and 8 a.m., March 3, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL motorcycles.

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed an ISIL boat and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy Machine Gun.

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

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

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

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### **4 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 3, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct three 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., March 3, and 8 a.m., March 4, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck an IED factory, an ISIL VBIED factory, an ISIL weapons storage facility and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike on ISIL fighters was reported as ineffective.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and three ISIL vehicles.

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

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

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

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## **5 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 4, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct seven 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., March 4, and 8 a.m., March 5, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Tal Hamis, two airstrikes struck two ISIL fighting positions and destroyed an ISIL staging area and an ISIL fighting position.

### **Iraq**

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

fighting position.

- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL artillery piece and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Haditha, , an airstrike was conducted to help support friendly forces movement.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

[Central Command](#), 5 March 2015.

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

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## 6 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 5, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack and fighter aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 5, and 8 a.m., March 6, 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 crude oil collection point.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Hamis, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

### Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL headquarters and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Haditha, an airstrike struck ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery system.
- Near Samarra, an airstrike neutralized an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Taji, an airstrike struck ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## 7 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 6, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack and fighter aircraft to conduct six 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., March 6, and 8 a.m., March 7, local time.

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

### Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck three tactical units, destroyed two fighting positions and damaged one heavy machine gun position.

### Iraq

- Near Mosul, six airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroyed two buildings, two check points, two ISIL vehicles, and one mortar, damaged an anti-air defense artillery gun and a weapons cache, and neutralized an excavator.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed two anti-air defense guns.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck two tactical units and destroyed one fighting position and one sniper position.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck one tactical unit and destroyed one vehicle and one weapons cache.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 7 March 2015.

Not posted at the Pentagon.

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## 8 March 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 8 March 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On March 7, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber aircraft to conduct an airstrike. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 7, and 8 a.m., March 8, local time.

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

## Syria

- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.

## Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL excavators and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL fighting position and destroyed three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Haditha, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar tube and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL IED factory and an ISIL tactical unit.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 8 March 2015.  
Not posted at the Pentagon.

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## 9 March 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 9 March 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

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

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

## Syria

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL modular oil refinery and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

## Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck two ISIL large tactical units, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed nine ISIL vehicles, two ISIL buildings, two ISIL armored vehicles and an ISIL storage facility.

- Near Haditha, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kirkuk, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 9 March 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 9 March 2015. (Includes 7-8-9 Mar press releases.)

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### **10 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 9, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct four 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., March 9, and 8 a.m., March 10, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL large tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kirkuk, four airstrikes struck three ISIL large tactical units, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL buildings, three ISIL vehicles, three ISIL VBIEDS, an ISIL culvert crossing and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike suppressed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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### **11 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 10, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in

Syria, using fighter aircraft to conduct two airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 10, and 8 a.m., March 11, 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 destroyed two ISIL vehicles.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Qaim, three airstrikes struck an ISIL artillery piece and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes destroyed three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL outpost and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

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

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

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

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## **12 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 11, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using fighter, attack and remote aircraft to conduct 13 airstrikes. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 11, and 8 a.m., March 12, local time.

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

CJTF-OIR [Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve] conducted **no airstrikes in Syria** between 8 a.m., March 11, and 8 a.m., March 12, local time.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Kirkuk, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL excavators, three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 12 March 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 March 2015.

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### **13 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

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

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery piece.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 13 March 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 13 March 2015.

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### **14 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

**Syria:**

On March 13, U.S. 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 eight airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 13, and 8 a.m., March 14, local time.

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

**Syria**

- Near Kobani, one airstrike struck one ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Hasakah, one airstrike struck one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed one ISIL fighting position.

**Iraq**

- Near Kirkuk, four airstrikes struck one large ISIL unit and two ISIL tactical units and destroyed four buildings, three ISIL machine guns, and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck one tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL vehicles and one structure.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike neutralized an ISIL rocket tube.
- Near Rawah, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL vehicles.

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

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

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

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**15 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

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

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

**Syria**

- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

**Iraq**

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Hawayjah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

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

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

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

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### **16 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 15, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, attack and bomber aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 15, and 8 a.m., March 16, 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 tactical unit, an ISIL excavator and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL machine gun.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Al Hawayjah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Haditha two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL IED factory and destroyed two ISIL excavators, three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL bull dozer.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL building, an ISIL sniper and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Rawah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL excavators and destroyed an ISIL front end loader and an ISIL excavator.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 16 March 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 16 March 2015.

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## 17 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 16, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 16, and 8 a.m., March 17, 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 and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, four ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.

### Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL weapons storage facility, two ISIL crossing points and destroyed two different ISIL crossing points.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike had inconclusive results.
- Near Kirkuk, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL vehicles, three ISIL buildings and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

On 17 March, the Syrian state news agency, [SANA](#) triumphantly announced that "The Syrian air defense systems shot down a hostile UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] in the northern province of Latakia on Tuesday [17 March]."

At 22:02 GMT on 17 March, [Reuters](#) reported that "The United States lost contact with an unarmed [surveillance] drone aircraft flying over Syria's Latakia province". The [Associated Press](#) says the reconnaissance drone was "lost" at 17:40 GMT.

**My comment:** The drone was violating Syrian airspace, so the Syrian government had the legal right to destroy the drone. That having been said, it was a stupid move by Assad, who should be encouraging cooperation with Western nations in the fight against terrorism in Syria.

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## 18 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 17, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter and attack aircraft to conduct two 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., March 17, and 8 a.m., March 18, local time.

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

### Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

### Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike denied ISIL an avenue of approach.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL rocket storage facility.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL remotely piloted aircraft and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL excavators and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, five airstrikes struck two ISIL bridges, an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL excavator and destroyed an ISIL sniper position and an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 18 March 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 18 March 2015.

CENTCOM did *not* mention the drone that was shot down in Syria on 17 March, perhaps because the surveillance drone was not conducting airstrikes.

[Reuters](#) suggests that the Syrian government will shoot down reconnaissance drones that surveil areas that are free of ISIL terrorists.

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## 19 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 18, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 18, and 8 a.m., March 19, local time.

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

### Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL tank and an ISIL armored personnel carrier.
- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

### Iraq

- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL-controlled bridge and destroyed a different ISIL-controlled bridge.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL pieces of engineer equipment and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL bridges, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL building and an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike had inconclusive results.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 19 March 2015.

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

On 19 March, the [Pentagon](#) released a summary of the airstrikes since 8 August 2014: "The coalition has conducted 2,893 airstrikes — 1,631 in Iraq and 1,262 in Syria. Total U.S. airstrikes numbered 2,320 — 1,151 in Iraq and 1,169 in Syria." That means the USA has conducted 71% of the airstrikes in Iraq, and 93% of the airstrikes in Syria. The total cost of operations against ISIL is US\$ 1.83 billion.

The [Washington Post](#) reported that the drone that was shot down over northern Latakia on 17 March "was flying in an area where U.S. aircraft had not previously operated" and far from ISIL terrorists.

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## 20 March 2015: airstrikes

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

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

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

### Syria

- Near Kobani, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.

### Iraq

- Near Al Hawayjah, an airstrike struck an ISIL IED factory.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL weapons assembly area.
- Near Haditha, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL rocket site, an ISIL heavy machine gun and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL excavators.

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

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

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

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## 21 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 20, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber aircraft to conduct three airstrikes. Separately, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes in Iraq, using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 20, and 8 a.m., March 21, local time.

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

### Syria

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, one ISIL

vehicle, one large ISIL machine gun, and one ISIL machine gun.

### **Iraq**

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed one ISIL storage facility and neutralized one ISIL rocket site, one ISIL RPG position, one ISIL large machine gun, and one ISIL mortar.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike destroyed one ISIL fighting position, one ISIL tank and one ISIL excavator.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Taji, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike destroyed two tactical units.

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

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

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

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## **22 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 21, U.S. military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, U.S. and Coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes approved by the Iraq Ministry of Defense, using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 21, and 8 a.m., March 22, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an armored personnel carrier.
- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, three ISIL vehicles and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed two ISIL excavators and an ISIL shipping container.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrike destroyed an ISIL homemade explosive cache, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL building.

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

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

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

Notice the press release now contains explicit mention that airstrikes in Iraq have been "approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense". This is important to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Iraqi government. It also explains why there have been no recent airstrikes near Tikrit: the Iraqi government has *not* requested airstrikes near Tikrit.

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### **23 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 22, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct eight airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 22, and 8 a.m., March 23, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, eight airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed 12 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike struck an ISIL trailer.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

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

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

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

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### **24 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 23, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using fighter and attack aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 23, and 8 a.m., March 24, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL checkpoint.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL shipping containers.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL IED and VBIED storage facility and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

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## **25 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 24, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 24, and 8 a.m., March 25, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, an ISIL vehicle and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, five airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, an ISIL vehicle and destroyed two ISIL excavators and an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL modular oil refinery, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL machine guns and an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit, two ISIL machine guns and destroyed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL building.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 25 March 2015.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 March 2015.

On the afternoon of 25 March, CENTCOM announced that airstrikes on Tikrit had begun: CJTF-OIR [Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve] operations to support Iraqi Security Forces in Tikrit have commenced after a request from the Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi. The Coalition is now providing direct support to Iraqi Security Forces conducting operations to expel ISIL from the city. CJTF-OIR is providing air strikes, airborne intelligence capabilities, and Advise and Assist support to Iraqi Security Force headquarters elements in order to enhance their ability to defeat ISIL.

"These strikes are intended to destroy ISIL strongholds with precision, thereby saving innocent Iraqi lives while minimizing collateral damage to infrastructure," said Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, CJTF-OIR commanding general. "This will further enable Iraqi forces under Iraqi command to maneuver and defeat ISIL in the vicinity of Tikrit."

Iraqi Security Forces have ISIL in Tikrit encircled. Renewed efforts on the ground supported by the Coalition are aimed at dislodging ISIL fighting elements from Tikrit and once again placing the town under the Government of Iraq control. The CJTF-OIR Coalition will continue supporting the Iraqi Security Forces and the GoI, to degrade and defeat ISIL.

[Central Command](#), 25 March 2015.  
Version posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 March 2015.

**My comment:** Note that there is *no mention* of the Shiite militias, which are supported and advised by Iranian military personnel. For daily developments on the campaign to liberate Tikrit, see [above](#).

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## 26 March 2015: 17 airstrikes on Tikrit

On Thursday, 26 March 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported 17 airstrikes in Tikrit Iraq:

Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve operations in support of Iraqi Security Forces in Tikrit commenced last night [25 March] after a request from the Government of Iraq.

In Tikrit, Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 17 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL

terrorists.

### **Tikrit, Iraq**

- In Tikrit, 17 airstrikes struck an ISIL building, two ISIL bridges, three ISIL checkpoints, two ISIL staging areas, two ISIL berms, an ISIL roadblock and an ISIL controlled command and control facility.

"The ongoing Iraqi and Coalition air strikes are setting the conditions for offensive action to be conducted by Iraqi forces currently surrounding Tikrit," said Lt. Gen. James Terry. "Iraqi Security Forces supported by the Coalition will continue to gain territory from Daesh."

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

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

Later on Thursday, 26 March 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported all of the airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On March 25, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, attack and bomber aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 24 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 25, and 8 a.m., March 26, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck an ISIL military garrison.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, five ISIL fighting positions and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tikrit, 17 airstrikes struck multiple ISIL buildings, two ISIL bridges, three ISIL checkpoints, two ISIL staging areas, two ISIL berms, an ISIL roadblock and an ISIL command and control facility.

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

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

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

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## 27 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 26, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 10 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 26, and 8 a.m., March 27, local time.

### Syria

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL vehicles, two ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapons and an ISIL excavator.

### Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapon.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapon.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL building.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings, an anti-aircraft artillery weapon and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tikrit, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL VBIED.

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

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

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

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## 28 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct four airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 27, and 8 a.m., March 28, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroyed two anti-aircraft artillery machine guns, three ISIL vehicles, one excavator, and damaged one ISIL fighting position.

### **Iraq**

- Near Tikrit, eight airstrikes struck two large ISIL units and one ISIL tactical unit, destroyed one ISIL vehicle, one ISIL vehicle borne explosive device, and destroyed 11 and damaged one fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two anti-aircraft artillery guns and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed two IED construction/facilitation buildings, one other building, an armored vehicle, and one fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed one machine gun, one building and one excavator.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck one ISIL tactical unit.

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

[Central Command](#), 28 March 2015.

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

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## **29 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 28, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter aircraft to conduct an airstrike. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 28, and 8 a.m., March 29, local time.

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

### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL

fighting position.

- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL storage facility, an ISIL fighting position and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tikrit, six airstrikes struck six ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapon.

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

[Central Command](#), 29 March 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 29 March 2015.

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### 30 March 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 29, U.S. and Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq, using fighter, attack and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 29, and 8 a.m., March 30, local time.

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

**CJTF-OIR conducted no airstrikes in Syria** between 8 a.m., March 29, and 8 a.m., March 30, local time.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck multiple ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket launcher and an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Tikrit, three airstrikes struck multiple ISIL buildings and destroyed two ISIL armored vehicles.

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

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

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

On 30 March, Iran's Revolutionary Guard claims a U.S. drone killed two Iranian advisers near Tikrit sometime during 23 March. But the USA did not begin airstrikes near Tikrit until the night of 25 March. [Associated Press](#). On 30 March, I searched three English-language

Iranian news websites (FARS, IRNA, and PressTV), but I found no mention of this story. Apparently not even the major Iranian news media takes this story seriously.

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### **31 March 2015: airstrikes**

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

On March 30, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using bomber aircraft to conduct an airstrike. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using attack, fighter and bomber aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The strategy has not changed,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, Combined Joint Task Force Public Affairs Officer. “The focus remains to drive ISIL out of Iraq. We have struck at ISIL’s command and control, supply lines, fighters and leaders, and military and economic infrastructure and resources. We have debilitated ISIL’s oil producing, processing and transportation infrastructure. We are seeing successes in this fight. It will take time, but we will succeed in our mission.”

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., March 30, and 8 a.m., March 31, local time.

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

#### **Syria**

- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, one ISIL checkpoint and destroyed 31 ISIL vehicles and two ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapons.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL building and suppressed ISIL movement.
- Near Tikrit, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL buildings.

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

[Central Command](#), 31 March 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 31 March 2015.

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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. (See my [document](#) that collects quotations from Obama and two U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and John Kerry.) 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 these terrorists took the name "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL).

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

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

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

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

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

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

My essays for [Feb 2015](#) and [Mar 2015](#) — in the section titled "Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War" — cite news stories about unnamed diplomats who want to cooperate with Assad.

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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. The third U.N. envoy for Syria, de Mistura, proposed a freeze in Aleppo that was rejected by the Syrian National Coalition and the insurgents. As of 31 March 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 or three years to train 15,000 rebels. Meanwhile, effective troops on the ground were needed in January 2014 to prevent ISIL from capturing 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 215,000 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.

The "SCPR Alienation and Violence Report 2014" cited [above](#) contains an eloquent description of the destruction of Syria.

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### **Conclusion for Iraq**

The Syrians have an effective government and an effective military. In contrast, during 2014 the Iraqi Parliament slowly formed a new government (during an existential crisis) and the Iraqi army was 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 2014.

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.

In June 2014, the Iraqi army was 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 non-Arabs 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.

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This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria19.pdf>  
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to source documents.

[my homepage](#)