

Syria & Iraq: April 2015

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 17 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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. On 3 April, All Iraq News disappeared from the Internet because of switching to a new domain name registrar and because of redesign of their website. I compensated for the loss of this Iraqi news source by using *Rudaw* in Kurdish Iraq.

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.

In 2011, these moderates wanted to continue a secular government in Syria, but without Assad.

2. The "jihadists" want to impose an Islamic government (i.e., Sharia law) 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, which wants to establish an Islamic emirate in Syria.
 - 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. ISIL's goal since June 2014 is to establish a caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

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.

It is critically important to understand that the jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL want to overthrow the existing secular government of Assad and establish a new government based on their interpretation of Islam. These jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL are *not* part of a pro-democracy revolt in Syria.

Government

The Arab nations, Western Europe, and the USA recognize the Syrian National Coalition, an exile group in Turkey, as the *only* legitimate government of Syria. However, there are hundreds of rebel or jihadist groups operating in Syria, and the Coalition represents only some of the rebel groups and none of the jihadists. As explained in detail in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria, the Coalition is unable to make decisions, and — in my opinion — has no credibility as a future government of Syria. However, the Coalition is the least objectionable alternative government for Syria. Since October 2013, several commentators have noted that Assad is preferable to having Al-Qaeda control Syria. The topic of a future

government for Syria is discussed in my separate [essay](#).

Chemical Weapons

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.

Public Release of Fact-Finding Reports in Dec 2014 and Feb 2015

My essay for [July 2014](#) cites a fact-finding report on chlorine gas use in Syria, which report was publicly issued by OPCW on 16 June 2014.

There are two more OPCW fact-finding reports on this topic, dated 10 Sep 2014 and 18 Dec 2014, but neither of these two reports were publicly released by OPCW. See my essays for [Sep 2014](#) and [Jan 2015](#).

On 12 April 2015, while searching for other Syrian documents, I stumbled across a publicly available copy of the OPCW fact-finding reports dated 10 Sep 2014 and 18 Dec 2014. This is important, because these two fact-finding reports are *not* publicly available at the OPCW website. The public disclosure is contained in a 116-page letter on 30 Dec 2014 from nine nations to the U.N. Security Council, [S/2014/955](#).

But the previous paragraph is *not* the whole story. On 4 Feb 2015, the Director of OPCW issued a [Decision](#) to attach the three fact-finding reports to his Monthly Report for February 2015, [S/2015/138](#). That Decision and the Monthly Report for February both hint that some members of the OPCW Executive Council opposed making the fact-finding reports public. In fact, on 12 April 2015 the latter two fact-finding reports are still *not* publicly available at the OPCW website, although they are publicly available in two different reports to the United Nations Security Council, [S/2014/955](#) and [S/2015/138](#).

Links to all of these fact-finding reports are also contained in my HTML [webpage](#) on Syria.

The distribution of these three fact-finding reports to the U.N. Security Council probably helped develop a consensus to condemn the use of chlorine in Security Council Resolution 2209 on 6 March 2015.

Security Council Report, a nonprofit organization, published a description of what happened in OPCW:

The transmission of the reports via a letter [[S/2014/955](#) on 30 Dec 2014] only happened after months of unsuccessful institutional haggling between the UN and the OPCW to bring the findings of the OPCW fact-finding mission formally to the Security Council's attention. (The fact-finding mission was mandated by the OPCW,

not the Security Council, meaning there was no direct reporting line back to the Security Council. The Secretary-General, who had not formally received the reports, had asked the OPCW Director-General to submit them to him. The Director-General declined, on the grounds that only a consensus decision by the OPCW Executive Council—which also includes China and Russia—would allow him to do so.)

The OPCW Executive Council met on 21 and 29 January [2015] to try and reach a decision on the reports of its fact-finding mission. At the 29 January meeting, Russia and the US put forward a consensus text that stated that the OPCW would include reports of the fact-finding mission in its 2118 [monthly] reports to the Security Council, creating a reporting line back to the Security Council that had not previously existed. The text furthermore expressed serious concern at the findings that chlorine had been used as a weapon in Syria, condemned the use of chemical weapons (without attributing blame) and called for accountability.

The 41-member OPCW Executive Council operates almost exclusively by consensus moving the Executive Council to a rare vote on 4 February to adopt the text [proposed by Russia and the USA]; 40 members voted in favour and only Iran voted against.

"What's in Blue. Syria: Chemical Weapons Consultations & OPCW Vote on Fact-Finding Reports," [SCR](#), 5 Feb 2015.

Use of Chlorine in Syria

The conventional wisdom — which *may* be correct — is that the Syrian government is releasing chlorine gas in attacks on towns in Syria. There are two reasons that support this conclusion:

1. Eyewitnesses report seeing chlorine bombs dropped from helicopters. The Syrian government is the only operator of military helicopters in Syria.
2. The chlorine gas is only dropped on insurgent-held towns in Syria.

As I remarked in my essay for [April 2014](#) (in section "Kfar Zeita" at 29 April) and [May 2014](#) (in section "Is Assad sane?"), one needs to ask: *Why* would Assad drop chlorine bombs?

1. These chlorine bombs provide *zero* military advantage to Assad. They kill only a few people, and these chlorine bombs are *not* helping Assad's military conquer towns.
2. There is immense detriment to Assad from the war crime of allegedly using poisonous gas in warfare. Assad became a pariah because of his alleged use of chemical weapons, which destroyed the possibility of cooperation between Western Europe and Assad on fighting terrorism in Syria.

The answer is: it is *not* rational for Assad to use chlorine. In this context, recall that in April 2014, Seymour M. Hersh, a famous investigative journalist, claimed Turkey had taught Nusra to release Sarin near Damascus. (See my essay for [April 2014](#).) There were allegations in

October 2014 and March 2015 that ISIL has released chlorine gas on the ground in Iraq. Perhaps some terrorist organization is dumping chlorine cylinders in Syria, using helicopters provided by some nation, but disguised as Syrian military helicopters (i.e., a "false flag" operation). To be clear, I believe it is *likely* that Assad's government is dumping chlorine, but the standard of proof in criminal cases is beyond a reasonable doubt. Based on the publicly available evidence at this time, I believe there are reasonable doubts about Assad's guilt.

Assuming that Assad is responsible for the use of chlorine in Syria, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2209 (6 March 2015) should have put Assad on notice to stop using chlorine in warfare. But since that Resolution there have been continuing allegations of additional uses of chlorine gas in Syria:

- On 16 March 2015 in Sarmin, a town in Idlib province, killing 6 people. [The Guardian](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [MSF](#).
- On 24 March 2015 in Binish, a town in Idlib province, but zero fatalities. [Washington Post](#)(AP); [Daily Star](#).
- [Human Rights Watch](#) claims *six* chlorine attacks in Syria during 16-31 March 2015.
- On 29 April in Saraqeb, a town in Idlib province. [Associated Press](#).

Syria

Why Peace Negotiations in Syria Futile Disorganization of the Syrian National Coalition & Politics of the Peace Process

My [previous essays](#) on Syria explain why I believe peace negotiations are futile with the current conditions in Syria. The following information continues this history of frustrated negotiations.

Diversions

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](#).

Deaths in Syria

On 16 April the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a new death toll of *at least* 220,271 dead since the Syrian civil war began on 18 March 2011.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 220271 persons since 18/03/2011, which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Daraa, until 14/04/2015.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 104629 civilians, including 11021 children and 7049 women.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters: 37336
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2512
- 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: 28253
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 46843
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 31346
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 2844
- Fighters from Hezbollah: 682
- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 3162.

It is worth to mention that the numbers do not include more than 20000 detainees in regime prisons and thousands of those who disappeared during regime raids and massacres. It does not include more than 7000 regular soldiers and pro-regime militants and about 2000 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 86,000 more than the documented number due to the extreme discretion by all sides on the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

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

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

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

"310,000 people killed since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution," [SOHR](#), 16 April 2015.

Adding all of the numbers in the bulleted list (not including "11021 children and 7049 women") gives a total of 257,607. I do *not* understand the discrepancy from SOHR's total of 220,271.

The 310,000 in the title seems to come from 220,271 plus the "approximately 86,000" uncounted insurgents and Syrian military.

On 1 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published the death toll for April 2015: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 4458 people in April 2015. The death toll is as follows:

- 621 civilians ([including] 180 children and 108 women) killed by aerial bombardment carried out by the government warplanes.
- 161 people, including 20 children and 11 women, killed due to shelling and firing by the regime forces.
- 11 people killed by unknown militiamen.

- 61 civilians died under torture inside the regime jails.
- 82 civilians, including 21 children and 13 women died due to shelling by the Nusra Front, IS, rebels and Islamic battalions.
 - 24 citizens, including 15 children and 2 women died due to shortage of medicines and necessary treatment.
 - 32 people executed by Islamic State.
 - 762 fighters of YPG, Rebels and Islamist fighters, including 20 fighters executed by IS.
 - Non-Syrian fighters from IS, the Nusra Front, Jund al-Aqsa and al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army: 1205
 - At least 126 fighters of the Nusra Front and other Islamist factions, who are still unidentified, killed during aerial bombardment, shelling and clashes with the regime forces in the province of Idlib.
 - Defected soldiers: 9
 - Regular regime soldiers and officers: 756
 - Fighters of the Peoples Committees and NDF as well as spies: 600
 - Hezbollah militiamen: 15
 - Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 105
 - Unidentified victims (documented by photos and footages): 11

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 4500 people killed in April 2015," [SOHR](#), 1 May 2015. (Typographical errors corrected by Standler.)

Adding all of these numbers (except for the five "including") gives a total of 4581, *not* 4458.

Al-Bawaba newspaper in Jordan published two good articles about the death toll in Syria:

1. "The numbers game: Counting the dead in Syria" [Al-Bawaba](#) 17 March 2015.
 2. "What we can learn from the dead in Syria" [Al-Bawaba](#), 1 April 2015. Copy at [SOHR](#).
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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.

Rebels in Syria

In March 2013, the Arab League gave the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) the seat previously occupied by Assad's government. But the Arab League failed to invite the SNC to the Arab Summit in Egypt on 28 March 2015. The SNC angrily denounced the failure to invite as "a retraction of the Arab League's recognition of the Syrian Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people". [SNC](#). The Arab League gave no public reason for the failure to invite the SNC.

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 six months on this project, and actual training is still at least one month in the future. I suspect the Pentagon is not eager to be blamed for either (1) the future defection of U.S.-trained rebels to jihadist or terrorist groups, or (2) the capture of U.S.-supplied equipment by Nusra Front or ISIL.

On 10 April, the Associated Press reported that the U.S. Government is beginning to realize that the proposal to train and equip Syrian rebels is poorly conceived.

The fight against the Islamic State group received a jolt of energy when the United States and Turkey sealed a pact to train and arm Syrian rebels. Two months later, the program faces delays and skepticism — as Turkish officials, Syrian rebels and even former American advisers openly question whether it can ever have any battlefield impact.

The U.S. Defense Department says it is narrowing down a list of potential fighters to be trained under the \$500 million U.S. program aimed at adding a credible ground force to the air bombing campaign already underway against IS. Turkish officials, who had initially pegged the start date to March, now say they are aiming for May.

Turkish officials say they have yet to hear the United States articulate a strategy for how the trained fighters will be deployed — or protected — in Syria. And while U.S. officials say they are keeping their strategy close to the chest so as not to give the enemy any clues, American analysts who have spoken to the planners are skeptical.

"My sense is that they do not have a real strategy in the sense of something that could actually achieve an objective," said Frederic Hof, who held ambassador status as the Obama administration's former adviser on the transition in Syria. Hof, now a fellow at the Washington-based Atlantic Council, called the program a placeholder in case the administration wants to ramp up the fight in Syria.

"I think the most it does now is that it checks a political box here in the United States, in the sense of providing talking points to the effect that you are actually doing something," said Hof.

Desmond Butler, "US plans for anti-Islamic State training drawing skepticism," [Associated Press](#), 08:23 EDT, 10 April 2015.

On 21 April, Aron Lund at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace reported that the Levant Front in Syria had collapsed and disintegrated. The Levant Front was created on 24 Dec 2014 to fight against Assad and also against ISIL. Lund concludes the disintegration "is also illustrative of the Syrian opposition's most debilitating flaw, namely the persistent refusal of leaders to submit to democratic decisions whenever they happen to go the way of the other guy. The result: complete fragmentation." [Syria in Crisis](#).

Recognition that Assad is Not Winning the Civil War

Beginning on 10 March 2014 and continuing through October 2014, journalists reported 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 stalled, 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 economic resources to win the civil war. My essay for [Dec 2014](#) cites a *Washington Post* article on 28 Dec that Assad's army has been depleted by recent "soaring casualties" and desertions. Replacements are not arriving because of "evasions of compulsory military service".

Beginning in December 2014, I no longer believe that Assad can win the civil war against a large number of opponents, when only two nations (i.e., Russia and Iran) are supporting Assad with military equipment and money. Not only are there *only two* nations supporting Assad, but also both of those two have their own significant problems. Iran is suffering crippling economic sanctions because of its development of nuclear weapons, and Iran is diverting resources to fighting ISIL in neighboring Iraq. Russia is suffering economic sanctions because of its support for rebels in the Ukraine, beginning in Feb 2014.

In February 2012, Tunisia severed diplomatic relations with Syria because of Assad's suppression of pro-democracy demonstrators. On 2 April 2015, Tunisia announced it would resume diplomatic relations with the Assad government in Syria. Tunisia will open a consulate (*not* an embassy) in Damascus. The publicly announced reason seems to be to track the estimated 3000 Tunisians in Syria who are fighting for ISIL or in Syrian prisons. [Reuters](#); [Middle East Eye](#); [PressTV](#) in Iran. This decision by Tunisia might be the beginning of more diplomatic recognition of Assad's government in Syria.

On 24 April, Robert Ford, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq during 2010-2014, wrote:

Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria did not have a good winter. His forces lost a provincial capital, Idlib, and despite repeated efforts could not even seize northern and eastern suburbs adjoining Damascus. There were also failures in Aleppo and Dara'a. He had to relieve heads of two of the regime's four secret police services. The economic situation worsened.

....

The Assad regime still enjoys some military advantages and support from Iran and Russia, which helps to prolong the conflict. Yet some recent developments may in fact be indicators of the beginning of the end.

Inability to defend and to counterattack. [Insurgents captured Idlib on 28 March 2015.] ... At the other end of the country, near the Jordanian border, the regime lost the regional stronghold of Busra Sham on March 25 and then the important Nasib border crossing on April 2 — the last functioning crossing with Jordan. In sum, the regime appears broadly on the defensive now, and its hold on western Aleppo appears insecure due to the vulnerability of its supply lines.

Increased dissent within the inner regime. There are four secret police agencies that are the foundation of the regime's power, and in mid-March the regime publicly announced that the heads of two of them had been fired.

Signs of dissent within the regime support base. After tens of thousands of casualties, there are hints that the relatively small Alawi community is tiring of the battle and wants out.

Greater willingness to talk peace. The regime flatly refused to discuss political issues at the Geneva 2 conference in January-February 2014. By contrast, it sent a delegation to Moscow to discuss a political track in January and March 2015. The regime is more comfortable negotiating with tamer opposition elements in Moscow than with the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in Geneva, but its willingness to accept any political talks is new.

In the peculiar circumstances of the Syrian regime, the above are all signs of weakness, and its leaders know it. We may be seeing signs of the beginning of their end.

Robert S. Ford, "The Assad Regime: The Beginning of the End?," [Middle East Institute](#), 24 April 2015.

A minor correction for Ford's penultimate paragraph: the second set of discussions in Moscow was in April 2015, *not* in March 2015.

On 26 April, Liz Sly, writing in *The Washington Post*, reported that Assad's military was losing to a reorganized rebellion by Nusra Front "and a small number of more moderate battalions".

A surge of rebel gains in Syria is overturning long-held assumptions about the durability of President Bashar al-Assad's regime, which now appears in greater peril

than at any time in the past three years.

....

As was the case in the capital of Idlib province last month, government defenses in Jisr al-Shughour crumbled after just a few days of fighting, pointing as much to the growing weakness of regime forces as the revival of the opposition.

....

Other observers say the prospect of a government collapse in Damascus is still remote. The capital is well defended, and the rebels' gains have come mostly on the periphery of the country, where the regime's supply lines are stretched.

But perceptions that Assad will survive indefinitely or serve at least as an interim counterbalance to the Islamic State and its strongholds in northeastern Syria are in doubt, said Emile Hokayem of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

The growing strains on Assad's manpower and resources "are becoming extremely obvious, and the magnitude of his losses are now too big to hide," Hokayem said.

"This destroys the narrative that he is winning, which he was counting on, and also the argument that he is the best option against ISIS," the analyst added, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State. "If he's not able to take on or even defend against the rebels, he's going to have a hard time presenting himself as able to fight ISIS."

Liz Sly, "Assad's hold on power looks shakier than ever as rebels advance in Syria," [Washington Post](#), 21:38 EDT, 26 April 2015.

On 29 April, the Associated Press reported:

In the span of a month, Syrian insurgents have routed government forces across the country's northwest, flushing them out of strongholds in a string of embarrassing defeats for President Bashar Assad.

The first to go was the city of Idlib, which fell to opposition fighters at the end of March, followed by the strategic town of Jisr al-Shughour last week and the Qarmeed military base on Monday [27 April]. Troops are now under fire at the few remaining outposts still in government hands.

The disintegration of government forces in Idlib province, coupled with recent losses in southern Syria, has punctured the notion that Assad is on his way to defeating the four-year-old rebellion and undermined his claim to be a bulwark against the Islamic State group, which had eclipsed the rebels over the past year.

The campaign also points to a new unity and assertiveness within the constellation of opposition forces, which has long been riven by infighting. And it has exposed the government's fundamental weaknesses including lack of manpower, battle fatigue and a

heavy reliance on Iran and other allies.

Ryan Lucas, "Syrian insurgent gains expose Assad weaknesses," [Associated Press](#), 05:55 GMT, 29 April 2015.

My opinion is that, when the Assad regime crumbles, Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra (Al-Qaeda), and Islamic jihadists) will control most of Syria. People will quickly realize that this is a *much worse* situation in Syria than when Assad was in control before the rebellion began in 2011. Obama's obsession with removing Assad (see my [document](#)) will be fulfilled, to the immense detriment of people remaining in Syria, and to the detriment of neighboring nations of Syria who will be exposed to an eventual expansion of ISIL's caliphate and Nusra's emirate. The removal of Assad will *not* lead to peace, but to a wider war and more terrorism.

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 2014 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 1 March, the Syrian National Coalition and rebels fighting in Aleppo rejected Mistura's freeze. (See my essay for [March 2015](#).)

de Mistura's reaction to the insurgent's rejection of his proposed freeze in Aleppo seems to have been to disappear from public view during March and April 2015.

Ban publicly orders de Mistura

At a speech at the Arab League meeting in Egypt on 28 March, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said:

I am instructing my Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to intensify our political efforts and to consult widely with Security Council members as well as throughout the region, including with the Syrian parties themselves.

Specifically, he and his team will work to operationalize and flesh out elements in the Geneva communique.

Ban Ki-moon, "Remarks at the 26th Ordinary Session of the Council of the League of Arab States," [U.N.](#), 28 March 2015.

On 4 April, ISIL captured 90% of the palestinian refugee camp at Yarmouk, a few kilometers from Damascus, creating a new humanitarian crisis. [Reuters](#). At a press briefing on 9 April, the United Nations Secretary General responded to the crisis in Yarmouk:

I have asked [UN Special Envoy for Syria] Staffan de Mistura now to focus much more to re-launch a political process. I need the full support. There is no military solution. Only a political solution, dialogue, can be an answer to this. And I need the support of all of the international community, particularly the Member States of the United Nations.

....

Da'esh or ISIL — they have committed unspeakable crimes against humanity, including beheadings, and the level of brutality is just unspeakable. I cannot just describe it enough, my anger. They must stop. Whatever grievances they may have, all these should be resolved through dialogue, not through killing people in such a horrific, brutal way. I strongly condemn [this], again — they must give up their arms and discuss all this through peaceful means. This is not what human beings do, this is unacceptable, unacceptable.

Ban Ki-moon, "Secretary-General's remarks at press encounter," [U.N.](#), 9 April 2015. Also reported by [Associated Press](#).

de Mistura to begin meetings in May 2015

In response to these marching orders from Ban, on 14 April 2015 Mistura proposed one-on-one talks between himself and "the Syrian stakeholders and regional and international actors" (e.g., opposition groups in Syria and governments of nations involved in Syria). Such talks would begin in May 2015. Somehow these one-on-one talks are expected by the U.N. to revive the peace negotiations. [U.N. press briefing](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#); all on 14 April 2014.

My comment is that it seems obvious that such discussions will dredge up inconsistent and contradictory goals. Given that the insurgents (e.g., rebels, jihadists, Nusra, ISIL) each refuse to negotiate, it seems hopeless to have any successful peace conference.

On 23 April, Mouin Rabbani, a former adviser to Mistura, criticized Mistura as inadequate for the negotiations in Syria. *Al-Jazeera* was the first to report the criticism:

The UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura has been criticised by an ex-adviser for "the total absence of preparatory work" before announcement of his plan for securing a ceasefire in Aleppo that "is now dead".

Mouin Rabbani, De Mistura's former principal political adviser, told Al Jazeera that the envoy, who two months ago briefed the UN Security Council about the imminent start of his arrangement with the Syrian government for the freeze of air raids on the city, "simply wasn't up to the task".

....

De Mistura, who was preceded by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan and veteran diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, "simply does not have the right background and expertise," said Rabbani.

Discussing the running of De Mistura's office, Rabbani said "there was a very serious issue of — to put it bluntly — cronyism and dodgy personnel decisions".

"Former adviser slams UN envoy to Syria's Aleppo plan," [Al-Jazeera](#), 18:28 GMT, 23 April 2015.

Three hours later, Reuters reported:

Former adviser Mouin Rabbani told Al Jazeera television that de Mistura was "out of his depth" and "wasn't up to the task." His comments follow U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's public demand that de Mistura "focus much more to re-launch a political process" to try an end a war that has killed 220,000 people and displaced millions.

....

Rabbani spoke of "the total absence of preparatory work" [on Mistura's proposed freeze in Aleppo] and said "de Mistura was very much out of his depth."

"He simply wasn't up to the task, and I don't mean this so much as a personal criticism (but) as an observation that he simply doesn't have the right background and expertise," said Rabbani, who left de Mistura's team earlier this year.

Louis Charbonneau & Arshad Mohammed, "Ex-adviser says U.N. Syria envoy 'out of his depth': report," [Reuters](#), 21:38 GMT, 23 April 2015.

Reuters also quoted the Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary General in New York, who defended de Mistura. I searched the U.N. website on 25 April, and I also looked at the Daily Press Briefings for 21-23 April, but I did not find the source of those quotations.

My comment is that the *two* previous U.N. envoys (i.e., Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi) each resigned after frustration with the Syrian parties and the failure of the international community (e.g., Russia, Iran, USA, Turkey, Arab nations) to push the parties toward peace negotiations. Negotiations are an art and every negotiator has a different style. Failure of the negotiations does *not* imply that the negotiator is incompetent. Sometimes both parties are unwilling to compromise on major issues, so that negotiations fail without any fault by the negotiator. That having been said, I have wondered why de Mistura repeatedly disappears from public view for more than a month, since his appointment as U.N. envoy for Syria on 10 July 2014.

On 24 April, Reuters reported that invitations had been issued for one-on-one talks with de Mistura in Geneva, to begin in May 2015:

United Nations Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura has invited Syria's government and opposition groups for separate talks in Geneva next month in the latest bid to end the four-year-old civil war, a U.N. spokesman said on Friday [24 April].

De Mistura, who is due to brief the U.N. Security Council later on Friday, plans for individual "low-key" talks with each of the main stakeholders over four to six weeks in the Swiss city, Ahmad Fawzi told a news briefing.

....

Major powers and regional players have been invited, but not the militant groups Islamic State or Jabhat al-Nusra, which are classified as "terrorist organisations", he said. Some of those present at the talks would be able to communicate with them, he added.

....

Some diplomats have privately expressed scepticism about De Mistura's chances of success.

....

Iran is among those invited to Geneva, Fawzi told Reuters.

Tom Miles & Stephanie Nebehay, "U.N. invites Syrian parties to peace talks in Geneva in May," [Reuters](#), 11:22 GMT, 24 April 2015.

My comment is that the anonymous sniping (i.e., "privately expressed scepticism") is irrelevant. The history of science and technology is littered with so-called experts who predicted that something was impossible. Then someone achieved the impossible and became famous, while the so-called experts were forgotten. It may be that de Mistura will fail again, not because he is incompetent, but because the parties refuse to compromise. But *if* there is to be peace in Syria, we need to keep trying negotiations.

I am pleased to see that Iran is included. As one of two nations supplying weapons to Assad, Iran is obviously a stakeholder in Syria.

The exclusion of ISIL and Nusra from Mistura's meetings is a more difficult issue. There are two views:

1. We should *never* negotiate with terrorists. Even if there were a compelling reason to make an exception to this rule (e.g., peace in Syria), one can *not* trust the terrorists to keep their agreement.
2. The fact is that the terrorists are the main insurgent groups in Syria. If there is to be peace in Syria, then ISIL and Nusra need to stop fighting. ISIL and Nusra will want

something in exchange for a ceasefire and we need to know what that something is.

In the past ISIL and Nusra have said they want to establish their caliphate or emirate in Syria and impose their radical interpretation of Islam on everyone. That goal would be unacceptable to the people of Syria and neighboring governments.

On the evening of 24 April, after de Mistura had briefed the U.N. Security Council, the Associated Press reported:

A new series of talks on the Syrian war that begin next month in Geneva should not be seen as negotiations toward a peace deal, the U.N. special envoy on Syria warned the Security Council on Friday [24 April], while an Iranian diplomat indicated that his country would take part.

Diplomats said Staffan de Mistura told the council that he sees little new willingness from the parties involved to negotiate. The diplomats spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the closed-door meeting.

De Mistura intends to meet separately with a range of parties to see if they are ready to move on to talks toward finding an end to the conflict, which is now in its fifth year. He expects to report his findings to the U.N. chief by the end of June.

....

While de Mistura said all parties in Syria were being invited to the new talks, he ruled out the Islamic State group, whose rise over the past year in parts of Syria has complicated the conflict.

"They are on the list of terrorists," he said, adding that he was sure the extremist group wouldn't want to participate anyway.

Cara Anna, "UN envoy on Syria warns that May talks are not negotiations," [Associated Press](#), 17:57 EDT, 24 April 2015.

On 28 April, the Syrian National Coalition said it would talk with Mistura in Geneva. [SNC](#); [Associated Press](#).

peace conference in Moscow: 6-9 April

On 5 April, one day before the second round of discussions began in Moscow, Reuters reported on the dim expectations:

The Syrian government and some opposition figures will start a second round of talks in Moscow on Monday [6 April] focussing on humanitarian issues, although a broader agreement is unlikely as Syria's main opposition group continues to boycott the talks.

Participants say they do not expect any big breakthrough towards ending a conflict that has killed more than 220,000 people in Syria since early 2011.

....

Randa Kassis, a former SNC member who now favours talking to Damascus because of the rise of radical Islamists in Syria, said the talks would focus on confidence-building measures including ensuring access for humanitarian aid.

"We won't get to a political transition without slowly giving and taking," Kassis, who now heads the Movement of Pluralistic Society, told Reuters.

Gabriela Baczynska, "Syria talks in Moscow to focus on humanitarian issues," [Reuters](#), 09:54 GMT, 5 April 2015.

My comments: These discussions could be a useful step on the long-road to an eventual political solution in Syria. The big problem that I see is that *none* of the insurgents who control land in Syria will be present: *neither* moderate rebels, Islamic Front (jihadists), Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda), *nor* ISIL. With essential parties absent, there can be no agreement on checkpoints and expediting delivery of humanitarian aid that are currently blocked by any of the insurgent groups.

[RIA-Novosti](#) mentioned that U.N. envoy, Staffan de Mistura, is absent from the second round of the Moscow talks.

On the evening of 6 April, RIA-Novosti reported that delegates had agreed on an agenda: The 5-point agenda provides

1. an assessment of the current situation [in Syria];
2. ways to alleviate the plight of the Syrian people and unite them in a fight against all kinds of threats, primarily terrorism;
3. a roadmap to rebuild trust between the regime and the opposition;
4. specifies steps that all sides to the Syrian conflict should take to reach a political settlement and national reconciliation; and
5. discuss a framework for political process based on the Geneva I communique issued in June 2012 and preparation for Geneva III [talks].

The talks will continue on Tuesday [7 April] when five representatives of the Popular Front will meet with five members from another opposition group, called the National Coordination Committee, as well as with some smaller political groups and independents. The government's Bashar Jafari will join negotiators on Wednesday [8 April].

"Participants of Syrian Talks Draft Agenda for Wednesday Round in Moscow," [RIA-Novosti](#), 16:57 GMT, 6 April 2015.

On the night of 6 April, after the first day of the conference, Agence France-Presse reported: "The main idea this time is to agree on a precise agenda for further negotiations," a government source told AFP.

....

An Arab diplomat following the developments told AFP that one proposal now being

floated would see Assad stay in power for two or three more years to prepare a transition, particularly given Russian and U.S. fears about the consequences if his regime collapsed suddenly.

"Syria talks kick off in Moscow, little progress expected," [Daily Star](#), 22:17 GMT, 6 April 2015.

My comments: Why not use the agenda developed at the second round of negotiations in Geneva, chaired by U.N. envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, on 15 Feb 2014? (See my [Feb 2014](#) essay.) Or use Kofi Annan's six-point plan of March 2012? There are numerous agendas that have been developed, all basically similar. The problems to solve (e.g., ceasefires, prisoner exchanges, humanitarian aid) have been the same since 2012.

Assad needs to remain in power until all of the Islamic terrorists have been expelled from Syria, a process that is likely to take more than three years.

On 7 April, there were no news reports about the meeting in RIA-Novosti or TASS (both in Russia), the Associated Press, Reuters, or the Daily Star in Lebanon.

On the morning of 9 April, the last day of the second round of discussions in Moscow, Agence France-Press released a story with the pessimistic headline: "Little sign of progress at Moscow Syria talks."

The talks in Moscow followed a similar round of meetings between the government and opposition in late January that failed to achieve any concrete results.

Another member of the opposition delegation, Randa Kassis, blamed divisions within the squabbling opposition themselves for hampering any progress.

"There is no work as a group. There are clans that try to impose their ideas on the others," she said. "The regime then profits from our weakness."

Analysts said the meeting was designed to help Russia — a firm ally of the Assad regime — bolster its profile as a peace broker in the region.

Ana s Llobet, "Little sign of progress at Moscow Syria talks," [Daily Star](#), 9 April 2015.

On 9 April, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported "participants in the intra-Syrian consultations in Moscow came to agreement on all 10 items of the agenda", but there was no mention of the actual ten items.

On 9 April, the Syrian government news agency published the text of a Syrian government **proposal:**

Earlier today, the delegation of the Syrian government presented points on the first item of the agenda titled "estimating the status quo" which are:

1. Settling the crisis in Syria through peaceful political means on a consensual basis stemming from Geneva1 Principles of June 30th, 2012.
2. Calling upon the international community to exercise prompt and serious pressure on all Arab, regional and international sides, particularly Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to halt all actions in support of terrorism including the

- facilitation of terrorists' crossing into Syria as well as training the terrorists, harboring and arming them.
3. Calling upon the international community to immediately lift the siege and the unilateral economic sanctions imposed on the Syrian state.
 4. The results of any political process should rely on the national sovereignty and people's will.
 5. Supporting and consolidating national reconciliations and backing the Army and Armed Forces in counterterrorism process.
 6. Calling upon the international community to help the Syrian refugees return to their homeland and creating the suitable conditions for making the displaced come back.
 7. The bases of any political process lie in the following identifiers:
 - A. Preserving the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity.
 - B. Preserving the institutions of the state and working on developing them and upgrading their performance.
 - C. Commitment to liberating all the occupied Syrian territories.
 - D. Holding an inter-Syrian dialogue under a Syrian leadership without foreign interference is the sole means for realizing a political solution.
 8. Urging the international community to support the agreement reached in Moscow as a step towards adopting it in Geneva3 Conference.

"Update3- Meetings held on second day of Moscow inter-Syrian talks," [SANA](#), 9 April 2015. (On 6-7 April the opposition met alone in Moscow, so the "inter-Syrian" talks were only on 8-9 April, which explains the title of this news article.) Also see different translation at [Syria Times](#).

Agreement on "estimating the status quo"

On 9 April, the Syrian government news agency published the text of unanimous agreement on the first item of the agenda (i.e., "an assessment of the current situation in Syria" or "estimating the status quo"), with six points:

Delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic and the delegation of the opposition figures to Moscow second consultative meeting agreed on points about the item of "estimating the status quo."

The points stipulate

1. settling the crisis in Syria through political means, based on Geneva communique of June 30th, 2012, and;
2. Calling on the international community to practice immediate and serious pressures on Arab, regional and international powers which contribute to shedding the Syrian blood to carry out UN Security Council resolutions relevant to combating terrorism, halting acts of supporting terrorism, including training, funding and arming terrorists.
3. Calling on the international community to immediately lift embargo and the economic, unilateral and coercive procedures imposed on the Syrian people and its institutions, asserting that any outcome of a political process should be based

- on national sovereignty and popular will.
4. Any political process has to be done thorough concordance among the Syrians as a government, powers and parties which believe in the political solution, boosting national reconciliations, supporting the army and armed forces against terrorism and calling on the international community to help the Syrian refugees return home.
 5. Any political process should rely on the factors of preserving national sovereignty, Syria's terrestrial integrity, keeping the state institutions , committing to liberating the occupied Syrian lands.
 6. According to the points, the political settlement will lead to intensifying and mobilizing the people's energies against terrorism to defeat it, limiting the weapon to the hand of the state's institutions, calling on the international community to support any agreement that will be reached about the comprehensive political solution of Moscow meetings to be later adopted in Geneva 3 conference.

"Second round of Moscow Consultative meeting concludes deliberations with unanimous agreement on first item of 'estimating the status quo'," [SANA](#), 9 April 2015.

Agreement on "Moscow Platform"

The so-called "Moscow Platform" agreed at the Moscow conference on 9 April has ten-points:

1. The settlement of the Syrian crisis must be reached through political means on the basis of mutual agreement on the principles of "Geneva-1" , 30 June 2012.
2. The participants appeal to the members of international community to use their influence on all Arab, regional and international parties involved in Syrian bloodshed, urging them to fulfill UN Security Council resolutions on counter-terrorism and cessation of all actions supporting terrorism, including the promotion of penetration terrorists on Syrian territory, their education and training, providing them with shelter, financial aid and weapons.
3. The participants appeal to the members of international community demanding immediate and complete lifting of the blockade and unilateral coercive economic measures introduced against the Syrian people and State institutions.
4. Content and results of any political process must be based on national sovereignty and people's will expressed through democratic mechanisms.
5. The political process is carried out through mutual agreement between the Syrians — Government, forces, parties and movements which are committed to a political solution.
6. The participants express support of national reconciliation process and eagerness to strengthen it as well as to facilitate achievement of a political settlement and

support of the army and the armed forces in the fight against terrorism.

7. The participants appeal to the members of international community for assistance in repatriation of Syrian refugees, creation of favorable conditions for the return of IDPs.
8. The fundamental goals of a political process are as follows:
 - a. preservation of national sovereignty;
 - b. unity of Syrian territory and its people;
 - c. preservation of public institutions, improvement and enhancement of their functioning;
 - d. rejection of any political settlement, built on ethnic, religious or communal quotas;
 - e. strict commitment to liberation of all the occupied Syrian territories;
 - f. the only way to achieve a political solution is an inter-Syrian national dialogue, led by the Syrians without any external intervention.
9. A political settlement will lead to consolidation and mobilization of the people in countering and defeat of terrorism. Such a settlement should result in an exclusive monopoly of state institutions to possess weapon.
10. The participants appeal to the members of international community to support mutual agreement on a comprehensive political solution to be reached during Moscow meeting in preparation for its adoption during Geneva-3 Conference.

[Russian Mission to Geneva](#) (15 April 2015).

Slightly different translation at [Interfax](#) (12 April). Note that Interfax asserts copyright in text that they neither wrote nor commissioned as a work made for hire.

Conclusion of Moscow Discussions on 10 April

At 17:35 Moscow time on 9 April, [RIA-Novosti](#) reports that a joint statement will be issued on 10 April, one day after the conclusion of the second round of discussions. Also on 9 April, [RIA-Novosti](#) at 19:04 Moscow time says: "a Syrian opposition source said that the participants of intra-Syrian consultations in Moscow are expected to issue a nine-point joint statement on Friday [10 April]." But on 10 April RIA-Novosti had *no* statement from the week of discussions, as explained below.

At 12:35 Moscow time on 10 April, [RIA-Novosti](#) reports the two "sides failed to reach an agreement".

On 10 April, the Associated Press had a story with the dismal title: "Syrian peace talks in

Moscow end in disarray":

Talks between the Syrian government and the opposition ended in acrimony Friday [10 April] with the parties blaming each other for the breakdown.

....

But some opposition representatives later reversed their support for the initially approved document because of a failure to agree on moves to improve mutual trust, such as prisoners' release, said Naumkin, head of the Moscow-based Institute for Eastern Studies.

"If we spent another week here, we would probably reach agreement on other issues," Naumkin said at a briefing. "They sat at the table together, they didn't go into a fistfight, they listened to each other. It's good."

Vladimir Isachenkov, "Syrian peace talks in Moscow end in disarray," [Associated Press](#), 15:32 GMT, 10 April 2015.

Reuters titled their story: "Syria talks in Moscow end with no progress":

Talks between representatives of the Syrian government and some mainstream members of the opposition ended in Moscow with no sign of progress towards ending a four-year-old conflict that has killed more than 220,000 people.

The second such meeting this year in Russia, an ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, was marred by friction among the opposition delegates and was boycotted by the Syrian National Coalition, a Western-backed group based in Istanbul.

....

The first round of talks in Moscow in January also ended inconclusively and Naumkin said a pause was now likely. The Syrian National Coalition has said it will only take part in the talks if they lead to Assad's departure.

Most of the factions fighting in Syria, including the most powerful single insurgent force, the Islamic State, have had nothing to do with any political discussions between the Syrian government and its political opponents.

Gabriela Baczyńska, "Syria talks in Moscow end with no progress," [Reuters](#), 14:27 GMT, 10 April 2015.

My comments: The Associated Press and Reuters are wrong on 10 April to be so negative about these discussions in Moscow. The delegates did agree on an agenda. There was unanimous agreement (with some abstentions) on six points about the first agenda item. There was agreement on a ten-point "Moscow Platform". If the meetings had continued for a few days, there might have been more agreement. No one expected the two days of discussion between the opposition and Syrian government to end the civil war in Syria.

Nonetheless, these proposals for ending the Syrian civil war are essentially meaningless because:

- The proposals are too vague, people from different viewpoints will give different meanings to these vague words. These proposals are platitudes.
- *None* of the insurgent groups have agreed to any of these proposals.
- Some of the proposals call on third-parties (e.g., foreign nations or the United Nations) to do something. *But* the third-parties did *not* consent, so the call is probably futile.
- And there is very little compromise involved in these proposal.

As an indication of the insignificance of these discussions in Moscow, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported on these discussions during the week, but waited until the end of the week to issue a news story. Most of the news reports were by a Russian news agency, RIA-Novosti, and by Syrian government news media, with a few reports by Agence France-Press. Both the Russians and Syrians are interested in the propaganda value of these discussions.

third conference in Moscow?

The conference in Moscow was adjourned without setting a date for the next (i.e., third) conference.

Qadri Jamil, one of the leaders of the opposition during the Moscow discussions, said the opposition would request the United Nations Secretary General to convene Geneva 3 negotiations. [RIA-Novosti](#), 10 April.

Prosecution of ISIL for War Crimes?

In May 2014, the French led a proposal at the United Nations Security Council to refer all parties in the Syrian civil war to the International Criminal Court, but the French proposal was blocked by vetoes from Russia and China. (See my essay for [May 2014](#).)

On 27 March 2015, the French foreign minister chaired a meeting of the United Nations Security Council and called for prosecution of ISIL for war crimes in the International Criminal Court (ICC). [Reuters](#).

There are three ways for the ICC to have jurisdiction (i.e., power to hear a case):

1. crime is committed in the territory of a nation who is a party to the Rome Treaty;
2. for citizens of nations who are parties to the Rome Treaty, when those citizens have allegedly committed international crimes; or
3. United Nations Security Council refers the case to the ICC.

Neither Syria nor Iraq are members of the ICC, so Nr. 1 in the above list of possible jurisdictions does *not* apply.

On 8 April 2015, the Prosecutor of the ICC issued a [statement](#) on the alleged crimes committed by ISIL. Because neither Syria nor Iraq are parties to the Rome Treaty, the ICC "has no territorial jurisdiction over crimes committed on their soil." The Prosecutor then

mentions the second possible jurisdiction, but concludes that the leaders of ISIL are citizens of either Iraq or Syria, and therefore the ICC has no jurisdiction over them.

Under the Rome Statute, the ICC may nevertheless exercise *personal jurisdiction* over alleged perpetrators who are nationals of a State Party, even where territorial jurisdiction is absent. On this basis, my Office has reviewed communications received alleging crimes committed by ISIS, with a view to assessing the prospect of exercising personal jurisdiction over States Parties nationals within the ranks of this organisation. In doing so, my Office took into account the scope of its policy, which is to focus on those most responsible for mass crimes.

The information gathered indicates that several thousand foreign fighters have joined the ranks of ISIS in the past months alone, including significant numbers of State Party nationals from, inter alia, Tunisia, Jordan, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Australia. Some of these individuals may have been involved in the commission of crimes against humanity and war crimes. A few have publicised their heinous acts through social media. The information available to the Office also indicates that ISIS is a military and political organisation primarily led by nationals of Iraq and Syria. Thus, at this stage, the prospects of my Office investigating and prosecuting those most responsible, within the leadership of ISIS, appear limited.

In this context, I have come to the conclusion that the jurisdictional basis for opening a preliminary examination into this situation is too narrow at this stage. A renewed commitment and a sense of urgency on the part of the concerned states may help identify viable avenues. The decision of non-Party States and the United Nations Security Council to confer jurisdiction on the ICC is, however, wholly independent of the Court.

Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, on the alleged crimes committed by ISIS, [ICC](#), 8 April 2015.

This statement by the Prosecutor was reported by [Reuters](#) and [Associated Press](#). I hope that diplomats and politicians will now understand that prosecution for war crimes is unlikely, unless the U.N. Security Council refers the case to the ICC. Instead of futilely threatening prosecution for war crimes, diplomats *should* be working in the Security Council to confer jurisdiction.

The Prosecutor did not mention the possibility of a referral by the U.N. Security Council, because that "is wholly independent of the Court." I comment that, if the United Nations Security Council refers the case to the ICC, then investigating and prosecuting *only* ISIL would avoid a veto by Russia and China.

My comment is that the whole threat of war crimes prosecution reminds me of the children's story in which the mice agree to put a bell on the cat. Like putting a bell on the cat, prosecution of ISIL (and Al-Qaeda) is a good idea. But *who* will walk into ISIL headquarters, arrest the leaders of ISIL, and take them to the Hague for trial?

There is no way that Syria will join the Rome Treaty, as that would give the ICC jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute Assad and his henchmen in the Syrian government. Similarly, there is no way that Iraq will join the Rome Treaty, as that would give the ICC jurisdiction to

investigate and prosecute atrocities by Shiite militias.

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.)

U.N. Report for April 2015

On 17 April 2015, Ban issued his monthly report required by Resolutions 2139 and 2165. This April 2015 report actually covers events in March 2015.

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

¶47. Of the 4.8 million people in hard-to-reach areas, some 440,000 people remain besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic. This includes 167,500 people besieged by Government forces in eastern Ghouta and Darayya; 26,500 people besieged by non-State armed groups in Nubul and Zahra; 228,000 people besieged by ISIL in the Government-controlled western neighbourhoods of Deir ez-Zor city; and 18,000 people besieged in Yarmouk.

¶67. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate rapidly. Day after day we see more men, women and children killed, with the parties to the conflict failing to uphold the most basic tenets of international law. Instead of reducing, the violence has escalated in many parts of the country.

¶68. The disastrous effect of the widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas continued to devastate large parts of the country. Innocent people were killed and maimed, some deliberately, and forced to flee as a result of the use of heavy weaponry in populated areas. All parties to the conflict must realize the toll this conflict continues to take on ordinary civilians. Yet they persist. Their actions raise serious moral and legal questions, which the international community, including the Security Council, must address. Those responsible for violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable.

¶70. I am also appalled at the collective punishment being meted out to people in the Syrian Arab Republic. People are being purposefully denied water, electricity and basic services. The tightening of siege tactics continues to inflict wanton suffering. It is abhorrent and must be ended.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)," United Nations Security Council, [S/2015/264](#) (17 April 2015).

Note in paragraph 47, the insurgents are now besieging more people than Assad's government.

All insurgents in Syria, as well as Assad's government, appear to continue to violating United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191. Moreover, the United Nations is powerless to stop the violations. That makes the United Nations irrelevant to Syria.

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.

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.
-

On 2 April, two bombs in Baghdad killed at least 11 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 8 April, ISIL released between 216 and 227 Yazidis who had been abducted by ISIL from the Sinjar area 8 months ago. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Rudaw](#).

On 10 April, two car bombs near and in Baghdad killed at least 11 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 11 April, four terrorist attacks in or near Baghdad killed at least 9 people. [not available at Associated Press website]; [Daily Star](#)(AP); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On 12 April, four bombs in Baghdad killed at least 12 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 13 April, the [Associated Press](#) reports: "A car bomb parked near an outdoor market in a busy commercial area in Baghdad killed at least 10 civilians on Monday while attacks elsewhere in and north of the Iraqi capital killed 5 more people, officials said."

On 14 April, six car bombs in or near Baghdad killed at least 28 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 15 April, three bombs in Baghdad killed 11 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 17 April, six bombs in Baghdad killed at least 40 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 19 April, three bombs and a mortar shell in and near Baghdad killed 14 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 22 April, two bombs in Baghdad killed at least 10 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 24 April, a bomb near a courthouse in the town of Mahmoudiyah killed 3 people, and a bomb near an open-air market in the town of Tarmiyah killed 4 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 26 April, five bombs in and near Baghdad killed at least 18 people. [Associated Press](#); [Daily Star](#).

On 27 April, three car bombs in Baghdad killed at least 20 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 28 April, police found the corpses of eight people who had been shot and dumped in the streets of Baghdad. Dumping dead bodies in the street was common in Iraq a few years ago. [Daily Star](#)(AP); [Rudaw](#)(AP).

On 30 April, five car bombs in Baghdad, and one car bomb south of Baghdad, killed a total of at least 21 people. [Associated Press](#).

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

Archaeological Sites in Iraq

My essay for [March 2015](#) cited the destruction of three archaeological sites by ISIL.

On 4 April, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL proudly released a video of their destruction of the ancient city of Hatra.

On 8 April, ISIL destroyed the 800 year old Bashtabiya castle in Mosul. [Rudaw](#).

On 12 April, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL proudly released a video of their

destruction of the ancient city of Nimrud.

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.

On 6 April, the U.S. State Department put out a press release about foreign experts are meeting in the USA to "share best practices and new ways to counter ISIL's messaging." The foreign delegates to the two-week meeting are from Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. [State Dept.](#); [CENTCOM](#), 8 April.

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 2014, [Reuters](#) reports that Maliki sacked four top army officers in Mosul, because they "failed to fulfill their professional and military duties".

On 18 June 2014, [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 2014, [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 2014, [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 2014, 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.

On 13 April 2015, Abadi involuntarily retired more than 300 Iraqi army officers. Abadi gave no public explanation for the retirements. [Rudaw](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

When I searched Google News on 2 Sep 2014, 19 Oct, 20 Dec 2014, 27 Feb 2015, and 21 April 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.

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](#).

Approximately 23 of the abducted Assyrians were released in early March, as cited in my essay for [March 2015](#).

On 9 April, [Fox News](#) reports that ISIL is demanding payment of US\$ 100,000 for the release of each of the remaining Assyrian Christians. There are between 250 and 300 Assyrians still being held hostage, so someone needs to find at least US\$ 25 million.

On 30 April 2015, I searched both the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news during April about "Assyrians abducted", but I found no news stories, except for one story at [Reuters](#) on 11 April. That story tersely says: "Islamic State is still holding some 200 Assyrian Christians abducted from villages near Tel Tamr in February. There has been no word on their fate."

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 May 2015.

Iraqi Army Liberates Tikrit

For the early history, see my essay for [March 2015](#). 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.

When was Tikrit liberated from ISIL? That question does not have a unique correct answer. Here are some possible answers:

- On 1 April, Iraq's Defense Minister declared victory. Later on 1 April, Prime Minister Abadi walked down a street in Tikrit, while journalists photographed Abadi. ([AP](#)).
- Weeks in the future, when all of ISIL's bombs have been removed.

Later, when former residents of Tikrit return and discover their houses have been destroyed or looted.

1 April: victory declared

On 1 April, at a White House press briefing, Obama's spokesman, Josh Earnest, said:

QUESTION: On Tikrit, can you please share with us the assessment of the United States government as to the state of the battle there, who is running the city, and the success of military operations there designed to repel ISIS from there?

MR. EARNEST: My colleagues at the Department of Defense can certainly give you some more details about this, but it is our assessment that Iraqi forces, under the command of the Iraqi military and the Iraqi central government, have advanced into the heart of Tikrit; that they have succeeded in taking the city center and other significant areas of the city from ISIL.

Now, we're very mindful of the fact that in these kinds of military operations there could be a little bit of a back-and-forth. But what's clear is that they've made important progress, even in just the last couple of days. And this is notable progress because you'll recall that when this operation began, it did not include the support of coalition military airstrikes. And after a few productive days, this operation essentially got stalled in the outskirts of the city, and remained stalled for a couple of weeks.

Five days ago, the Iraqi military made a specific request to the United States to back their efforts with military airstrikes. And we've seen over the course of the last five days that the stalemate that has previously been in place for a couple of weeks had receded, and that Iraqi security forces that were multi-sectarian in nature — these included Shia military; these included members of the popular mobilization force; these included some tribal fighters as well — were able to advance into the city.

And this is, if you take a look at what's happened over the last five days, I think a pretty compelling description of the successful implementation of our strategy. We have said all along that a multi-sectarian force that's being led by the Iraqi military and a unified Iraqi central government, that that force would be effective but would be made even more effective when backed by coalition military airstrikes.

QUESTION: And Shia militia.

MR. EARNEST: And Shia militia. That's what we've seen over the last five days. I'd point out that the Shia militia, though, is under the command of the Iraqi military and of the Iraqi central government. And that's key. There are some Shia military units or Shia militia fighters who I think were at least ambiguous about whether or not they were under the command of the Iraqi military. And we saw that there were some Shia militia fighters who declined to participate in the operation once coalition military airpower was involved.

And, again, what the United States insisted on was an operation that was multi-sectarian and under the command of the Iraqi military. And, again, based on what's happened over the last five days, I think this is a pretty clear piece of evidence that this strategy that we've laid out is one that has some potential in terms of driving back ISIL fighters.

"Daily Press Briefing by the Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 04/01/15," [White House](#), 1 April 2015.

My comments are that Mr. Earnest was wrong by two days in the start date for the U.S. airstrikes. The airstrikes actually began on the night of 25 March. Earnest was wrong again to speak — six times in one press briefing — of the "multi-sectarian force" in Tikrit. Nearly all of the Iraqi army is Shiite, and nearly all of the militias in Tikrit are Shiite. There are a few Sunni tribes and Sunni militias, but they are less than 10% of the total pro-government fighters in Tikrit.

On 1 April, the Associated Press reported that ISIL and the Iraqi government had destroyed Tikrit:

"God willing, there will be a fund to rebuild areas destroyed by Daesh and the war. Tikrit and Salahuddin areas will be covered by this fund," al-Abadi said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group.

....

A satellite image of Tikrit, released in February by the U.N., showed at least 536 buildings in the city have been affected by the fighting. Of those, at least 137 were destroyed and 241 were severely damaged. The current offensive also exacerbated previous damage, particularly in the south where clashes have been the most intense. Qassim Abdul-Zahra & Sameer N. Yacoub, "Iraq hails victory over Islamic State extremists in Tikrit," [Associated Press](#), 19:12 GMT, 1 April 2015.

Note that "at least 137" buildings were destroyed sometime *before* the end of February, and does *not* include damage during the liberation of Tikrit in March.

On 1 April, McClatchy newspapers summarized the fight for Tikrit during March 2015: Iraqi security forces backed by sectarian militias took control of the last Islamic State strongholds in Tikrit on Wednesday, the first successful operation by the government in Baghdad to reclaim a major Sunni Muslim population center since the extremist group took control of most of central, western and northern Iraq last year.

Reports from the scene indicated that the operation, far bloodier than anticipated when the security forces and their Shiite militia allies began it a month ago, had destroyed most of the city and surrounding areas. The death toll among the pro-government forces exceeded 1,000.

....

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi asked for American air support over the

objections of Iraq's largest Shiite militias, which had planned the operation as a showcase of the country's ability to handle the Islamic State threat without Western involvement.

The episode revealed tensions within Iraq's Shiite-dominated government over the roles of the U.S.-led air coalition and of Iran, whose famed Revolutionary Guard commander Gen. Qassem Suleimani had personally supervised the early stages of the offensive. Some of the militias pulled out of the offensive in protest, and it appeared Wednesday that the bulk of the forces in Tikrit were Iraqi army troops.

Mitchell Prothero, "Iraqi forces claim last parcels of Tikrit from Islamic State," [McClatchy](#), 1 April 2015.

Copy at [Miami Herald](#).

My comment: On 1 April 2015, the [United Nations](#) Assistance Mission for Iraq released their monthly death toll for Iraq, which claimed only 997 dead in *all* of Iraq during March. This 997 number is implausibly small, given the McClatchy report quoted above that "more than 1000" pro-government fighters had died in Tikrit alone. My essay for [March 2015](#) (at 16 March) cites one reason the liberation of Tikrit stalled on 13 March was daily death tolls of "60 fighters per day" amongst the Iraqi army and Shiite militia.

looting in Tikrit & Tikrit in ruins

On 1 April, Agence France-Presse reported on looting by Shiite militias in Tikrit:

Pro-government militiamen were seen looting shops in the centre of the Iraqi city of Tikrit on Wednesday [1 April] after its recapture from the Islamic State jihadist group in a month-long battle.

The militiamen took items including clothing, shampoo and shaving cream from two shops in central Tikrit before driving away.

Two trucks were also seen leaving Tikrit loaded with new tyres, a generator and a mirror that fell out and shattered on the highway.

While localised, the incidents raise concerns over how the myriad militiamen now in the city will conduct themselves.

As they have in other areas, militiamen also spray painted the names of their groups on houses and shops in the city, including on unbroken windows that had survived the fighting.

"Looting in Iraq's Tikrit after city retaken," [Al-Arabiya](#), 1 April 2015.

My comment: So the liberators of Tikrit are thieves and vandals. Note that the creation of the Popular Mobilization Forces was in response to a Fatwa by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani on 13 June 2014. Other Shiite militias were created by a Shiite cleric (e.g., Muqtada al-Sadr). The looting and vandalism reflects poorly on both the Shiite religion and on the failure of law-and-order in Iraq. One of the reasons for the looting may be sectarian [revenge](#)

against the Sunnis in Iraq.

On 3 April, Reuters reports continuing looting in Tikrit by Shiite militias:

Ahmed al-Kraim, the head of the Salahuddin provincial council, told Reuters that the fighters had burnt “hundred of houses” over the last two days in Tikrit.

“Houses and shops were burnt after they stole everything,” Kraim said. He put the number of torched buildings “in the hundreds”.

“Our city was burnt in front of our eyes. We can’t control what is going on,” Kraim said, who left for Baghdad late Friday [3 April] afternoon due to the chaos.

"Iraqi provincial council head says Shi'ite paramilitary fighters continue looting in Tikrit," [Reuters](#), 17:33 GMT, 3 April 2015.

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

On 3 April, Prime Minister Abadi instructed Iraqi security forces to arrest anyone seen looting in Tikrit. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Late at night on 3 April, Reuters reported on the looting in Tikrit:

On April 1, the city of Tikrit was liberated from the extremist group Islamic State. Then, some of the liberators took revenge.

Near the charred, bullet-scarred government headquarters, two federal policemen flanked a suspected Islamic State fighter. Urged on by a furious mob, the two officers took out knives and repeatedly stabbed the man in the neck and slit his throat. The killing was witnessed by two Reuters correspondents.

The incident is now under investigation, interior ministry spokesman Brigadier General Saad Maan told Reuters.

Since its recapture two days ago, the Sunni city of Tikrit has been the scene of violence and looting. In addition to the killing of the extremist combatant, Reuters correspondents also saw a convoy of Shi'ite paramilitary fighters — the government's partners in liberating the city — drag a corpse through the streets behind their car.

Local officials said the mayhem continues. Two security officers, speaking on condition of anonymity, said on Friday [3 April] that dozens of homes had been torched in the city. They added that they had witnessed the looting of stores by Shi'ite militiamen.

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Officials close to Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi, a moderate Shi'ite, had described the Tikrit campaign as a chance to demonstrate his government's independence from one source of its power: Iraqi Shi'ite militias backed by Shi'ite Iran and advised by Iranian military officers. Sunnis deeply mistrust and fear these paramilitaries, accusing them of summary executions and vandalism. But Abadi has had to rely on the Shi'ite militias on the battlefield, as Iraq's regular military deserted en masse last summer in

the Islamic State onslaught.

....

Looting has also been a problem. Shi'ite paramilitary fighters in pickup trucks raced through the city carrying goods that appeared to have been looted from homes and government offices.

The vehicles were crammed with refrigerators, air conditioners, computer printers, and furniture. A young militia fighter rode on a red bicycle, gleefully shouting: "I always dreamed of having a bike like this as a kid."

Ned Parker, "Special Report: After Iraqi forces take Tikrit, a wave of looting and lynching," [Reuters](#), 23:06 GMT, 3 April 2015.

(Note: on 11 April [Reuters](#) reported that Ned Parker, the author of this story, had been forced to flee from Iraq because of death threats from Shiite militias.)

Early on 4 April, the Associated Press reported that Tikrit was in ruins, and also that looting continues:

In Iraq's Tikrit, liberation from the Islamic State group comes at a heavy price, both in loss of life and in the sheer devastation the militants leave in their wake. Much of Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown and once a bustling city north of Baghdad, now lies in ruins.

....

Today, [after a month of ferocious street battles,] the houses that still stand are pocked with bullet holes and Tikrit's streets are lined with potholes where mortars slammed down. The provincial headquarters in the downtown — now adorned with Shiite militia flags in place of the Islamic State group's black banner — is burned from fire and damaged from heavy fighting.

....

The looting was first reported within hours of the military victory but authorities have refrained from blaming anyone. A number of human rights organizations have accused the Shiite militias of carrying out revenge attacks on Sunnis in newly-recaptured towns, or destroying their homes so they can never return.

....

In the heart of the city, Iraqi policemen are out in full force, But elsewhere, there is little law and order, and the Shiite militias roam Tikrit streets freely, spray-painting their graffiti and slogans on buildings and homes.

Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraq's Tikrit, free of the Islamic State, is a city in ruins," [Associated Press](#), 07:08 GMT, 4 April 2015.

Copy at [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 5 April, Rudaw in Kurdistan reports that "Mosul's exiled governor Atheel Nujaifi ruled out any role for the Hashd al-Shaabi Shiite militia in the battle for Mosul". Rudaw also reports on misconduct by Shiite militias in Tikrit:

In the places the militias have liberated of ISIS there have been reports of atrocities against Sunnis, including in the fight for Tikrit.

In one incident, militants affiliated with the militia attacked a court in the town of Dour near Tikrit, taking prisoner at least 30 Iraqi policemen, according to a Rudaw reporter.

The militia withdrew from Tikrit on Sunday [5 April] and let the military take charge, in a move to defuse the rising sectarian tensions.

"Governor warns Shiite militias should not have role in Mosul fighting," [Rudaw](#), 5 April 2015.

On 6 April, France24 reported that half of Tikrit was in ruins.

Today, the houses that still stand are pocked with bullet holes and Tikrit's streets are lined with shell craters.

The provincial headquarters in the downtown — now adorned with Shiite militia flags in place of the IS group's black banner — is burned from fire and damaged from heavy fighting.

....

More than half of the city has been destroyed, and most of Tikrit's 200,000 Sunni residents have yet to return. When they do it will be to an uncertain future.

Anne-Sophie Le Mauff & Delano D'Souza, "Tikrit in ruins after liberation from Islamic State group," [France24](#), 6 April 2015.

My comment: The fighting to liberate Kobani in Syria from ISIL destroyed most of Kobani, see my essay for [Jan 2015](#). Apparently it is the same for Tikrit. The total cost of a war is not only the cost of the military campaign, but also includes rebuilding damaged cities and long-term care for people maimed in the war. But if the Iraqi military uses fewer artillery shells and fewer airstrikes, then there will be more dead and wounded Iraqi soldiers during the invasion of cities held by ISIL. This is a classic case of damned if you do, and damned if you don't.

On 26 April, I searched Google News for more stories about either looting in Tikrit or damage to Tikrit, but found nothing significant. Perhaps the death threats against Ned Parker earlier in April discouraged journalists from continuing to report on these topics.

2-7 April

Agence France-Presse tersely summarized the liberation of Tikrit:

Iran was Baghdad's main foreign partner for much of the operation, but Iraq eventually requested coalition airstrikes, which began on March 25. That prompted a backlash among key militia groups, with commanders saying they were halting offensive

operations in response to the strikes, an outcome the coalition wanted anyway.
"Airstrikes broke Tikrit deadlock: coalition." [Daily Star](#), 22:15 GMT, 2 April 2015.

There are not enough bomb-disposal experts in the Iraqi security forces to handle all of the hundreds of bombs installed in Tikrit by ISIL. Agence France-Presse reports that the Shiite militia have crude ways of disposing of bombs:

Some are turning to less sophisticated bomb disposal methods, with one militiaman suggesting that burning houses was a means of detonating explosives within.

A militiaman also fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a parked car he said he suspected of being a car bomb.

Even if such methods do remove explosives, they also damage property, angering residents and undermining Tikrit's long-term stability.

W.G. Dunlop, "As fighting ends, Tikrit faces long road to recovery," [Daily Star](#), 22:15 GMT, 2 April 2015.

On 5 April, *Iraqi News* tersely reports an interview with Iraqi Vice-President Iyad Allawi. (During 2004-2005, the USA appointed Allawi as interim prime minister of Iraq.)

Iraqi Vice President Iyad Allawi said in an interview with 'Al-Hadath' TV channel, that Iran's situations and the statements of some of its officials did not encourage national reconciliation in Iraq. Allawi stressed that the intervention of Iranian military leaders in Tikrit caused the operation to fail.

Abdelhak Mamoun, "Iran's situations didn't help in reconciliation in Iraq, says Iraqi Vice President," [Iraqi News](#), 5 April 2015.

Despite declaring victory in Tikrit on 1 April, the pro-government forces have *not* yet liberated the Qadisiya area in Tikrit, where hundreds of ISIL fighters remain. [Rudaw](#), 5 April.

Since mid-March 2015, the conventional wisdom is that the Iraqi army will next move to push ISIL out of Anbar province, *then* move to push ISIL out of Mosul. (See [below](#).) Anbar province and Mosul are each heavily dominated by Sunni Muslims. Given the recent experience with Shiite militia looting and vandalizing buildings in and near Tikrit, it would be unwise to involve the Shiite militia in the liberation of Anbar or Mosul. But the Iraqi army alone is not strong enough to expel ISIL, so the Iraqi government must seek new partners for the Iraqi army. On 5 April, the Associated Press reports on these topics:

.... But as Tikrit now sits in ruins, still patrolled by fractious Shiite militias, the powerful Sunni tribes remain as distrustful as ever as further offensives in their heartland loom.

.....

The government-backed Popular Mobilization Forces, comprised mainly of Shiite militias, have been a driving force in most of the successful battles against the militant group. But little remains of those towns — with several human rights groups pointing to the militias as the culprits for that destruction. The powerful, Iranian-backed militias have been accused in the past of atrocities ranging from driving Sunni families from

their homes, to kidnapping and, in some cases executions.

In Tikrit, fighting damaged many homes. Access to electricity and water is sporadic and roads are cratered and impassable in some parts of the city. While the government has blamed criminal gangs for loot, others have blamed the militiamen.

....

As Iraq looks ahead to its next battlefield — most likely in Anbar province — the government has a key opportunity to demonstrate its desire to protect Sunni communities and empower the Sunni tribesmen to oversee law and order once the Islamic State group is abolished and normalcy is restored.

Vivian Salama & Sameer N. Yacoub, "After Tikrit victory, Iraq's new challenge: Win over Sunnis," [Associated Press](#), 19:39 GMT, 5 April 2015.

On 6 April prime minister Abadi visited Erbil to seek the support of the Kurdish Peshmerga in the liberation of Mosul. After obtaining that support, Abadi spoke to the Kurdish newspaper *Rudaw*:

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said Monday that the Shiite militia known as Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) will not take part in the battle for Mosul, adding that it is preferable if people in the city take on the task themselves.

“ISIS a threat to the Kurdistan Region, therefore the Peshmerga will play a vital role in the liberation of Mosul, but we think it is better if the people of Mosul themselves lead the fight and the PMF will not take part,” Abadi told *Rudaw* during his visit to Erbil on Monday [6 April].

"Iraqi PM Abadi: Shiite militia won't join battle for Mosul," [Rudaw](#), 6 April 2015.

During 7-11 April, there was little published news about Tikrit. Two news stories dominated the middle-east news: (1) Saudi airstrikes on Yemen and (2) ISIL captured the Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus.

Iraq chooses Iran, Iraq rejects USA

For the background and previous history, see my essay for [March 2015](#).

What is emerging on 6-7 April 2015 is a new Iraqi policy to:

1. send the Shiite militias home,
2. equip the Sunni tribes with weapons and use them to help liberate Anbar province, and
3. have the experienced Peshmerga help with the difficult liberation of Mosul.

Presumably, the U.S.-led coalition would continue to supply airstrikes in support of the Iraqi missions in Anbar and Nineveh provinces. (Mosul is the capital of Nineveh province.) That would mean that the Iranians sit on the sidelines. See the above cited articles and the 7 April article in the [NY Times](#).

On 12 April, Abadi "ordered [the] transfer large quantities of weapons and ammunition to Anbar as soon as possible for distribution to security forces and tribal fighters." [Iraqi News](#).

On 16 April, Abadi signaled his discomfort with photographs of Iran's Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran's al-Quds brigade of the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, directing fighting inside Iraq. Reuters reports:

"To be honest with you, it's (a) very sensitive issue. Iraqi sovereignty is very important for us," Abadi told a gathering at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank.

"Iraqis are sacrificing to save their country. To make it appear as if others are doing this on behalf of Iraqis, Iraqis wouldn't accept that."

Abadi said it was "a bad idea" for Soleimani to have such a visible presence fighting Islamic State in Iraq.

Phil Stewart, "Iraq signals unease with Iran general's battlefield prominence," [Reuters](#), 06:42 GMT, 17 April 2015.

A news story by Agence France-Presse tersely says Iraq welcomes help from Iran only if Iran respects Iraq's sovereignty. [Daily Star](#).

My comment is that Abadi welcomes help from foreign militaries, as long as that help is invisible. And do *not* expect any [gratitude](#) from Iraq for assistance. It seems that Iraq wants to have an illusion of self-reliance, when Iraq desperately needs foreign assistance in military equipment, airstrikes, technical advice, and training. One of the reasons that Iraq needs foreign assistance is the corruption during the reign of Maliki.

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.' ").

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.

Reports of looting by Shiite militias in Tikrit are cited [above](#).

On 6 April, the Iraqi government had begun exhumation of corpses who were murdered by ISIL at the Speicher Air Force Base massacre in June 2014. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [The Guardian](#). This forensic examination is necessary to document war crimes by ISIL and to return each body to its family, but will probably also continue to inflame Shiite hatred for Sunnis.

On 18 April, the exhumation was said to take weeks to complete. [Washington Post](#).

31 March 2015: No Gratitude from Iraq

On 31 March, Prime Minister Abadi gave a [speech](#) to announce the hoisting the Iraqi flag above the Province Building in Tikrit. Abadi praises the Iraqi army and militias: "our brave forces our champion troops". But Abadi mentioned neither the USA nor Iran, who had assisted in this victory. Abadi's only mention of the U.S.-led coalition was "the Iraqi aviation and that of the international coalition has directed influential strikes on Daesh's hideouts." The so-called Iraqi aviation flies decrepit airplanes — five Su-25 aircraft — and can *not* do precision bombing. (The [Washington Post](#) reports the Iraqi air force mistakenly bombed the Tikrit headquarters of the Iraqi army on Wednesday, 25 March.)

On 2 April *The New York Times* also reported on this lack of gratitude by the Iraqis: One week after the start of intensive American airstrikes against Islamic State hideouts, most of the key parts of central Tikrit had finally fallen to the government's forces — although significant pockets still remained contested on Thursday [2 April].

But to hear some of the Iraqi forces here tell it, the Americans deserve little or no

credit. And many of the Shiite militiamen involved in the fight say the international coalition's air campaign actually impeded their victory — even though beforehand they had spent weeks in a stalemate with militants holed up in Tikrit. Some even accuse the United States of fighting on the side of the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Still, most of the militiamen who are now pouring into this city in the Sunni heartland along the Tigris River were not even in the real battle over the past week, and the only shots they fired were into the air on Thursday — which they did with abandon.

....

... Mohammad Takrif, 24, a car mechanic from Hilla, had a similar take. “Thank God and Hadi al-Ameri, and also the Iranian advisers who helped us,” he said. And the Americans? “All they did was bomb the wrong side and kill federal policemen the other day.”

He was referring to a reported airstrike on Friday [27 March]. But senior Iraqi generals now say that was a so-called friendly fire accident that they attributed to planes from the tiny Iraqi air force, not the American-led coalition.

....

Even at higher levels of the Iraqi establishment, whatever praise was emitted for the American role was grudging at best.

Prime Minister Abadi, for instance, credited “the joint efforts of the army and police forces alongside the popular mobilization fighters and the tribal fighters and the people of Tikrit with air coverage of the Iraqi air force and the international coalition.”

The Iraqi air force has all of a dozen attack jets, but less than half are known to be in service, and none are equipped for precision bombing. He also praised the “bravery of the Iraqi pilots” but did not mention coalition ones.

Rod Nordland, "Iraq Forces, Pushing ISIS out of Tikrit, Give Few Thanks for U.S. Airstrikes," [NY Times](#), 2 April 2015.

My comment: Not only is there lack of gratitude from Iraq, but also the Iraqis are spreading malicious lies about U.S. airplanes dropping supplies to ISIL, and about U.S. airplanes attacking Iraqi government locations.

The Iraqi government has made only a few initial steps in ending the corruption and incompetence of the Iraqi army that allowed ISIL to take control of 1/3 of Iraq in 2014. The Iraqi government remains unable to control the Shiite militia with their goal of sectarian revenge. I do not know if the Arabic-language news media in Iraq is informing Iraqis of these embarrassing shortcomings of their government.

What is clear is that many Iraqis want to pretend that the Iraqis can defeat ISIL without help of Western governments. At the same time, the Iraqi government begs for billions of U.S. dollars/year in airstrikes and military equipment from the USA, Western Europe,

Canada, and Australia.

Strangely, the Shiite majority in Iraq is more empowered now than before the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, when Saddam Hussein — a Sunni — controlled Iraq and persecuted Shiites.

AUMF for anti-ISIL campaign Stalls in U.S. Congress

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 since August 2014.

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. The brief hearings on Obama's draft are described in my essay for [March 2015](#).

On 1 April, Senator Menendez (D-NJ), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was indicted in federal court on corruption charges. Menendez had been an active supporter of an AUMF that would limit the President's authority to wage war against ISIL. Menendez's legal troubles will probably reduce his effectiveness in advocating a better AUMF.

On 14 April, the [Associated Press](#) reports that the AUMF has "languished" in Congress, and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives declared it was "virtually impossible" for the Congress to approve Obama's draft AUMF.

On 30 April, *The Washington Post* explained:

As lawmakers continue to spar with President Obama over his use of executive power on an Iran nuclear deal and a slew of domestic matters, most appear willing to let him have his way on at least one issue the war against the Islamic State in Iraq, Syria and potentially beyond.

It has been nearly three months since Obama, responding to congressional demands and his own pledge to seek legislative blessing, sent proposed war authorization language to Capitol Hill. Now, the subject appears to be dying a quiet death.

A feisty bipartisan minority is not prepared to let it go without a fight. Thirty House lawmakers from both parties Thursday [30 April] signed a letter to Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) demanding that he force action on the Authorization for the Use of Military Force, or AUMF, against the Islamic State.

....

The AUMF saga is a twist on conventional Washington wisdom in more ways than one. Unlike virtually every other issue before lawmakers, it is the Democrats who have argued for narrowing Obama's latitude. They worry that vague language in his proposal, including about the possibility of ground troops, would deprive Congress of its ability to check executive action and allow Obama or his successor unlimited expansion of global military actions.

....

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-Tenn.), a vocal proponent of a new AUMF last year, said last week that "what the president sent over isn't supported by any Democrat," let alone Republicans, albeit for different reasons. "What I don't want to do is begin a process that in the end may show divisions," Corker told the Financial Times.

Karen DeYoung, "Debate over war authorization in Congress fades with little result," [Washington Post](#), 21:55 EDT, 30 April 2015.

Hussein's army officers now leaders of ISIL

It has been known since mid-2014 that many of the senior officers in Saddam Hussein's army have joined ISIL. Liz Sly, writing in *The Washington Post*, explains that this is partly a result of the U.S. invasion in 2003, when Hussein's army was disbanded and former members of Hussein's Baath party were prohibited from employment by the Iraqi government. The unemployed army officers simply took employment by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which later became ISIL. [Washington Post](#).

On 5 April, [Rudaw](#) reports that "a top ISIS leader who was once a general in Saddam Hussein's army" had been killed in Fallujah.

On 20 April, [Rudaw](#) suggests that ISIL now includes parts of the former (1) the Fedayeen Saddam, Hussein's special forces for fighting guerrilla wars and (2) the Mukhabarat, Hussein's secret service. Additionally: "Experts say Saddam's best officers are now in charge of ISIS' military, which is why ISIS is so strong in intelligence and on the battlefield."

Iraqi Army Intends to Liberate Anbar Province

Since mid-March 2015, the conventional wisdom is that the Iraqi army will next move to push ISIL out of Anbar province, *then* move to push ISIL out of Mosul. (See, e.g., [Daily Star](#), 18 March; [NY Times](#), 24 March.)

On 8 April, the head of Anbar Provincial Council had a burst of enthusiasm and proclaimed the beginning of the liberation of Anbar from ISIL. [Rudaw](#). But the Iraqi army, Sunni tribes, and coalition airstrikes have been operating in Anbar Province since September 2014. The

early efforts were intended mostly to protect Baghdad from ISIL, by attacking Fallujah, and by defending Haditha Dam.

On 8 April, *The New York Times* reported that the liberation of Anbar had *not* yet begun. [NY Times](#).

On 15 April, Abadi told journalists that the Iraqi government was focusing on liberating Anbar province from ISIL, plus defending Beiji (site of Iraq's largest oil refinery) from attack by ISIL. [Associated Press](#).

The U.S. Government prefers that Abadi focus on liberating Mosul and defending Beiji, and later liberate Anbar province. Anbar is complicated because it is in the Sunni heartland, where some of the residents support ISIL instead of the Iraqi government. Further, the Iraqi army is mostly Shiite, and not welcome in Anbar. The Iraqi army is weak, and needs reinforcements, but the only available reinforcements are Shiite militias, which are really *not* welcome in Anbar. *Before* Anbar is liberated, Iraq needs to train-and-equip Sunni tribesmen in Anbar to assist in the liberation, but that train-and-equip has not yet begun. See, e.g., [NY Times](#); press briefing by Gen. Dempsey at [Pentagon](#); [Voice of America](#); [Stars&Stripes](#).

On 15 April ISIL seized three villages near Ramadi. (Ramadi is the capital of Anbar province.) [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 17 April, the [Washington Post](#) mentions that amongst refugees fleeing from Ramadi to Baghdad were "police officers who said they had left their positions after other security forces retreated and their ammunition had run low." Instead of a planned Iraqi liberation of Anbar, the Iraqi army found itself fighting to stop ISIL from acquiring more towns in Anbar, as ISIL seized the initiative.

On 21 April, the Iraqi army was fighting to retake one town near Ramadi that was captured by ISIL on 15 April. [Associated Press](#).

On 28 April, the Associated Press reported on some of the problems in using the Iraqi army to fight in Anbar province.

Iraqi forces are on a westward push to retake Anbar, a sprawling Sunni-dominated desert province captured by the Islamic State group in their offensive last year. But as the battles for Tikrit and Ramadi have shown, it will be a hard slog for a much-diminished Iraqi army — especially given Baghdad's reticence to arm Sunni tribesmen and local fears of the Shiite militias backing government forces.

....

The past weeks of seesaw battles in Anbar, with progress in areas like Garma east of Fallujah, a stalemate in the biggest city of Ramadi and an Iraqi rout near Lake Tharthar, show that the army still needs help. But relying on erstwhile Shiite militia allies may not be palatable to locals.

"The Iraqi soldiers fighting in Anbar are not well-trained enough for this battle. Many of the soldiers are there for the money, but the (Shiite militias), they are believers in this fight," said an Iraqi brigadier general involved in the Anbar campaign. "There isn't

yet a clear plan to liberate Anbar because of the political and tribal disputes."

Speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to journalists, he said some tribes might be supportive but others were with the Islamic State group. He also lamented how soldiers would throw down their weapons and flee when hard-pressed.

....

In the past few years, Iraq's army has been hollowed out by corrupt commanders siphoning off salaries and equipment and not training soldiers to do much more than man checkpoints.

A force that once numbered in the hundreds of thousands is now estimated by U.S. officials to be around 125,000 at best and probably a lot less, once all the so-called "ghost-soldiers" — non-existent names on the payroll — are purged.

....

Plans to create a National Guard with Sunni fighters have stalled because the Shiite-dominated government suspects many of supporting the Islamic State group and refuses to arm them.

Under the former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the Sunni Awakening force was dismantled after the U.S. pulled out in 2011, further alienating the local population.

....

.... Also, the U.S.-led coalition would be unable to back the Iraqis with air power in dense urban combat.

Qassim Abdul-Zahra & Paul Schemm, "Iraq faces huge challenges dislodging Islamic State in Anbar," [Associated Press](#), 08:14 GMT, 28 April 2015.

On 30 April, Agence France-Presse reported:

Iraqi authorities are on the defensive after ISIS scored a major propaganda victory with attacks in Anbar, undermining confidence in Baghdad's attempts to retake the key province.

....

A major blow came after ISIS attacked an army post east of Ramadi last Friday [24 April]. Rumors that more than 100 soldiers were killed in the attack swept through social media, assisted by press reports. [Iraqi defense minister] Obeidi called a news conference to say that the toll from the attack was 13, including two top officers,

....

....

Anbar poses major military challenges. Government forces have not made significant progress in retaking the Ramadi areas lost this month, and much of the rest of the province remains out of their control.

Army Staff Major Gen. Mohammed al-Dulaimi said there are not enough Iraqi security forces in Anbar, given its massive size, and they hold only part of Ramadi and a handful of other areas.

Karim Abou Merh & W.G. Dunlop, "Iraq government seeks to counter ISIS propaganda coup," [Daily Star](#), 30 April 2015.

In responding to embarrassing failures in Anbar, the Iraqi government blamed journalists who demoralized the Iraqi army. [Associated Press](#), 29 April.

Foreign Fighters Join ISIL

On 31 March 2015, a report to the United Nations Security Council estimated that the number of foreign fighters in Islamic terrorist groups increased by 71% from mid-2014 to March 2015, to a current number of more than 28,000. Most of these foreigners are fighting with ISIL, but some are fighting with Nusra Front in Syria, and 6500 are fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The report called Syria and Iraq "international finishing schools" for terrorists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [BBC](#). On 21 April, I was unable to find a copy of the U.N. Report that was mentioned in these news articles.

On 8 April, a French Senator released a report that showed 47% of ISIL fighters from Europe come from France. A total of 1430 French citizens are fighting for ISIL. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

This large concentration of French citizens fighting for ISIL may be the result of France allowing emigration of Muslims from Algeria. As a result of this emigration, France has approximately four million Muslims, the largest number of Muslims of any nation in Western Europe. The 1430 ISIL fighters from France are 0.04% of the total Muslims in France.

On 13 April, Vera Jourova, the EU justice commissioner, spoke with *Le Figaro* newspaper in France. Agence France-Presse translated:

"At the European level, we estimate that 5,000 to 6,000 individuals have left for Syria," Vera Jourova, the EU justice commissioner, told *Le Figaro* in an interview, adding the true number was likely to be far higher due to the difficulty of tracking foreign fighters in the conflict.

....

Focusing on those seeking to leave for Syria to wage jihad, or those returning from the conflict, meant intervening "too late", she said.

Ms Jourova said the EU instead wanted to promote prevention as a means of curtailing the steady flow of European nationals, looking at the diverse reasons of why people

joined jihadist groups beyond simply religion.

British research had identified "a desire for adventure, boredom, dissatisfaction with their situation in life or a lack of prospects," in those who had opted to leave their families behind and head for Syria, the commissioner said.

"More than 6,000 European jihadists in Syria, EU official says," [The Telegraph](#), 09:15 GMT, 13 April 2015.

The continuing recruitment of foreign fighters by ISIL indicates failure of mainstream Islamic clerics to counter ISIL propaganda. If we can not stop more Muslims from joining ISIL and Al-Qaeda, then we lose the war against Islamic terrorism.

terrorist attacks TV5 in France

Traditionally, Islamic terrorists used AK-47 assault rifles, hand grenades, and rocket-propelled grenades in relatively low-technology warfare. Islamic terrorists are also famous for suicide bombers who wear vests of explosives and shrapnel, and car bombs.

That *may* have changed at 20:00 GMT on 8 April 2015, when hackers executed a cyberattack on French television network TV5. I say "may", because (1) it is not clear whether the hackers are Islamic terrorists, and (2) while the hackers claim allegiance to ISIL, it is not known whether ISIL supports these hackers.

An early report from the Associated Press tells us that hackers claiming allegiance to ISIL had inserted computer viruses into equipment owned by French television network TV5:

Hackers claiming allegiance to the Islamic State group seized control of a global French television network, simultaneously blacking out 11 channels and taking over the network's website and social media accounts. The attack appeared to be an unprecedented step in the extremist group's information warfare tactics.

The hackers briefly cut transmission of 11 channels belonging to TV5 Monde and took over its websites and social media accounts starting Wednesday [8 April] night. The channel's director, Yves Bigot, said the attack was continuing Thursday [9 April]. He told RTL radio that the network has restored its signal but can only broadcast recorded programs.

....

TV5 Monde, which was founded by the French government in 1984 and calls itself the "worldwide French cultural channel," broadcasts news and other programs produced in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Canada. Its Facebook page says its signal reaches more than 257 million homes in over 200 countries and territories.

....

William Reymond, editor of the French investigative website Breaking3zero, ..., said

the latest attack can be directly linked to two Islamic State-linked militants — one in Algeria who built the malicious software and another in Iraq who helped speed up the attack.

Within a half-hour, he said, the malware had burrowed in and exploited a weakness to enter the network's computer system and take over its central transmission server, preventing the signal from being beamed to a satellite. He said TV5 Monde will have a hard time regaining full control. "They have to erase everything. There were at least three other encrypted viruses," he said.

Lori Hinnant, "French network's broadcasts hacked by group claiming IS ties," [Associated Press](#), 12:35 GMT, 9 April 2015.

Agence France-Presse first reported the story, which was tersely repeated by [Reuters](#) at 23:27 GMT on 8 April. At 11:40 GMT on 9 April, Reuters was still reporting the reaction of politicians, and ignoring reporting what happened.

At noon GMT on 9 April, FRANCE24 website reported:

Wassim Nasr, FRANCE 24's expert on jihadist movements, noted, however, that the message — written in Arabic — contained plenty of spelling and grammar mistakes, indicating that "the authors are not Arabic".

David Thomson, a journalist at FRANCE 24's sister radio station RFI and author of a book on French jihadists, added that the so-called "cybercaliphate" that the hackers had referred to in the attack "is not an official arm of the IS group".

The Paris-based company was able to partially resume television broadcasts by 1:00am local time (2300 GMT) after a three-hour blackout, Bigot [Director-General of TV5] said, but added its systems had been "severely damaged" by the "unprecedented attack".

"We're still not able to produce our news programmes," he told FRANCE 24, adding documentaries and other pre-produced programmes were being shown instead.

TV5Monde regained control of its social networks by 2:00am Thursday, the director-general said, but television broadcasts were likely to take hours, if not days, to return to normal. The attack would have required weeks of preparation, he added.

"France's TV5Monde targeted in 'IS group cyberattack'," [FRANCE24](#), 12:01 GMT, 9 April 2015.

At 14:00 GMT (16:00 French time) on 9 April, TV5 was able to resume live broadcasts after 18 hours of interrupted service. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

In the evening/night of 9 April, most of the news reports were promises by French politicians to arrest the perpetrators of the cyberattack. Back in the year 2002, I wrote an [essay](#) on the history of early malicious computer programs that explained the difficulty in identifying and prosecuting the authors of malicious computer programs. And, once identified, the author of a malicious computer program is likely to be in some third-world nation that will not

extradite the author to France for trial.

My comment: While cyberattacks on a popular television network are highly visible, a cyberattack on computers at utilities (e.g., electricity, water, heating gas, telephones) could do more damage.

There was intense news coverage of the TV5 story on 9 April, but then the news coverage vanished. Apparently when TV5 broadcasts were restored, everyone became calm and uninterested in the malicious computer attack.

On 9 April, *after* the attack on TV5, there was a live interview with an employee of TV5 inside the TV5 building. On the bulletin board behind the employee were sticky notes and index cards listing usernames and passwords! The confidential usernames and passwords were visible to anyone watching the interview. [Ars Technica](#). This displays an appalling lack of security at TV5.

On 12 April at 17:00 GMT, apparently the same CyberCaliphate hacked the website of *Le Soir*, a French-language newspaper in Belgium. [Deutsche Welle](#).

On 13 April, in a little-noticed story, a so-called "Electronic Caliphate Army" hacked the website of the International Union of Muslim Scholars. [Iraqi News](#). The Union had been critical of ISIL.

As of 19 April, there is no published information that would link these three attacks on TV5, *Le Soir*, or the Union of Muslim Scholars. There is also no published information on the perpetrators of these attacks.

View from the Pentagon

When Admiral Kirby was head of the press office at the Pentagon, there were meaningful press briefings several times a week. His penultimate [briefing](#) was on 18 Feb 2015, when the press corps expressed their appreciation to him for his professionalism. After the departure of Admiral Kirby, there was a big decrease in information coming from the Pentagon.

On 13 April 2015, the Pentagon reported:

Some 25 percent to 30 percent of Iraqi territory has been taken back from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant terrorist group control by coalition forces, Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters today [13 April].

....

“Among other strategic infrastructure and sizeable towns where ISIL has lost territory are Mosul Dam, Zummar and the vicinity of Sinjar Mountain,” Warren said.

The corridor north of Tikrit has been “substantially retaken by friendly forces,” Warren said. With offensive pressure on ISIL, he said he expects Tikrit also will be cleared from ISIL “relatively soon.”

Beiji and a nearby oil refinery is still contested, and will continue to be the focus of airstrikes, he said.

"ISIL Loses Control of Once-dominated Iraq Territory," [Pentagon](#), 13 April 2015.
Copy at [Central Command](#).

On 15 April, [CNN](#) had commentary on this Pentagon news release by Afzal Ashraf, a counterinsurgency specialist and consulting fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in England. Ashraf claims ISIL will withdraw, rather than face an attack by a large army. But then ISIL will attack elsewhere (e.g., Ramadi), where the Iraqi army is weak.

ISIL has been trying to capture the large oil refinery near Baiji since June 2014. On 11 April, ISIL breached the perimeter of the refinery, but were repelled by the Iraqi army. [FRANCE24](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#). On 18 April, as fighting at the oil refinery continued, Iraqi soldiers "surrounded and entered" the refinery. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Finally, on 20 April the Iraqi government again had "full control" of the oil refinery. [CENTCOM](#). But on 27 April, fighting continued in the area near the Baiji refinery. [Iraqi News](#).

And on 15 April ISIL seized three villages near Ramadi, as described [above](#).

Abadi visits Washington, DC

During 14-16 April 2015, Abadi visited Washington, DC, where he met with President Obama, Secretaries Kerry and Carter, and leaders of the Congress. Obviously, Abadi was seeking *more* assistance from the USA. Obama did announce an additional US\$ 200 million in humanitarian aid for Iraq, but Obama did *not* promise more military assistance.

Sources:

- "FACT SHEET: U.S.-Iraq Cooperation," [White House](#), 14 April 2015. (Lists what the USA has done for the ungrateful Iraqis since mid-2014.)
 - "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Al-Abadi of Iraq after Bilateral Meeting," [White House](#), 14 April 2015.
 - "Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq," [White House](#), 14 April 2015.
 - "U.S. to give Iraq \$200 million in humanitarian aid, less than Abadi sought," [Washington Post](#), 14 April 2015.
 - "For Obama and Abadi, the start of a complicated relationship," [Washington Post](#), 14 April 2015.
 - "Obama Gives Visiting Iraqi Premier Aid and an Endorsement," [NY Times](#), 14 April 2015.
 - "Iraqi prime minister asks for 'sustainable support' from the U.S.," [Washington Post](#), 16 April 2015.
 - "Can Iraqi prime minister deliver on pledges made in Washington?," [Rudaw](#), 20 April 2015.
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19 April: ISIL in Libya executes Christians

On 19 April, ISIL in Libya released a video showing their execution of 30 captive Christians from Ethiopia. There were two groups: (1) approximately 15 were beheaded with a knife on a beach, and (2) approximately 15 were shot in the head in southern Libya. The narrator tells Christians to either convert to Islam or pay jizya, a medieval tax on non-Muslims. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [The Telegraph](#).

We are reminded that on 15 Feb 2015, ISIL in Libya beheaded 21 Christians from Egypt. (See my essay for [Feb 2015](#).)

Airstrikes in Iraq & Syria

Escalation of U.S. Military Engagement in Iraq

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [list](#) of significant escalations of U.S. Military involvement in Iraq.

1 April 2015: airstrikes

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

On March 31, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter, attack and bomber aircraft to conduct seven airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted seven 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 31, and 8 a.m., April 1, local time.

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, three ISIL vehicles and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings and two ISIL heavy machine guns

- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL tent shelter.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 1 April 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 1 April 2015.

2 April 2015: airstrikes

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

On April 1, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using fighter and bomber aircraft to conduct three airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

All strikes took place between 8 a.m., April 1, and 8 a.m., April 2, local time.

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

Syria

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

Iraq

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL building.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL mortar tube.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 2 April 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 2 April 2015.

3 April 2015: airstrikes

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

On April 2, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using

attack and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., April 2, and 8 a.m., April 3, 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 four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL excavators and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

4 April 2015: airstrikes

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

On April 3, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack and bomber aircraft to conduct six airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists. All strikes took place between 8 a.m., April 3, and 8 a.m., April 4, 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 and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, one ISIL vehicle, and one ISIL building.
- Near Hasakah, an airstrike struck one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed one ISIL machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed one ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Huwayjah, an airstrike had no effect.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL machine guns and an ISIL rifle.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck one large ISIL unit, one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL machine guns, an ISIL bull dozer, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL rifle.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL building.

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

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

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

5 April 2015: airstrikes

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

On April 4, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct three airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 12 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., April 4, and 8 a.m., April 5, 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 five fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored personnel carrier.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck 10 IED facilities.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL IED production facility and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL building.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

6 April 2015: airstrikes

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

On April 5, Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria, using attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct five airstrikes. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted eight 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., April 5, and 8 a.m., April 6, 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 eight fighting positions, an ISIL tunnel system and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL mortar positions and an ISIL sniper position.

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

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

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

7 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq, between 8 a.m., April 6, and 8 a.m., April 7, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes, using bomber and remotely-piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"These strikes, like all those we've conducted in Iraq, were coordinated with and approved by the Government of Iraq," said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR spokesman. "This coordination allows the Coalition to deliver precise strikes in support of the Iraqi Security Forces' efforts to counter Daesh."

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

Syria

- Near Aleppo, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL vehicle and destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroyed an ISIL excavator, an ISIL mortar tube, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL-created dam.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL artillery piece and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL excavators.

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

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

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

See the 10 April press release below for more information on the airstrike near Aleppo, which hit the "Khorasan Group".

8 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8

a.m., April 7, and 8 a.m., April 8, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted two airstrikes, using bomber and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL mortar system.

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

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

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

On 8 April, Canada announced it had bombed ISIL in Syria, becoming the first Western Nation to join the U.S.-led coalition in Syria. Six aircraft from the USA and two aircraft from Canada bombed an Islamic State garrison near Ar-Raqqah. [Reuters](#); [CBC](#); [Globe&Mail](#).

9 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 8, and 8 a.m., April 9, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes, using bomber, fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Our coalition capability to degrade ISIL continues to grow, with the first airstrikes conducted by Canada in Syria," said Combined Joint Task Force Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley. "It is the collective efforts of all nations and the power of the coalition that foreshadows the defeat of ISIL and the threat they pose."

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, two ISIL vehicles and destroyed five ISIL vehicles and an ISIL tank.
- Near Ar Raqqa, an airstrike struck an ISIL military garrison.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL tunnel system and destroyed an ISIL vehicle in the surrounding areas.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar tube, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL buildings, two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

10 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 9, and 8 a.m., April 10, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes, using bomber, fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"The Syrian strikes support continued advances of Kurdish forces in the northern part of the country" said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF Chief of Staff. "Likewise, complementary strikes in Iraq that support multiple on-going operations by the ISF and KSF, combine to produce ever increasing lethal pressure on Daesh throughout both Syria and Iraq."

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four vehicles.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL excavators and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL IED position and destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Hit in Al Anbar Province, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings and three ISIL fighting positions.

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

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As a correction to the April 7 press release in which an airstrike near Aleppo was described as striking an ISIL tactical unit, the tactical unit was part of a network of veteran al Qaida operatives, sometimes called the "Khorasan Group," who are plotting external attacks against the United States and our allies.

[Central Command](#), 10 April 2015. (first posted morning of 13 April)

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 10 April 2015.

11 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 10, and 8 a.m., April 11, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes, using bomber, fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

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

SYRIA

- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck a large and a tactical ISIL unit and destroyed four vehicles.

IRAQ

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck one ISIL tactical unit and one ISIL rocket fire team and destroyed one excavator.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL excavators and one ISIL vehicle.

- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck one tactical unit, destroyed three buildings and three fighting positions.
- Near Hit, an airstrike struck a checkpoint.
- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and a fighting position.
- Near Huwayjah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

Note that CENTCOM began omitting the stock sentence that said: "All aircraft returned to base safely." That sentence was a nice touch that assured the families of pilots, and reminded everyone that the U.S.-led coalition has air superiority in Iraq and Syria.

12 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 11, and 8 a.m., April 12, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes, using bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 10 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Deliberate strikes in Mosul continue to degrade Daesh and set the conditions for future operations," said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR Chief of Staff. "The Coalition will continue to apply pressure on Daesh elements throughout all of Iraq as we make steady progress in degrading and dismantling Daesh's military capabilities in support of the Government of Iraq."

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, three airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck an ISIL large and small tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL excavators, two ISIL armored vehicles, an ISIL tank and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL storage facility and an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL

fighting position and an ISIL building.

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

Not posted at the Pentagon.

13 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 12, and 8 a.m., April 13, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes, using bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"These strikes on Daesh formations near Bayji reduce their numbers and limit their ability to conduct operations," said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR Spokesman. "Coalition strikes continue to degrade Daesh's capabilities across Iraq and Syria. We will continue to support the ISF and the Government of Iraq against this threat."

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

Syria

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

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, six airstrikes struck six ISIL tactical units, destroyed an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Ramadi, four airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL buildings, an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL heavy machine guns.

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 13 April 2015. (covers 08:00 on 11 April to 08:00 on 13 April)

14 April 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 14 April 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 [13 April], and 8 a.m. today [14 April], local time, noting that assessments of results are based on initial reports.

Airstrikes in Syria

- Fighter aircraft conducted three airstrikes near Kobani, which struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrikes in Iraq

Fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 15 airstrikes in Iraq, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Beiji, seven airstrikes struck one large and two smaller tactical units, two ISIL excavators, destroyed 11 ISIL buildings, four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL excavators, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL warehouse, an ISIL vehicle bomb and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes destroyed two ISIL bridges and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL buildings, and an ISIL rocket-propelled grenade.

All aircraft returned to base safely.

[Pentagon](#), 14 April 2015.

Note the stock sentence, "All aircraft returned to base safely.", which disappeared beginning 11 April, has returned.

15 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 14, and 8 a.m., April 15, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes, using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 17 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"After detailed analysis, planning and coordination, a deliberate coalition airstrike was conducted in Mosul," said, CJTF-OIR Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley. "These deliberate airstrikes demonstrate the ability of the coalition to pursue a deliberate campaign plan while also providing dynamic air support to ongoing ISF ground operations."

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, destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL tunnel and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, nine airstrikes struck two large and six smaller tactical units, destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL armored personnel carrier.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

16 April 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, 16 April 2015, neither the CENTCOM website nor the Pentagon website reported airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. However, the U.S.-led coalition apparently informed Reuters, who tersely reported:

The United States and its allies staged 20 air strikes on Islamic State targets in Syria and Iraq in a period from Wednesday to Thursday morning, the Combined Joint Task Force said in a statement.

Nineteen of the strikes occurred near eight Iraqi cities and hit tactical units, fighting positions, vehicles, weapons and buildings, the statement said.

Another attack near al Hasakah, Syria, destroyed to fighting positions and hit a tactical unit.

"U.S., allies focus on Iraq in latest air strikes on Islamic State — statement," [Reuters](#), 18:35 GMT, 16 April 2015.

17 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 16, and 8 a.m., April 17, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes using attack and bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“Air strikes were conducted yesterday throughout the breadth of Iraq and into Syria, as the coalition continues the fight against Daesh,” said CJTF-OIR Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley. “The steady, continuous pressure being applied by ground forces and coalition airstrikes is degrading Daesh and clearly inhibiting their operational freedom, span of control, military capacity and fighter morale.”

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 an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL vehicles and two ISIL motorcycles.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Bayji, five airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units, destroyed four ISIL vehicles, three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL building.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 17 April 2015.

18 April 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 18 April 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and

Syria:

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 16, and 8 a.m., April 17, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes using attack and bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Today's airstrike details highlight that clearly identifiable ISIL units, equipment, leadership and vehicles will be struck with utmost precision through our dynamic targeting process," said Combined Joint Task Force Public Affairs Officer Col. Wayne Marotto. "These strikes, conducted on a daily basis, have lasting results as they degrade ISIL's fighting capability and allow the ISF the ability to go on the offensive."

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

SYRIA

- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed one ISIL vehicle.

IRAQ

- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and two ISIL heavy machine guns, destroyed one other ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL check point and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, three ISIL vehicles and one ISIL excavator.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL vehicles and one ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike destroyed one ISIL building and struck and ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, one airstrike struck one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed one ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck one ISIL tactical unit and destroyed one ISIL fighting position.

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

[Central Command](#), 18 April 2015. (first posted on 20 April)

Not posted at the Pentagon.

19 April 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 19 April 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and

Syria:

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 18, and 8 a.m., April 19, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted an airstrike using attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“We have witnessed continued, simultaneous successes on the ground in Iraq, most notably in Northern Iraq,” said Combined Joint Task Force Public Affairs Officer Col. Wayne Marotto. “All of the coalition airstrikes reported today were dynamic in nature, directly supported forces on the ground from Sinjar in the far North to Ramadi, in Central Iraq, and maintained the ongoing degradation of ISIL.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and two ISIL sniper positions.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large and smaller tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapon, an ISIL machine gun and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kirkuk, three airstrikes struck two ISIL large and one smaller tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroyed an ISIL structure, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.

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

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

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

20 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 19, and 8 a.m., April 20, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 10 airstrike using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 26 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“We have seen a lot of Coalition strike support over the reporting period,” said CJTF-OIR Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley. “In just about every case, offensive ground activities in both Iraq and Syria, force Daesh to present themselves where they can be targeted. Layered Coalition support, including aviation fires, reconnaissance, intelligence, and advise and assist elements, remains the key enabler to Iraqi and Kurdish operations to dismantle and defeat Daesh.”

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 mortar position and destroying an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kobani, seven airstrikes struck seven ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL mortar tube and an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapon.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Rutbah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, eight airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL VBIEDS, an ISIL machine gun, an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL ammo storage facility and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL staging area, destroying an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapon and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, five airstrikes struck an ISIL large and two ISIL small tactical units, destroying an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL buildings and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

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

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

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

21 April 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 21 April 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Attack, fighter and bomber aircraft conducted six airstrikes in **Syria**:

- Near Hasakah, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL checkpoint, destroying four ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL fighting positions.

Fighter, attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 22 airstrikes in **Iraq**, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. These strikes are a result of Iraqi security and Kurdish forces conducting simultaneous offensive operations:

- Near Asad, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Huwayjah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Beiji, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL anti-aircraft artillery weapons, two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL vehicle bomb, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL roadside bomb.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area, an ISIL bomb factory and multiple ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck an ISIL large and small tactical unit, destroying three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL buildings.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL buildings and an ISIL recoilless rifle.

All aircraft returned to base safely.

[Pentagon](#), 21 April 2015.

Not posted at CENTCOM.

22 April 2015: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 22 April 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria: Attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted seven airstrikes in **Syria**:

- Near Hasakah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units, destroying 14 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 11 airstrikes in **Iraq**, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Beiji, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL command and control facility, destroying an ISIL dump truck, an ISIL motorcycle, an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and two small tactical ISIL units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Rawah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL checkpoint.

Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck a large ISIL unit and a small tactical ISIL unit, destroying three ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

[Pentagon](#), 22 April 2015.
Not posted at CENTCOM.

23 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 22, and 8 a.m., April 23, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using attack, fighter and bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The Coalition struck Daesh forces in nine different locations across Iraq and Syria,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR Chief of Public Affairs. “We are working very closely with our partners to find and strike Daesh with precision fires.”

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, destroying three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL command and control facility.
- Near Al Qaim, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL Stryker vehicles, destroying an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL security headquarters, destroying an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL house-borne IED and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL buildings and three ISIL fighting positions.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 23 April 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 23 April 2015.

24 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 23, and 8 a.m., April 24, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“Daesh terrorists attempt to intimidate and extort the population in areas under their control through such techniques as checkpoints,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR Chief of Public Affairs. “The Coalition uses precision air strikes and reconnaissance, which limits Daesh’s grip on the population.”

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

Syria

- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL boat.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, two ISIL fighting positions, destroying an ISIL IED and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck an ISIL checkpoint, destroying four ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL buildings, two ISIL excavators and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL culvert.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 24 April 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 24 April 2015.

25 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 24, and 8 a.m., April 25, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes using fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Coalition support remains steadfast as we work together with our partners to defeat Daesh," said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR Chief of Staff. "These strikes support continuous incremental gains by Iraqi and Kurdish fighters that will combine over time to result in the demise of Daesh in Iraq and Syria."

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position, destroying an ISIL IED cache and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL boats.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, seven airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and an ISIL staging area, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL warehouse.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL vehicles and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck multiple ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying two ISIL structures.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL engineer vehicle.

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

[Central Command](#), 25 April 2015. (posted online on 27 April)

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 April 2015. (corrected on 26 April)

26 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 25, and 8 a.m., April 26, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 17 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using fighter, attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The Coalition continues to degrade Daesh military capabilities across the region,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR Chief of Public Affairs. “By working closely with our partners in Iraq and Syria, these strikes are contributing to their success.”

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 an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Hawayjah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL staging areas and an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, six airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL VBIEDs, two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL bunkers, two ISIL structures, an ISIL mortar tube and an ISIL warehouse.
- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL armored personnel carrier, an ISIL dump truck, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

27 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 26, and 8 a.m., April 27, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 26 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The Coalition struck Daesh military capabilities with a total of 31 successful airstrikes,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR Chief of Public Affairs. “A successful

campaign against Daesh will take time, and will require a sustained, united and coordinated response.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck eight ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying five ISIL fighting positions and ISIL heavy machine gun.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bayji, seven airstrikes struck six ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL warehouse and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Fallujah, eight airstrikes struck seven ISIL tactical units, destroying five ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL mortar tubes, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, two ISIL mortar positions and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying a recoilless rifle.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL mortar position, destroying an ISIL excavator.

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

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

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

28 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 27, and 8 a.m., April 28, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL fighting positions, destroying

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

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL staging areas.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL warehouses and an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL VBIEDs, an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and two ISIL checkpoints, destroying two ISIL excavators, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL excavator, an ISIL building and an ISIL machine gun.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 28 April 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 28 April 2015.

29 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 28, and 8 a.m., April 29, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“Iraqi Security Forces are in a tough fight in Bayji and Ramadi,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR Chief of Public Affairs. “However, the coalition will continue to support them with all requested military capabilities within our means.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck an ISIL large and two small tactical units, destroying five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Al Huwayjah, five airstrikes struck three ISIL staging areas and an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL VBIEDS and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, five airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL warehouse.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL trench complex.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL tanker trucks.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL crane, an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 29 April 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 29 April 2015.

30 April 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., April 29, and 8 a.m., April 30, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 15 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The coalition remains undistracted in the execution of the mission,” said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR Chief of Staff. “Our focus continues to be dismantling and defeating Daesh.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, an airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL trench system.
- Near Kobani, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL armored vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL weapon system.
- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck one large and three small tactical units, destroying three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL

fighting positions.

- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL staging area, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL structure.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL excavators, an ISIL building and an ISIL fighting position.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 30 April 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 30 April 2015.

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.

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 30 April 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 220,000 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 in my essay for [March 2015](#), contains an eloquent description of the destruction of Syria.

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](#)), 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.

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.

This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria20.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to historical documents.

[my homepage](#)