

Syria & Iraq: May 2015

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 18 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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 summer time is +3 hours from GMT. Baghdad is +3 hours from GMT.

Every day, I checked the websites of [The Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, [Iraqi News](#), [Rudaw](#) in Kurdish Iraq, the U.S. Central Command, and the Associated Press for news to summarize in this essay. On 26 May, I stumbled across the new URL of the English language version of [All Iraq News](#). When I found significant news, I attempted to find and cite the original source.

Terse Summary of Syria Fighters

It is helpful to understanding the Syrian civil war to divide the opposition fighters into three groups of people:

1. The so-called "rebels" are moderates, many of whom are part of the Free Syrian Army. 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

Chlorine in Syria

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.

In my essay for [April 2015](#), I cited three separate chlorine attacks in Syria from 16 March to 29 April 2015. There were more alleged chlorine attacks in May 2015:

- On 2 May in Saraqeb, in Idlib province, with 40 people injured. [SOHR](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 7 May in villages of Janoudieh, Kansafrah, and Kafr Batiekh, all in Idlib province, with at least 69 people injured. [Associated Press](#).
-

On 1 May the [Associated Press](#) reported that OPCW has a fact-finding team ready to go to Syria to investigate use of chlorine bombs, but the Syrian government had *not* granted permission for the team to enter Syria. The AP does not identify the source of their information, which is the 19th monthly report from OPCW at ¶13.

On 5 May, *neither* the U.N. Secretary General's webpage on reports transmitted to the Security Council, *nor* the Security Council webpage on reports received, listed the 19th monthly report from OPCW, which the Secretary General transmitted on 28 April. Moreover, the U.N. document delivery system was again nonfunctional, with requests returning error Nr. 507. However, the report is publicly available at [ReliefWeb](#).

Undeclared Weapons in Syria

Under the original schedule issued by OPCW in response to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118, Syria was required to declare *all* of their chemical weapons no later than 27 Oct 2013.

On 8 May 2015, Reuters reported that the Syrian government has apparently failed to declare all of their chemical weapons.

International inspectors have found traces of sarin and VX nerve agent at a military research site in Syria that had not been declared to the global chemical weapons watchdog, diplomatic sources said on Friday [8 May].

Samples taken by experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition and Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in December and January tested positive for chemical precursors needed to make the toxic agents, the sources told Reuters on the condition of anonymity because the information is confidential.

"This is a pretty strong indication they have been lying about what they did with sarin," one diplomatic source said. "They have so far been unable to give a satisfactory explanation about this finding."

Anthony Deutsch, "Exclusive - Weapons inspectors find undeclared sarin and VX traces in Syria: diplomats," [Reuters](#), 18:12 GMT, 8 May 2015.

On 9 May, Agence France-Press reported:

Chemical weapons inspectors have found traces of precursors for the deadly VX and sarin nerve agents at an undeclared site in Syria, according to a European Union document seen Friday [8 May].

Maris Klisans, Latvia's permanent representative at the Hague-based Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), told fellow delegates at a closed-door meeting Thursday [7 May] that the 28-country bloc had a number of "concerns" over Damascus's handling of its chemical weapons issue.

"Last but not least, the recent finding of the (OPCW) Declaration Assessment Team, showing traces of precursors of VX and sarin were found on a site where they were not supposed to be, figure high on that list," Klisans told the delegates, delivering the statement on behalf of the EU.

"Syria chemical inspectors find sarin traces," [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP), 04:17 GMT, 9 May 2015.

On 12 May, *The New York Times* reported:

International inspectors have found traces of banned toxic chemicals in at least three military locations in Syria, four diplomats and officials said, less than two years after President Bashar al-Assad agreed to dismantle the country's chemical arsenal.

Traces of sarin, a nerve agent, were found in drainage pipes and in artillery shells in two places, and traces of another banned toxin, ricin, were found in a third location, a scientific research center, according to a United Nations diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential reports from the inspectors.

....

Taken together [with accusations of Syrian government forces dropping chlorine bombs on insurgent-held areas], the recent events raised troubling questions for international

inspectors about whether Damascus was violating the terms of a deal brokered by Russia and the United States in 2013 that forestalled an American military strike.

....

A violation of the deal struck to eliminate Syria's chemical arsenal would undermine President Obama's single claim to policy success in Syria, where four years of war has displaced nearly half the country, killed more than 200,000 people and shown no sign of abating. It could also embarrass Russia, Mr. Assad's most powerful military and diplomatic patron.

....

.... Evidence of chemical weapons remains a fraught issue for global public opinion more than a decade after false claims of an Iraqi chemical weapons program were used to justify the American invasion that deposed Saddam Hussein.

Somini Sengupta, Marlise Simons, & Anne Barnard, "Inspectors in Syria Find Traces of Banned Military Chemicals," [NY Times](#), 12 May 2015.

Also see [Associated Press](#) on 13 May.

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 2015, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

Deaths in Syria

On 1 June the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a new death toll of *at least* 6657 dead in the Syrian civil war during May 2015.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 6657 people in May 2015.

The death toll is as follows:

- 1285 civilians, including 272 children and 212 women, distributed as follows:
 - 734 civilians, including 148 children and 113 women killed by airstrikes carried out by the regime air force.
 - 45 citizens, including a woman, tortured to death in the regime jails.
 - 111 civilians, including 46 children and 16 women, killed due to shelling by Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic State, the rebel and Islamic battalions.
 - 75 civilians, including 33 children and 25 women, killed in airstrikes carried out by US-led coalition warplanes.
 - 159 people, including 14 children and 14 women, executed by IS militants.
 - 20 civilians, including 2 children and 5 women killed in southwest the city of Ras al-Ayn (Sari Kanyeh); the activists accused YPG of shooting them,
 - 141 people, including 29 children and 38 women, died due to the regime firing and shelling, explosion of mines and IEDs, firing by unknown gunmen and in unknown circumstances.
- Syrian fighters of YPG, Rebel and Islamist factions: 788.
- Non-Syrian fighters of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaysh al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army, Turkestan Islamic Party and the Chechen Jonound al-Sham: 2109.
- Defected soldiers: 5
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 1568
- Militiamen of the People's Committees and NDF as well as informers: 674
- Hezbollah militiamen: 51
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 157
- Unidentified victims (documented by photos and footages): 20

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 or IS jails.

SOHR renews its appeal to UN Security Council to assume its responsibilities and work on using its power in order to stop the daily killing committed against the Syrian people and destroying their social structure, coexistence, past, present and future by using all kind of weapons, whether they are firearms or media, where the Syria helicopters intensified and concentrated on using explosive barrels in the last six months Despite the adoption of resolution 2139 by the Security Council, where the most important mission of this resolution is to maintain the international peace and security.

"More than 6000 people killed in May," [SOHR](#), 1 June 2015.

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

My webpage cites my extrapolation of the total number dead from the beginning of the Syrian civil war on 18 March 2011 through 31 May 2015: 229,312 dead.

Rebels in Syria

Training of Free Syrian Army Begins

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. The Pentagon has moved with glacial slowness during the past seven months on this project. 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.

The Pentagon has failed to provide information at its website on the train-and-equip mission for Syrian rebels, so I have relied on foreign news sources.

On 1 May, *Hurriyet Daily News* in Turkey reported the arrival of U.S. trainers and equipment in Turkey:

Some 123 U.S. soldiers arrived in Turkey as part of a program to train and equip the putatively moderate Syrian opposition, along with weapons that are being transferred to Incirlik Airbase in the southern province of Adana.

Eighty-three of the U.S. soldiers have been deployed at Incirlik Airbase, while 40 of them have been transferred to the Hirfanl base in the Central Anatolian province of Krehir.

....

The Syrians who will be trained at Hirfanl are expected to be transferred to the southern province of Hatay where they will be equipped with necessary briefing for the use of arms, including anti-tank weapons, infantry rifles and machine guns, before travelling to Syria to join fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), according to sources.

Concerned that radicals could infiltrate the trainees of the program, Washington chose to determine a broad group of Syrian opposition members on its own intelligence information, with the option that Ankara could exclude any rebels from the training program.

Sevil Erkus, "US soldiers arrive at Incirlik Airbase with weapons for train-equip program," [Hurriyet Daily](#), 1 May 2015.

Another version at: "US military teams, arms land in Turkey to train and equip Syrian forces," [Rudaw](#), 1 May 2015.

On 2 May, Reuters reported:

The latest U.S.-led plan to train and arm a Syrian opposition force will start in Turkey on May 9, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told a Turkish newspaper.

....

On Friday [1 May] Cavusoglu told Turkish daily Sabah that the U.S. and Turkey share the view of a Syria without President Bashar Assad.

"There isn't any political or other issue. At first, 300 people will be trained, followed by the next 300 and, at the end of the year, the number of trained and equipped fighters will reach 2,000," he said.

Dasha Afanasieva, "Turkey, U.S. to start train-and-equip plan for Syria rebels May 9 — Turkey," [Reuters](#), 13:41 GMT, 2 May 2015.

On 7 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported that training of Syrian rebels had begun "a few days ago" [4-5 May?] in Jordan, and "would start [in Turkey] this weekend" [10-11 May]. About 350 Americans are involved in training an initial group of 90 Syrian rebels. See also [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters); [NY Times](#).

On 7 May, Carter and Dempsey gave a press briefing at the Pentagon, which mentioned the training. The Secretary of Defense said:

[QUESTION: "what responsibility does the U.S. have once [the trained rebels] do go operational?"]

Now, very good question, and of course we would have some responsibility to protect

forces. Now, remember, their mission is to fight ISIL. So, that's the combat we expect them to get involved in, and we do expect to support them in that regard. If they are contested by regime forces, again, we would have some responsibility to help them. We have not decided yet in detail how we would exercise that responsibility, but we have acknowledged that we have that responsibility.

....

In the case of the train and equip forces, they are being trained and equipped to fight ISIL. That is the purpose, and that is the basis upon which they're being vetted and trained. The question was raised earlier about what happens if — and they are not being asked by us, and it's not part of our program to have them engage the forces, Assad's forces.

So the question arises, if Assad's forces undertake to engage them, would we have some responsibility towards them? And as I indicated, we would. But they're not being fielded for that purpose. They're being fielded for the purpose of engaging ISIL. That'll be their principal mission, and that's one of the bases on which they would join our program in the first place.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Ash Carter and General Martin E. Dempsey in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [transcript](#), 7 May 2015. [press release](#).

Contrast Carter's clear statement that the only purpose of these trained rebels is to engage ISIL with the Syrian National Coalition's statement that these rebels will also fight against Assad:

Vice-President of the Syrian Coalition Hisham Marwa said that the announcement of the start of the US-Turkish train and equip program for the FSA is a step that can be utilized in the development of the FSA's capabilities, especially since this program comes in the context of preparing qualified fighters to defend the Syrian people against the terrorism of the Assad regime and ISIS.

"Syrian Coalition Hails Commencement of FSA Train and Equip Program," [SNC](#), 8 May 2015.

On 7 May, CENTCOM issued the following press release, which is quoted here in its entirety:

The U.S. military and partner forces have begun training the initial class of appropriately vetted Syrian opposition recruits this week to support the effort to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL in Syria.

This multinational and interagency program involves coalition military and foreign ministries, intelligence agencies, and civilian investigative services. The training curriculum is designed to meet the specific needs of the Syrian opposition forces and may be tailored to specific mission and personnel requirements.

Training will cover a range of critical combat skills, including marksmanship, casualty care, land navigation, communications, leadership, and law of armed conflict and human rights principles.

The training phase is a critical step in the Syria train and equip mission designed to build the capability of the appropriately vetted Syrian fighters so that they can defend the Syrian people from attacks by ISIL and secure territory controlled by the Syrian opposition; protect the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from threats posed by terrorists in Syria; and promote the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria.

The international community recognizes the significant threat posed by ISIL in the region, and the train-and-equip mission is a vital part of the campaign to counter ISIL. The more than 60 partners of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL continue their synchronized and mutually-reinforcing efforts to degrade and ultimately defeat this shared threat.

Editor's note: The safety and security of these new trainees and the trainers are our top priority. For operational security and force protection reasons, specific details regarding the class size, training course length of time, and the locations of the training will not be provided.

"Initial Class of Syrian Opposition Forces Begin Training," [Central Command](#), 7 May 2015. (The Editor's Note at the end is present in the version posted at the CENTCOM website.)

My comments: In the CENTCOM press release, notice in the first paragraph that the purpose of training these rebels is "to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL in Syria." No other purpose is mentioned in this first paragraph. But in the fourth paragraph two other missions are vaguely mentioned: (1) "secure territory controlled by the Syrian opposition" and (2) "promote the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria." In the former, was the territory seized from ISIL or from Assad? There is no answer. In the latter, does "promoting the conditions" include defeating Assad's military? Again there is no answer. The final paragraph mentions "ISIL" three times, reinforcing the focus of the first paragraph *only* on ISIL.

This train-and-equip program needs a spiffy name. I suggest "Operation Piddling Little Lizard", which conveys the fact that the program is too small and will be ineffective in eradicating ISIL. Worse, either (1) the trained rebels will defect to jihadist groups or (2) Islamic terrorists will capture the U.S.-supplied weapons — both of which have happened before.

An additional problem is that the Number One goal of the rebels is to depose Assad, while the USA *intends* for these rebels to *only* engage ISIL. So what happens when these rebels attack Assad's army, or are attacked by Assad's army? The U.S. Defense Secretary still has *not* decided the answer to that question. I think it would be prudent to determine the answer to that question *before* we begin any train-and-equip of rebels in Syria.

On 12 May, Turkey said that training of rebels from Syria had again been "delayed" because of "technical reasons". But 90 rebels are being trained in Jordan. [Today's Zaman](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 24 May, it was reported that Turkey and the USA had agreed "in principle" to provide airstrikes in Syria in support of rebels that were trained. The *Daily Sabah* in Turkey reported: Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, speaking to Daily Sabah in an exclusive interview while attending the fifth MIKTA Foreign Ministers Meeting in Seoul, said the moderate Syrian opposition forces that will be part of the train and equip program in Krsehir won't be abandoned once they are back in Syria. He said ignoring their plight once in Syria was against what the program wanted to achieve, adding that the U.S. and Turkey had agreed in principle to provide the trained and equipped moderate forces with air protection in Syria. He said that the air cover for trained Syrian forces was not part of the comprehensive plan put forward by Turkey that included setting up no-fly zones and safe zones in Syria.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said that Turkey and the U.S agreed to provide air protection for the moderate Syrian opposition forces that are currently being trained as part of the train-and-equip program which started in the Turkish province of Krsehir recently and aims to train up to 2,000 fighters until the end of this year. Regarding the allegations that Turkey and Saudi Arabia have agreed upon an operation in Syria and Turkey will become a part of a sectarian war, Minister Cavusoglu said that all of these claims are conspiracy theories and he underlined that Turkey is against sectarianism.

....

.....

[QUESTION:] There was speculation on the train-and-equip agreement signed with the U.S.. Is there a problem or contradiction with the U.S.?

[Cavusoglu:] There are no problems or contradictions; there is only a delay. A day is named; however, due to a delay in technical preparations, it may become obsolete. There was a delay in logistics and the arrival of the personnel.

[QUESTION:] What are Turkey's expectations from the train-and-equip program?

[Cavusoglu:] We aim to consolidate the moderate opposition in Syria both politically and militarily. We advocate a political resolution, but a significant alternative in the field is also needed. Both ISIS and the regime forces continue their assaults and killings. Aleppo's defense against these forces is extremely important. Superiority in the field must be provided. As there are no military operations against these forces currently, with this program, we are trying to achieve a balance. The opposition forces are fighting on both fronts; while the fight against ISIS is prioritized, the regime must be also stopped.

.....

[QUESTION:] Is there cooperation with the U.S. in providing air support for the train-and-equip army?

[Cavusoglu:] Of course. They have to be supported via air. If you do not protect them

or provide air support, what is the point?

[QUESTION:] Does this air support include the use of armed drones from the Incirlik air base?

[Cavusoglu:] These are technical details. There is a principle agreement on providing air support. How it is going to be provided is in the responsibility of the army.

[QUESTION:] There was news that alleged that Turkey and Saudi Arabia agreed on an operation in Syria, and Turkey will become a part of a sectarian war. How do you evaluate these allegations?

[Cavusoglu:] These are only conspiracy theories. We are against sectarianism. We advocate national unity in every country that is in a crisis. This is true for Yemen, Libya, and also for Syria; however, in Syria, this must be accomplished without Bashar Assad. He delegitimized himself when he killed 300,000 people. It is not possible for him to govern Syria anymore; he will not be able to unite the nation. There are not any agreements with Saudi Arabia regarding Syria; however, we are of the same mind regarding the regime in Syria, ISIS, and extensive strategy. While we had different opinions on Egypt, there were not any differences concerning Syria. The leader of the main opposition party even claimed that we were going into war in Syria. As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we are not obliged to answer every wild speculation made every day.

Ali Ünal, "Turkey, US to provide air protection for moderate Syrian opposition forces," [Daily Sabah](#), 24 May 2015.

The alleged agreement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia is discussed [below](#).

The Associated Press reported:

Turkey and the U.S. have agreed in "principle" to provide air protection to Syrian rebels being trained and equipped to fight Islamic State militants, once they enter Syrian territory for battle, Turkey's foreign minister said.

The two countries agreed in February to train and equip up to 15,000 Syrians under the \$500 million U.S. program designed to add a credible ground force to an air bombing campaign against the militant group.

The program suffered unexplained delays as the U.S. resisted Turkish calls for the force to be also prepared to fight the Syrian regime and the sides tried to reach agreement on who to train.

The U.S. has also refused a Turkish proposal for enforcing a safe area and a no-fly zone in Syria, prompting questions on how trained rebels would be protected when they entered Syria.

"They have to be supported via air," Mevlut Cavusoglu, the Turkish foreign minister told the pro-government Daily Sabah newspaper in comments published Monday

[25 May]. "If you do not protect them or provide air support, what is the point?"

Cavusoglu didn't provide further details on the air cover or confirm whether the air support would include the use of armed drones taking off from an air base in southern Turkey.

Suzan Fraser, "Turkey, US to provide air protection to Syrian rebels," [Associated Press](#), 14:35 GMT, 25 May 2015.

Reuters reported that the U.S. Government claims no decision was made:

The United States and Turkey have agreed "in principle" to give air support to some forces from Syria's mainstream opposition, Turkey's foreign minister said, in what if confirmed could mark an expansion of U.S. involvement in the conflict.

U.S. officials acknowledged ongoing discussions with Turkey about a range of options to step up the fight against Islamic State, but said no decisions had been made.

"We're in ongoing discussions with the Turks across all lines of counter-ISIL efforts. Our understanding is no decisions have been made," said one U.S. defense official who was not authorized to speak publicly.

....

Cavusoglu did not go into details on what "in principle" meant or what kind of air power would be provided or by whom.

"They have to be supported via air. If you do not protect them or provide air support, what is the point?," Cavusoglu told the pro-government Daily Sabah newspaper during a visit to Seoul.

Dasha Afanasieva, "Turkey says in deal with U.S. on air support for Syria rebels," [Reuters](#), 07:22 GMT, 25 May 2015.

My comment is that U.S. airstrikes inside Syria in support of rebels would be a violation of Syrian sovereignty, in the same way that airstrikes inside Syria to attack ISIL are a violation of Syrian sovereignty. One could argue that airstrikes in support of U.S. trained rebels who are fighting against ISIL are not different from airstrikes in support of Kurdish rebels in Kobani — both are fighting only against ISIL, and Assad's military is *not* involved. The real problem comes when the U.S.-trained rebels engage Assad's military. Any airstrikes in support of rebels who are fighting against Assad would be a significant escalation of U.S. involvement in the Syrian civil war. The U.S. Government seems to be avoiding addressing this problem by pretending that the U.S.-trained rebels will *only* fight against ISIL. But, as cited above, both the Syrian National Coalition and Turkey believe the rebels will fight against *both* Assad and ISIL.

On 26 May, the deputy foreign minister of Syria said that any air support to rebels in Syria would be "aggression" against Syria. [Associated Press](#).

On 28 May, [Reuters](#) reported an anonymous U.S. official said that training of Syrian rebels

had finally begun in Turkey, after months of delay.

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.

On 16 May, [The Telegraph](#) published a review of recent military victories by insurgents, then suggests that the inner core of Assad's government has internal power struggles, and the Syrian army is "weakened and demoralised".

On 21 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights ([SOHR](#)) announced that ISIL now controls more than half of Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Months ago, ISIL controlled only one-third of Syria. Success for ISIL is failure of Assad.

On 25 May, Sammy Ketz of Agence France Press suggested that the current nation of Syria might be partitioned into four nations:

1. Assad currently controls 25% of Syria's area, but 60% of its population. Assad would continue to control Damascus, Hama, Homs, and the port city of Latakia.
2. the Islamic emirate under Nusra Front has 22% of the population
3. the ISIL caliphate has 12% of the population
4. the Kurds have 6% of the population

Such a partition could benefit Assad by concentrating his limited military resources on a small area of land. [Daily Star](#). The problem that I see is that ISIL and Nusra Front would probably not stop fighting after the partition, so Assad would continue to be weakened by war.

Turkey & Saudi Arabia agree to help anti-Assad insurgents

On 7 May, the Associated Press reports that Saudi Arabia and Turkey agreed to assist insurgents who want to depose Assad. This agreement puts Saudi Arabia and Turkey on a different path than the USA, which first wants to destroy ISIL. Moreover, Turkey is openly tolerant of Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda in Syria), which the USA sees as a dangerous terrorist organization. Saudi Arabia's change in policy seems motivated by a desire to decrease the influence of Iran in Syria. But opposing Assad (and Iran) in Syria means helping Islamic terrorists take control of Syria. [Associated Press](#), 16:06 GMT and later revised; [Daily Star](#)(AP); [Today's Zaman](#)(AP); all on 7 May.

In the evening of 7 May (Arab time), I looked at the websites of the Saudi Press Agency, Anadolu Agency in Turkey, and Reuters but found nothing on this alleged agreement. The [Daily Sabah](#) in Turkey quoted Turkish government officials as denying the agreement with Saudi Arabia: "The only cooperation between Turkey and Saudi Arabia regarding Syria is the train-and-equip program." Again, on 9 May, the Prime Minister of Turkey denied any new agreement with Saudi Arabia. [Today's Zaman](#); [Daily Sabah](#).

It appears that this alleged agreement occurred in March 2015, and was accidentally revealed on 7 May. Beginning in April 2015, there was a series of military victories in Syria by rebels who were supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. (See my essay for [April 2015](#).) As explained in the following paragraphs, these military victories may have been facilitated by an agreement between Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

The Washington Post reported on 29 April 2015:

U.S. allies in the Middle East have ramped up their support for rebels fighting against Syrian forces in recent months, potentially widening a gulf over strategy between the Obama administration and its regional partners.

....

The delivery of additional weapons and financial aid from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar have facilitated recent advances against government forces in northwest Syria by the Army of Conquest, a newly formed umbrella of diverse rebel groups, including al-Qaeda's affiliate and other Islamist groups, along with "moderate" fighters.

....

But what many view as a leadership vacuum is most acutely felt in the case of Syria. In response, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, with an assist from Qatar, recently ended a long estrangement to address their shared concern over the lagging fight against Assad.

Karen DeYoung & Liz Sly, "U.S. allies in Middle East ramping up support for rebel forces in Syria," [Washington Post](#), 29 April 2015.

A columnist for *Today's Zaman* in Turkey wrote on 1 May:

All observers agree the recent rebel gains are a result of better cooperation between the

three main sponsors of the anti-Assad rebels: Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. In March, Erdogan visited new Saudi King Salman and discussed the possibilities to increase support and combine rebel efforts to make them more efficient. It paved the way for a deal between two of Syria's most powerful rebel factions, Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. They formed a new umbrella organization, Jaish al-Fatah (Army of Conquest), which managed to unite most of the smaller Islamist rebel groups in the north, but also the remaining, moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA) units.

Joost Lagendijk, "What is Turkey up to in Syria?," [Today's Zaman](#), 1 May 2015.

On 7 May, the Associated Press reported:

Under Turkish and Saudi patronage, the rebel advance has undermined a sense that the Assad government is winning the civil war — and demonstrated how the new alliance can yield immediate results. The pact was sealed in early March when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan flew to Riyadh to meet Saudi's recently crowned King Salman. Relations had been tense between Erdogan and the late King Abdullah, in great part over Erdogan's support of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Saudi shift appears to be part of broader proxy war against Iran that includes Saudi-led airstrikes in Yemen against Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The new partnership adds Saudi money to Turkey's logistical support.

....

The Turkish-Saudi agreement has led to a new joint command center in the northeastern Syrian province of Idlib. There, a coalition of groups — including Nusra and other Islamist brigades such as Ahrar al-Sham that Washington views as extremist — are progressively eroding Assad's front. The rebel coalition also includes more moderate elements of the Free Syrian Army that have received U.S. support in the past.

At the end of March, the alliance — calling itself "Conquest Army" — took the city of Idlib, followed by the strategic town of Jisr al-Shughour and then a government military base.

Desmond Butler, "APNewsBreak: Turkey, Saudi in pact to help anti-Assad rebels," [Associated Press](#), 23:06 GMT, 7 May 2015.

On 8 May, Reuters reported on this topic, but did *not* mention any new agreement or pact between Saudi Arabia and Turkey:

Turkey is cultivating closer relations with Saudi Arabia's new leadership, putting aside long-standing differences over political Islam and aligning efforts to solve regional crises including the war in Syria.

The rapprochement between two of the Middle East's biggest powers already appears to be paying dividends in Syria, helping to drive advances by Islamist rebels fighting side-by-side with Western-backed groups against President Bashar al-Assad's forces.

....

Fear of the threat from Shi'ite Iran is a prime motivator for Riyadh.

.....

But common to both U.S. allies [Saudi Arabia and Turkey] is a sense that Washington is disengaging from the Middle East.

Riyadh has watched nervously as the United States pursues an agreement with Iran over its disputed nuclear programme; Ankara has grown frustrated with the U.S. focus on fighting Islamic State radicals in Syria and what it regards as Washington's reluctance to confront Assad.

.....

"Our views on Syria are aligned with Saudi Arabia. Turkey is working together with not only Saudi Arabia, but also its other allies," said [Turkey's] foreign ministry spokesman Tanju Bilgic, adding this had been true all along. "There is no new factor." Nick Tattersall & Orhan Coskun, "Regional crises push Turkey, Saudi closer despite ideological rift," [Reuters](#), 15:27 GMT, 8 May 2015.

In searching Google News for this agreement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, I found that the agreement was first reported on 12 April by [Huffington Post](#). Two Arab newspapers cite the *Huffington Post* article: [Today's Zaman](#), 13 April; [Arab News](#), 15 April. On 13 April, the [Financial Times](#) published an apparently independent analysis of the Saudi/Turkey agreement.

My comments: While Turkey denies that there is a new (March 2015) agreement with Saudi Arabia about Syria, a change in support for insurgents in Syria is obvious. The Saudi-Turkey agreement is bad news for Assad. It is also good news for Islamic terrorists (e.g., Nusra and ISIL), who will flourish in Syria after Assad is deposed. Note that Obama, with his long-standing obsession with deposing Assad, recognizes that defeating ISIL is the first priority in Syria.

Obama's Summit with Gulf Nations

President Obama had arranged for a summit of leaders of Gulf Cooperation Council nations (i.e., Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman) at the White House and Camp David in Maryland on 13-14 May. In addition, Obama had scheduled a private meeting at the White House with the new King of Saudi Arabia on 13 May, before the larger meeting later that day.

But on 10 May, the King suddenly announced that he would *not* travel to the USA for these meetings. The Saudi Press Agency announced the cancelation at 19:04 GMT on 10 May, and gave the official reason: the King needed to monitor the crisis in Yemen. There was *no* expression of either regret or disappointment in the Saudi official announcement, making the announcement appear brusque. Commentators (e.g., *The New York Times*, and *The Wall*

Street Journal) initially interpreted the King's sudden cancelation as a snub to Obama, because of the USA continuing negotiations with Iran over nuclear weapons. [NY Times](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [Reuters](#); [Saudi Gazette](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#); all on 10 May. Also see: [Sydney Morning Herald](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 11 May.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Obama's summit was collapsing, three days before it began:

King Salman's decision appeared to ripple across the Persian Gulf. Bahrain said on Sunday that its ruler, King Hamad bin Isaa Al Khalifa, had opted not to travel to Washington.

The only two monarchs from the six countries confirmed to attend the summit at the White House and the presidential retreat at Camp David, Md., were the emirs of Qatar and Kuwait.

Jay Solomon, Carol E. Lee, & Ahmed Al Omran, "Rulers Snub Arab Summit, Clouding U.S. Bid for Iran Deal," [Wall Street Journal](#), 20:00 EDT, 10 May 2015.

On the evening of 11 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported a story titled: "White House denies Obama's Gulf overtures are unraveling". But the [NY Times](#) reports: "Gulf leaders, led by King Salman of Saudi Arabia, are making their growing displeasure with the Obama administration known ahead of meetings this week at Camp David."

My comment is that diplomatic protocol makes it appropriate for a visiting head of state to meet the host head of state, while a visiting foreign minister meets the host foreign minister. But here, Obama, a head of state, will be meeting with four foreign ministers, plus two heads of state. The two heads of state are from two small nations, Kuwait and Qatar. Instead of being formal, Obama is pretending not to notice the snubs, in order to salvage his summit with Gulf nations.

As a humorous note, the King of Bahrain is attending a horse show organized by Windsor Castle in England, instead of sitting in boring meetings with Obama. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(Reuters); [The Telegraph](#) ("The most pointed snub...."). This is a provocative way to snub Obama.

In a press conference on 14 May after the summit, Obama claimed that he had convinced the Gulf nations to endorse the U.S. negotiations with Iran. [White House](#). But the [Associated Press](#) said: "Obama's claim of winning Arab support for his nuclear diplomacy appears far from certain." And [Reuters](#) said: "it was unclear whether Obama had made significant headway toward Gulf Arab backing for an emerging Iran deal."

On 15 May, Obama was interviewed by *Al-Arabiya*.

QUESTION: Are we going to see the end of all bloodshed [in Syria] before you leave office, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: I'll be honest, probably not.

.....

THE PRESIDENT: And in Syria, our efforts have to be as part of a broader international coalition, and ultimately a military solution is not going to be the solution. If the United States simply sent in troops into Syria — our military is very effective, and for a short period of time, we potentially could come down on the side of the opposition against Assad. But in terms of governance, in terms of keeping the peace, in terms of working through some of the sectarian issues that have plagued that country as well as the region for such a long time, those would still be there.

....

QUESTION; So forgive me, Mr. President, when people rise and they demand their rights, they look up to the United States.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

QUESTION: They don't look to any other country. And especially after President Assad used chemical weapons, people felt they've been let down. The civil war did not start from day one. They felt that you could have done something in the beginning and you didn't.

THE PRESIDENT: But if you look at the history of the process, essentially what they're arguing is that we should have invaded Syria and overthrown the Syrian regime — which, by the way, would be a violation of international law, and undoubtedly we would then be criticized for that, as well.

....

Nadia Bilbassy-Charters, "U.S. President Barack Obama in an exclusive interview with Al Arabiya," [Al-Arabiya](#), 15 May 2015.

So Obama accepts that the war in Syria will continue past January 2017. Unfortunately for Syria, Obama is probably correct.

Obama, and many others, have repeatedly said that there is *no* military solution to the civil war in Syria. But look at what is actually happening in Syria. The insurgents continue to fight, and the insurgents refuse to attend peace negotiations. Iran pours weapons and military advisers into Syria. Russia sends weapons to Syria. Many of the Gulf nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Qatar) have sent weapons to the insurgents, and beginning in March 2015 Saudi Arabia and Turkey have increased their flow of weapons to insurgents. The USA, through the CIA and now beginning with a train-and-equip program, have supplied weapons to rebels. In summary, the insurgents, the Assad regime, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Russia, and the USA *all* act like there is a military solution.

Back in 2013 and continuing through Aug 2014, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, repeatedly called for nations to *stop* sending weapons to Syria. Ban was repeatedly ignored by everyone. Incidentally, the attack on Kobani by ISIL seems to have been the key event that ended Ban's calls to stop sending weapons to Syria. (See my essay for [October 2014](#), where I remarked: "When the peacemakers and humanitarians begin calling

for more military intervention, we know the situation is dire.") Sending weapons to Syria means there will be more killings, more maimings, and more destruction of buildings.

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 2014 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 begins meetings on 5 May 2015

In response to public marching orders from Ban, on 14 April 2015 Mistura proposed one-on-one talks between himself and opposition groups in Syria and governments of nations involved in Syria. (See my essay for [April 2015](#).) Such talks would begin in May 2015. Somehow these one-on-one talks are expected by the U.N. to revive the peace negotiations.

On 4 May, Agence France-Presse reported that de Mistura would begin one-on-one talks on Tuesday, 5 May:

"We don't expect any major announcement, we don't expect any concluding communiques that will be signed by everybody," [U.N. Geneva spokesman Fawzi] told reporters.

De Mistura himself hinted last week that a new round of full negotiations to end the conflict might be possible, perhaps starting late next month [June 2015].

In the meantime, [de Mistura] wants the separate consultations to take place out of the public eye, [U.N. Geneva spokesman] Fawzi said.

"Separate talks with Syria rival sides to start Tuesday: UN," [Daily Star](#)(AFP), 4 May 2015.

On 5 May, de Mistura held a press conference, but journalists reported less information than was provided by his spokesman on 4 May. See, e.g., [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). A transcript of de Mistura's opening remarks was provided by the United Nations Office in Geneva, which says in part:

The Geneva Consultations are not a one-off meeting; and they are not a conference. This is not Geneva III. There is no beginning, no middle and end here. No big round table with multilateral representation. No big communique expected at the end. And these are not peace talks. These are closed, low-key, separate, structured discussions with the parties, to consult on the current crisis in Syria, the road ahead and the final destination of a Syria at peace with itself. This is the necessary ground work before we even get to a negotiating table.

As it has been mentioned earlier, the first meetings are starting already as of today and for an initial period of five to six weeks. But there is no cut-off date. This is a rolling process which will be expanded, as necessary, with additional players and actors to be consulted as we move along. By the end of June we will assess progress on this stock-taking of views and decide on the next steps. It is possible that these consultations may continue beyond that date in this or other format. You should not expect, therefore, any major public announcements during or even at the conclusion of this process.

This is a very intense and serious effort however and I hope you appreciate the nature of these discussions, which by the definition of being low-key have to be away from the public eye. That said, we — through Ahmad [Fawzi] and my own office — will ensure that you are briefed as regularly as the process allows.

There have been some questions and I'm sure one of them will be — and I would like to tell you in advance — because I am sure, who is invited, how many are invited. I know that it is a fair question to ask. At this stage over 40 Syrian groups, obviously in addition to the Government of Syria, entities, individuals, and about 20 regional and international actors, including the neighbouring countries and of course members of the P5 of the Security Council. This process will be expanded to others as we move along. We want to get as broad a spectrum of views as possible. We want to hear their point of view. We want to see what they think could be the end of this conflict. This includes political and military actors, women — Syrian women, who have a lot to say and have been trying hard to have their voice heard — victims, civil society, diaspora, religious and community leaders and so on.

Staffan de Mistura, "Opening Statement At Press Conference On The Geneva Consultations On Syria," [transcript](#), 5 May 2015.

My comment: de Mistura has invited 60 groups (40 from Syria and 20 nations) for talks that will probably end sometime around 30 June 2015. Not counting Saturdays and Sundays, there are only 41 days until the end of June. That means the average group will spend about 2/3 day talking with de Mistura. Mistura's schedule may be too rushed. Some groups may deserve two days of Mistura's time, to fully explain and discuss their position on critical issues.

So prepare for silence from de Mistura during May and June, followed by an inability to convene a peace conference for Syria.

On 11 May, the Syrian National Coalition — who represented the opposition in the Geneva negotiations in Jan/Feb 2014 — said they will *not* meet with de Mistura. [Associated Press](#).

On 11 May, a leader of Syrian Kurds met with de Mistura. [Today's Zaman](#).

On 12 May, the Vice President of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) said: "We were waiting for de Mistura to invite us to negotiations, and instead he invited us to unimportant consultations at a time when the Syrian opposition is winning key victories on the ground. The invitation to Iran only strained the situation further and that's our basic problem with de Mistura." The Coalition was also miffed that de Mistura invited approximately 40 groups in Syria to talk with him. [SNC](#). My comment is that the SNC seems to believe it is the *only* voice of people in Syria, when the SNC is actually a bunch of expatriates who have not lived in Syria in recent years.

Later on 12 May, the Syrian National Coalition abruptly changed course and decided to send the head of the SNC's Legal Committee to meet with de Mistura. The SNC representative "will hand a letter to de Mistura containing an explanation of the implementation of the Geneva Communique and also the 'Document of Basic Principles for a Political Settlement' which was ratified and adopted by the Syrian Coalition and the Kurdish National Council." [SNC](#).

On 13 May, [Reuters](#) reports that "30 opposition armed groups" sent a letter to de Mistura that accuses de Mistura of bias in favor of Assad. The groups were also grieved that de Mistura will meet with Iran. For those and other reasons, the groups rejected an invitation to meet with de Mistura.

On 14 May, [Reuters](#) reports that the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) sent a letter to de Mistura that claims that Mistura's talking with 40 groups from Syria "may have a negative impact on your mission and the role and credibility of the United Nations". The letter also objects to de Mistura's talking with Iran. Reuters clarifies that Khaled Khoja, the current president of the SNC, had declined a personal invitation to meet with Mistura in Geneva. As mentioned above, the SNC then sent the head of their legal committee to Geneva to deliver some letters and documents to Mistura.

On 22 May, the United Nations issued a [press release](#) about de Mistura's continuing meetings with Syrians.

On 27 May, [Anadolu Agency](#) in Turkey reported that de Mistura had called for a "humanitarian cease-fire" in Syria. One day later, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters had reported this story. Apparently no one seriously considers Mistura's call for a ceasefire in Syria.

third peace conference in Moscow?

On 26-29 Jan 2015 and again on 6-9 April 2015 there were meetings in Moscow between the Syrian government and various opposition leaders. (See my essays for [Jan 2015](#) and [April 2015](#).) The second conference ended without setting a date for a third conference.

On 9 May, I searched Google News for reports of scheduling a third conference in Moscow, but I found nothing.

On 29 May, I searched Google News again, and found a vague report in [RIA-Novosti](#): "Moscow is willing to host the third round of intra-Syrian talks, with many participants desiring to continue negotiations in this format, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said Thursday [28 May]."

I suggest that additional, and more frequent (e.g., twice/month), conferences are desirable. While one would *not* expect significant agreements to come quickly, that is precisely why it is desirable for the parties to meet frequently and continue their discussions, until compromise is reached. Holding infrequent conferences (e.g., two months between successive conferences) slows progress towards reaching a compromise.

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 2014, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 2165, to repair some of the defects in Resolution 2139. (See my [ninth essay](#) on Syria.)

My recollection is that I had to download Ban's monthly report for April 2015 from ReliefWeb, because the U.N. document delivery system was nonfunctional on 22 April. As mentioned above in connection with the 19th monthly report from OPCW to the Security Council, the United Nations document delivery system has been nonfunctional during May 2015. Fortunately, one can find Ban's May 2015 Report at [ReliefWeb](#).

U.N. Report for May 2015

On 22 May 2015, Ban issued his monthly report required by Resolutions 2139 and 2165. This May 2015 report actually covers events in April 2015.

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

¶62. Parties to the conflict continue to behave with impunity and total disregard for the basic tenets of humanity and international humanitarian law. Thousands of innocent people have been killed, injured or displaced in civilian areas and neighbourhoods. Housing, essential services and vital infrastructure have been destroyed or rendered unusable. It is difficult to believe that those who drop barrel bombs or launch mortar

rounds and artillery shells do not realize the immense harm and suffering that their actions are causing to civilians. The deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime and those responsible must be held accountable.

¶65. The level of carnage and devastation throughout the Syrian Arab Republic should shock the collective conscience of the world. The Syrian people are losing hope. They cannot afford to wait. A political solution must be found. The international community, and particularly the Security Council, must take action without delay to end the daily violations of international law and the killing of civilians.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)," United Nations Security Council, S/2015/368 (22 May 2015).

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.
-

During 10-30 April 2015, the Associated Press reported almost daily bombings in or near Baghdad, which killed at least 212 people, an average of 10 people/day. (See my essay for [April 2015](#).) On 1 May, the Iraqi government blamed this series of bombings on Sunni muslims who had fled from Anbar province. [Associated Press](#). Lost in the propaganda is the fact that these Sunnis are genuine Iraqi citizens.

On 2 May, ISIL executed at least 25 Yazidis held in captivity. [Associated Press](#).

On 2 May, two car bombs in Baghdad killed 19 civilians. Also, "In eastern Diyala province, a roadside bomb killed five women and two children traveling in a minibus". [Associated Press](#), 19:29 GMT on 2 May.

On 3 May, ISIL claimed credit for killing 19 people in Baghdad on 2 May. Also, police in Baghdad found 5 corpses in the streets. The victims were shot dead, then dumped in the streets. [Associated Press](#), 16:51 GMT on 3 May.

On 8 May, two suicide bombers detonated at a Shiite mosque in Balad Ruz and killed at least 18 people. One suicide bomber detonated at a Shiite mosque in Kanaan, killing 4 people. [Al-Arabiya](#), 14:22 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 16:22 GMT; [Reuters](#), 18:20 GMT.

On 10 May, five bombs in Iraq killed at least 14 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 12 May, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in Baghdad, killing at least 10 Shiite pilgrims. An Islamic roadside bomb in eastern Baghdad killed another 2 Shiite pilgrims. In northeastern Baghdad, three mortar shells killed at least 4 Shiite pilgrims. And in Mashahidah, a town north of Baghdad, an improvised explosive device killed at least 3 Shiite pilgrims. [Associated Press](#).

On 17 May, the Anbar Provincial Council announced that ISIL "had executed more than 500 civilians" in Ramadi, presumed during 15-16 May. [Iraqi News](#). But Agence France-Presse reports that these 500 also includes Iraqi security forces (i.e., Iraqi army and Iraqi police). [Daily Star](#). Later, the [Associated Press](#) cited an Anbar provincial official that 500 "civilians and soldiers" had been killed by ISIL in Ramadi, in agreement with AFP. Still later, [Reuters](#) reported the 500 included "civilians and security forces".

On 22-23 May, 4 people died from bombs in or near Baghdad. [Press TV](#) in Iran.

There were no other reports of bombs in Baghdad during 13-27 May, probably because journalists were focusing on the [rout](#) in Ramadi, or maybe because only a few people died each day from bombs in Baghdad.

On 28 May, two ISIL car bombs exploded near luxury hotels in Baghdad, killing at least 15 people. [The Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); both on 28 May. [Associated Press](#); [Rudaw](#)(AP); [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Washington Post](#); all four on 29 May.

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.

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.

[Below](#), I suggest creating hundreds of small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere to hire Arabs to counter propaganda from ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

Egyptian president Sisi called for more tolerance Islamic theology. (See my essay for [Jan 2015](#).) On 31 May 2015, [Reuters](#) reported that Al-Azhar University was teaching more moderate Islamic theology.

No Criminal Prosecution of 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 that 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).

On 17 May 2015, prime minister Abadi announced the dismissal of legal action against deserters from the Iraqi military, "as well as crimes against the military regime and the affairs of the service". [Iraqi News](#). No reasons were given for this end to legal prosecution. Perhaps there were too many defendants for a small number of prosecutors and judges. Perhaps Abadi wants to increase morale in the military by stopping prosecution of military personnel.

The failure to prosecute corrupt army officers may be more evidence that Iraq is a failed nation, which no longer enforces its laws. Karim *may* be a victim of ethnic discrimination and now a scapegoat.

On 19 May 2015, a press release posted at Abadi's website says the Iraqi Council of Ministers have agreed to "directing harsh penalties to the indolent who led to negative

impacts in Ramadi." [Abadi](#). Astoundingly, this comes just two days after Abadi dismissed prosecution for similar offenses in Mosul in June 2014.

On 21 May 2015, Abadi "open[ed] an investigation into the causes of the fall of the city of Ramadi" with the intention "to bring the guilty security leaders to the military courts". [Iraqi News](#); [Rudaw](#).

On 30 May, Abadi reiterated his intent to investigate the rout at Ramadi and punish those leaders who gave orders to flee.

The prime minister also promised to take "legal action" against commanders who "left Ramadi without approval" and said the Iraqi government has created a committee to investigate the fall of the city.

"The Iraqi forces pulled out, not because they couldn't fight, but they have been given orders to withdraw," said Abadi.

"We will take those commanders to court who have destroyed the reputation of brave Iraqi commanders. We will remove them from security agencies," Abadi added. "PM Abadi says Ramadi codename is 'Labaik Ya Iraq'," [Rudaw](#), 30 May 2014.

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.

On 19 May 2015, *The Washington Post* reported:

Ahmed al-Sharifi, an Iraqi political analyst, cited corruption as a major reason why the Iraqi army performed poorly in Ramadi. He estimated that there were as many as 23,000 "ghost soldiers" on the government payroll in the province — people listed as drawing salaries but who were not actually performing military service. The actual number of soldiers who fought to defend Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, was closer to 2,000, he said.

In November, Abadi [announced](#) as part of a preliminary investigation that at least 50,000 such "ghost soldiers" across Iraq had been receiving salaries, highlighting the level of corruption in a force that Washington spent billions of dollars to train and equip.

"When you have corruption at this scale, then fighting the Islamic State is going to be even more of a challenge," Sharifi said. "This is a major reason for the security and military collapse in Anbar."

Hugh Naylor, "Fall of Ramadi reflects failure of Iraq's strategy against ISIS, analysts say," [Washington Post](#), 19:04 EDT, 19 May 2015.

Apparently. Abadi has been unable to end the "ghost soldier" problem during the past five months.

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 reported that ISIL was demanding payment of US\$100,000 per abducted Assyrian for their release, as cited in my essay for [April 2015](#).

Bishop Mellis of the Assyrian Church of the East had been leading negotiations with ISIL for the release of 230 Assyrians who were abducted on 23 Feb 2015. On 1 May, Bishop Mellis gave an interview to SBS Radio in Australia.

Mellis:

We are a poor nation. These people have not done anything wrong and won't harm anyone. We as Assyrians do not have this amount of money you are asking for [US\$ 23 million].

We offered an amount of money that we cannot disclose at this time. With the amount we offered, we thought it was acceptable, to have the return of the 230 people.

After two days, they (ISIS) told us, "the amount the church offered was not acceptable. From now on, we will no longer negotiate with you."

The hostages have been moved to Raqqa, the ISIS stronghold in Syria, and are now awaiting trial in Islamic court under Sharia law, where a Muslim judge will decide their fate.

"ISIS Demands \$23 Million for Assyrian Hostages, Vigil Held in Australia," [AINA](#), 20:58 GMT, 1 May 2015.

I looked at the SBS Radio website on 5 May, but found no file for this news story.

On 27 May, the [Associated Press](#), at the end of a long article on Iraq, mentions that ISIL had released two elderly Assyrian Christian women in Iraq. But ISIL "is still holding 210 Assyrian Christians and is demanding \$100,000 for each hostage."

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 June 2015.

Iraqi Army Liberates Tikrit

For the early history, see my essay for [March 2015](#). For reports on looting in Tikrit by Shiite militias, and for reports of the massive destruction in Tikrit, see my essay for [April 2015](#).

On 4 May 2015, the Associated Press reported that Tikrit was a "ghost town", one month after its liberation from ISIL:

Iraqi government forces drove the Islamic State group out of Abu Mustafa's hometown of Tikrit over a month ago, but he has yet to return, fearing the Shiite militias that now patrol its bombed and battered streets.

The well-off businessman, who fled to Iraq's relatively secure Kurdish region before the operation began, has heard of widespread looting and vandalism, including of his own property. And he's heard that the militiamen are exacting revenge on Sunnis like himself, viewing them as sympathizers of the extremist group.

....

He said he left two cars in his garage when he left, but now friends in the police — a Sunni force made up of locals who share authority uneasily with the militias and army — tell him they are gone.

Sameer N. Yacoub & Paul Schemm, "Iraqi city still a ghost town a month after defeat of IS," [Associated Press](#), 06:11 GMT, 4 May 2015.

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 7 May, Tim Kaine, U.S. Senator from Virginia, called it a "scandal" that the U.S.

Congress had failed to authorize the war against ISIL, which began in August 2014. [CNN](#); [Reuters](#). The transcript of Senator Kaine's speech is at 161 Congressional Record S2703-S2704 (7 May 2015). Senator Kaine said: "The silence of Congress in the midst of this war is cowardly and shameful." Kaine correctly rebuts Obama's claim that the AUMFs from 2001 and 2002 give Obama the power to wage war against ISIL. The 2001 AUMF was directed against Al-Qaeda, at that time ISIL or its predecessor organizations did *not* exist. The 2002 AUMF was to invade Iraq and depose Saddam Hussein, something that happened "years ago". Senator Flake (R-Ariz.) "echoed the sentiments" of Kaine.

On 18 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "A move to write new war powers to authorize the Obama administration's 9-month-old battle against Islamic State militants has stalled in Congress. It might even be dead." Representative Rep. Adam Schiff, a Democrat, claimed that no Democrats in Congress supported Obama's draft AUMF. Schiff is quoted as saying: "The snag is there is no real political will or interest in doing [an AUMF]."

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 15 April ISIL seized three villages near Ramadi. 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 8 May, the Iraqi government announced it had recruited 1000 Sunni Muslims in Anbar as part of a new militia. [Associated Press](#). Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Shiite-led government of Iraq had been reluctant to provide weapons and ammunition to the Kurds and Sunnis in Iraq. Ironically, Iraq *needed* more soldiers to fight against ISIL, but when the Kurdish peshmerga and Sunni tribes were willing to fight against ISIL, the Iraqi government would *not* equip these fighters.

On 15 May, the Iraqi campaign to retake Anbar province had a major setback, as ISIL seized government buildings in downtown Ramadi, the capital of Anbar. The captured buildings included the police headquarters, provincial offices, and municipal offices. ISIL killed dozens of captured Iraqi army soldiers and allied Sunni tribal fighters. Reuters reports that ISIL "had taken control of the only major supply route into the city, making it difficult to send reinforcements." [Associated Press](#), 19:49 GMT on 15 May; [Reuters](#), 01:11 GMT on 16 May; [Washington Post](#), 21:50 GMT on 15 May; [Daily Star](#); [McClatchy](#) (also at [Miami Herald](#)); [Anadolu](#) in Turkey; all on 15 May, except Reuters.

On 15 May, Abadi declared "the Iraqi security forces will defeat the ISIL terrorists in Ramadi in the following hours." [All Iraq News](#). But the reality was that two days later, the Iraqi security forces fled from Ramadi, as described below. Astoundingly, [All Iraq News](#) failed to report the rout in Ramadi.

On 16 May, the [Associated Press](#) reports that reinforcements have arrived for the Iraqi army's push to recapture Ramadi. However, only 200 Iraqi soldiers arrived to reinforce the Iraqi army in Ramadi. [NY Times](#), 17 May.

17 May: ISIL captures Ramadi

On 17 May, the Associated Press reported:

Iraq's prime minister ordered his country's security forces not to abandon their positions in Anbar province Sunday to the Islamic State group, as some troops left their weapons and vehicles behind to flee the militants in the embattled city of Ramadi.

Associated Press, "Iraqi premier: Don't abandon Anbar to Islamic State group," [Rudaw](#), about 17:00 GMT, 17 May 2015.

Also at: [Military Times](#), 18:02 GMT on 17 May 2015.

Early report at: "State TV: Iraqi premier orders forces not to abandon positions in Anbar to Islamic State group," [Associated Press](#), 16:13 GMT, 17 May 2015; [All Iraq News](#), 17:05 GMT, 17 May.

Agence-France Press also reported that Abadi ordered the Iraqi army *not* to flee from Ramadi. [Daily Star](#).

And then ISIL captured all of Ramadi, as the Iraqi army fled. *Al-Arabiya*, the Associated Press, and *The Washington Post* all compared the capture of Ramadi to the rout of the Iraqi army when ISIL captured Mosul in June 2014.

Sources on 17 May:

- "Governor's spokesman in Iraq's Anbar province says 'Ramadi has fallen' to Islamic State group," [Associated Press](#), 18:50 GMT.
- Associated Press, "ISIS takes control of Ramadi, Iraqi troops flee," [Canadian Broadcasting](#), 19:36 GMT. ("The retreat recalled the collapse of Iraqi police and military forces last summer,")
- "Contested Iraqi city of Ramadi falls to Islamic State group," [Associated Press](#), 22:08 GMT.
- "Islamic State claims full control of Iraq's Ramadi," [Reuters](#), 23:30 GMT.
- "Key Iraqi city falls to ISIS as defenders retreat," [Washington Post](#), 19:54 GMT. ("The rapid disintegration of pro-government forces in Ramadi conjured memories of the Islamic State's similar defeat of Iraq's weak military ... last summer.")
- "Iraq's Ramadi falls to ISIS after army deserts city," [Al-Arabiya](#), 20:22 GMT. ("Ramadi fell after the Iraqi army deserted the city, ..., in a withdrawal echoing the military's shock departure from Iraq's second largest city of Mosul in June last year.")
- "Iraq: Daesh takes control of Anbar's Ramadi city," [Anadolu Agency](#) in Turkey.
- "Iraqi troops flee as key city of Ramadi falls to ISIS," [Daily Star](#). ("The retreat [from Ramadi] recalled the collapse of Iraqi police and military forces last summer,")

On 20 May, General Dempsey offered a terse explanation for what happened in Ramadi: "The ISF [Iraqi Security Force] was not driven out of Ramadi. They drove out of Ramadi." [Pentagon](#); [Stars&Stripes](#); [Reuters](#).

On 21 May, journalists offered an explanation for what happened. There was a sandstorm in Ramadi on 17 May that obscured the city. The commander of the Iraqi security forces in Ramadi erroneously believed that the sandstorm would prevent U.S. airstrikes. ISIL attacked with approximately 30 car bombs, some of which did immense damage to buildings in Ramadi. There was a failure of radio communications between the commander in Ramadi and "Iraq's combined joint operations center, where American officers are standing by to receive requests for air support and respond immediately." The local commander in Ramadi then gave the order for Iraqi security forces to ~~retreat~~ flee. [Military Times](#). See also [Reuters](#), 21 May; [Washington Post](#), 23 May.

As of 25 May, I can find only one published information about the numbers of ISIL fighters and number of Iraqi security forces in Ramadi during the final battle on 17 May. Ali Khedery — a U.S. citizen and former adviser to the U.S. Government in Baghdad during 2003-2009 — claims that there were only 150 ISIL fighters in Ramadi, and 6000 members of the Iraqi security forces (army and federal police).

Sources:

- [CNN](#), 18 May.
- [Rudaw](#), 19 May.
- [Iraqi News](#), 26 May.

My comment is that it seems incredible — *not* plausible — that the Iraqi government forces outnumbered ISIL by 40 to 1. I suggest that we await confirmation from other sources before relying on these numbers. On the other hand, note that ISIL's tactic in Ramadi was *not* an assault by a large number of troops, but instead a series of suicide car bombs. The car bombings do not require a large number of ISIL fighters.

On 28 May, there was an interview by CBS News with John Allen, a retired U.S. Marine Corps general and currently the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition To Counter ISIL. General Allen said: "We're saying that we thought there was somewhere between 400 and 800 Daesh, and somewhere around 2,000 Iraqi [security forces in Ramadi]." [State Dept.](#); [CBS News](#). General Allen also said there were approximately 10,000 Iraqi security forces in the *entire* Anbar province, which number should not be confused with the number of Iraqi security forces in the city of Ramadi.

My comment is that General Allen does *not* know how many ISIL fighters were in Ramadi, but he estimates "between 400 and 800". And General Allen is attempting to mollify the Iraqis by suggesting the Iraqi security forces outnumbered ISIL by approximately 3 to 1.

The blame for the rout in Ramadi is discussed [below](#).

**Fleeing Iraqi Army Abandons Equipment:
Gift to ISIL**

Concurrent with the ISIL capture of Ramadi on 17 May, ISIL attacked, and "broke into", a
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large Iraqi army base, home of the Iraqi 8 Brigade, on the west side of Ramadi. [Reuters](#), 16:57 GMT on 17 May; [BBC](#); [Arab News](#). Aside from tanks and missile launchers, it is not known on 17 May what kinds of weapons were stolen by ISIL from the Iraqi army base.

[McClatchy](#) newspapers reported that the elite Iraqi army reinforcements that had arrived in Ramadi promptly fled, and "abandoned dozens of U.S.-supplied armored vehicles, as well as artillery, heavy machine guns and other military gear". "One police officer confirmed that at least 30 U.S. supplied armored Humvees, which had been sent as reinforcements on Saturday [16 May], had been abandoned in the neighborhood of Malaab alone."

On 19 May, [Rudaw](#) reported: "According to social media accounts managed by the extremists, the group seized at least 30 US-made armored Humvees and nearly 10 M1A1 Abrams battle tanks in addition to tons of ammunitions and other advanced weapons."

On 19 May, the Associated Press reported the Pentagon's comment on the abandonment of weapons and equipment by the fleeing Iraqi army in Ramadi.

Iraqi troops abandoned dozens of U.S military vehicles, including tanks, armored personnel carriers and artillery pieces when they fled Islamic State fighters in Ramadi on Sunday, the Pentagon said Tuesday [19 May].

A Pentagon spokesman, Col. Steve Warren, estimated that a half dozen tanks were abandoned, a similar number of artillery pieces, a larger number of armored personnel carriers and about 100 wheeled vehicles like Humvees. He said some of the vehicles were in working condition; others were not because they had not been moved for months.

This repeats a pattern in which defeated Iraq security forces have, over the past year, left behind U.S.-supplied military equipment, prompting the U.S. to destroy them in subsequent airstrikes against Islamic State forces.

Asked whether the Iraqis should have destroyed the vehicles before abandoning the city in order to keep them from enhancing IS's army, Warren said, "Certainly preferable if they had been destroyed; in this case they were not."

Robert Burns, "Iraqis abandoned US-supplied equipment in Ramadi," [Associated Press](#), 14:26 EDT, 19 May 2015.

On 31 May 2015, Agence France-Presse reports that Abadi admits that Iraq lost 2300 armored Humvees in Mosul in June 2014. [Daily Star](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). My comment is that perhaps in May 2016 Abadi will tell us how much weapons, ammunition, and equipment the Iraqi army gave to ISIL in Ramadi.

My comment: The Iraqi army *should* have disabled weapons before fleeing. For example, an incendiary grenade can be ignited on the engine of a vehicle or tank, melting the engine into uselessness. Concrete can be poured into barrels of artillery, rendering them useless. Fires can be set in warehouses containing ammunition. The failure of the Iraqi army to destroy their munitions and vehicles was a gift to ISIL.

On 22 May, the Pentagon's announcement of airstrikes near Ramadi appears to include

destroying U.S. supplied vehicles that were stolen by ISIL.

Journalists and politicians have focused almost exclusively on the *fleeing* Iraqi security forces, and ignored their gift of weapons and equipment to ISIL. The retreat from Ramadi was not unforgivable, as the Iraqi army could return days later and retake Ramadi. But abandoning weapons and equipment for ISIL to acquire makes ISIL stronger and more difficult to defeat. Moreover, when ISIL has the same type of advanced weapons as the Iraqi army, the Iraqi army no longer has a technical advantage in quality of weapons.

Shiite militias arrive near Ramadi

On the evening of 17 May, the Anbar Provincial Council decided it preferred to have Shiite militias instead of ISIL, and so the Council asked Abadi to send Shiite militias to expel ISIL from Ramadi. Abadi then immediately ordered Shiite militias to the Habbaniya air base east of Ramadi. See, e.g., [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#); [Iraqi News](#); [Bloomberg](#).

My comment: The involvement of Shiite militia, which are backed by Iran, again raises questions of whether the U.S. will cooperate with the Shiite militia. During the battle for Tikrit in March 2015, the U.S. Military refused to cooperate with Shiite militia, as described in my essay for [March 2015](#).

It is obviously a bad idea to send Shiite militia into a predominantly Sunni city, but Abadi has no choice. The Iraqi army has proven inadequate to protect Ramadi. The Iraqi government has failed to train and arm Sunni tribes, because the Shiite majority did not want ethnic minorities (e.g., Sunnis and Kurds) to have military power. The peshmerga in Kurdish Iraq are not interested in fighting in Ramadi, which is far from their homeland. The only large military in Iraq is the Shiite militia.

By the evening of 18 May, a total of approximately 3000 Shiite militia had arrived at Habbaniya air base, east of Ramadi. [Reuters](#), 22:09 GMT; [Wall Street Journal](#), 14:49 GMT; [Iraqi News](#); [All Iraq News](#), all on 18 May 2015.

[Rudaw](#) reports on 18 May that 1000 fighters from Sunni tribes in Anbar province have been trained at the Habbaniya air base. These 1000 fighters are in addition to the column of 3000 Shiite militia members in the previous paragraph.

18 May 2015 U.S. Government Reaction to Rout of Iraqi Army

There was significant reporting of the reaction of the White House, U.S. State Department, and Pentagon to the fall of Ramadi. Clearly, there was a coordinated propaganda campaign to call this rout of the Iraqi army a "setback".

On 18 May there was a small press briefing aboard Air Force One. The transcript contained

8 mentions of "Ramadi". Here is the White House's official reaction to the rout in Ramadi:

QUESTION: Can you give us an update on what kind of briefings the President is getting on the situation in Ramadi, and if he's reconsidering U.S. strategy there because of what's happened?

MR. SCHULTZ: Thank you, Nedra. As you know, Ramadi has been contested over the last 18 months. We've always known the fight against ISIL would be long and difficult, particularly in Anbar Province. There's no denying that this is, indeed, a setback. But there's also no denying that we will help the Iraqis take back Ramadi.

The President is being kept up to date on the situation there. I don't have any new strategy to preview or that's under contemplation right now, because as we've said for a while now, this was going to be a long-term proposition, that there would be ebbs and flows in this fight.

Today, we are supporting the Iraqi security forces and the government of Iraq with precision airstrikes and advice to the Iraqi forces. Our aircraft are in the air right now and searching for ISIL targets. They will continue to do so until Ramadi is retaken. In fact, we have conducted 32 airstrikes in Ramadi in the past three weeks, including eight over the past 24 hours. These strikes will be continuing. ISIL will ultimately be defeated in Ramadi and elsewhere in Iraq because we believe that Iraqi forces have the capacity to ultimately take Ramadi with coalition support.

"Press Gaggle with Principal Deputy Press Secretary Eric Schultz en route Camden, NJ", [White House](#), 18 May 2015.

Readers of my previous essays on Syria will recall Jen Psaki was the spokesperson for the State Department. In April 2015, Ms. Psaki was promoted to Director of Communications at the White House. Marie Harf became the acting spokesperson at the State Department, but she is currently traveling with Secretary Kerry. So the press briefings at the State Department are currently held by Jeff Rathke, who is Director of the State Department Press Office.

The 18 May press briefing at the State Department contained 38 mentions of "Ramadi" and 7 mentions of "setback". Here are some snippets from the transcript:

QUESTION: Could you give us a review of, I guess, what would be the good, the bad, and the ugly of your fight against the Islamic State this weekend? Specifically on Ramadi, what you're doing now to reverse this setback, and where you stand with the Iraqi forces on trying to —

MR RATHKE: Mm-hmm. Okay. Well, the news about Ramadi, of course, got a lot of attention over the weekend. I would point out a couple of things. First, Ramadi has been contested for the last 18 months. ISIL first moved openly into Ramadi on January 1st, 2014, and Iraqi forces and local fighters have fought back against them throughout this period. Starting late last week, ISIL launched a series of suicide vehicle bombs that had a large impact, and this also — and since then we've also heard from ISIL's own comments that the suicide bombers were foreign fighters.

We've always known that the fight would be long and difficult, especially in Anbar

province, and so there's no denying that this is a setback, but there's also no denying that the United States will help the Iraqis take back Ramadi. As of today, we are supporting the Iraqi Security Forces and the Government of Iraq with precision airstrikes and advice to the Iraqi forces. Our aircraft are in the air searching for ISIL targets, and they will continue to do so until Ramadi is retaken. Since the beginning of May, we've conducted 35 airstrikes in Ramadi, and that includes nine over the last 24 hours, and those strikes will continue. My colleagues at the Pentagon will have more details, perhaps, to share about that.

But we believe that the Iraqi Security Forces have the capacity and the will to retake Ramadi, with coalition support, and as we've always said, this fight against ISIL will be difficult and would take time.

I would — just one larger context point I would say: There's also no question that overall, since the formation of the international coalition to fight ISIL that ISIL has been driven back in Iraq. It has lost as much as 25 percent of the area that it once controlled. And I would also highlight that on Saturday [16 May], thanks to the skill and extraordinary competency of some of our forces, a major ISIL leader who was responsible for its funding mechanism, through the oil sales, was eliminated from the battlefield and significant intelligence gains were achieved. And so while this was an American operation, it was also done in close coordination with our Iraqi partners.

....

MR RATHKE: I'm not trying to suggest — I'm not trying to downplay the importance of Ramadi. I'm simply pointing out that over the last 12 months, the trend has been for ISIL to be pushed back in Iraq. You see this in Tikrit most recently, and you've seen it in other places where the siege — going all the way back into last summer, when there were real fears about whether Baghdad itself might even come under threat. We don't have those fears now. We don't see Baghdad as under threat, and we see in a number of places, including in Anbar and other parts of northern Iraq, ISIL being pushed back. It's not a uniform positive message or a uniform positive picture; there are setbacks like in Ramadi. But we are confident that the Iraqi political leadership and their security forces working with us will be successful.

....

QUESTION: You said that the Iraqi forces have the capacity, the will, and the experience to retake Ramadi. If they have the capacity and the will and the experience, why have they allowed the fall of Ramadi in the hands of ISIL?

MR RATHKE: Well, again, this has been a contested area for a year and a half. It's a setback, but I don't have further analysis of the developments on the ground over the last couple of days to offer.

....

QUESTION: Do you think that the Iraqi Government bears any responsibility in the fall of Ramadi?

MR RATHKE: Well, what is —

QUESTION: Because they haven't provided the arms to the Sunnis, to the —

QUESTION: To the tribes.

QUESTION: — and the tribes that they've asked for.

MR RATHKE: Well, clearly, the fall of Ramadi is not a success, if that's what you're asking. I'm not going to point fingers and assign specific responsibility, but clearly, it is a setback. So — and that's — and I think, as we see by Prime Minister Abadi's response, a commitment to finding ways to move forward and to take back Ramadi. U.S. State Department, "Daily Press Briefing", [State Dept.](#), 18 May 2015.

The Pentagon issued a press release that quotes Army Col. Steve Warren, head of the press office at the Pentagon. Here are the first five paragraphs of that press release:

Iraqi security forces and coalition partners will retake the Iraqi city of Ramadi, now "largely under control" of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant extremists since yesterday, Pentagon spokesman Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters today [18 May].

The colonel said it's important to not over interpret ISIL's gain in a single city when Iraqi forces are engaged in offensive operations across the "breadth and depth" of a large nation.

"To read too much into this is a mistake," Warren said. "This is one fight, one episode, in which Iraqi Security Forces were not able to prevail -- today."

While ISIL was able to gain the upper hand in Ramadi, "what this means for our strategy is simply that we — the coalition and Iraqi partners — now have to go back and retake Ramadi," Warren said.

Defense Department officials have always said there would be ebbs and flows in Iraq's fight against ISIL, [Col. Warren] said, adding that "it's a difficult, complex, bloody fight, and there will be victories and setbacks."

"Pentagon: Iraqi, Coalition Forces Will Retake Ramadi," [Pentagon](#), 18 May 2015.

The published news articles on 18 May generally accepted the U.S. Government's propaganda that the rout in Ramadi was only a temporary "setback". One exception was an article in McClatchy:

The Obama administration Monday [18 May] called the fall of the capital of Iraq's Anbar province to the Islamic State a temporary setback that Iraqi forces would reverse with U.S. support. Experts dismissed that assessment as ludicrous.

“Delusional, really, is the better word,” Ali Khedery, a former U.S. official who served as an adviser to five U.S. ambassadors to Iraq and three heads of U.S. Central Command, said of the administration’s statement. “It’s unbelievable, frankly. I now know what it’s like to have lived through Vietnam, I guess.”

Experts called the loss a stunning blow to the Iraqi government and U.S. strategy.

It wasn’t clear why the administration clung to an upbeat message [three days after the Islamic State overran most of Ramadi](#) and [a day after Iraq’s best special forces unit fled the city](#) with other troops, local police and tribal fighters. The message was delivered in nearly identical verbiage by White House, State Department and Pentagon spokesmen and was reinforced by a statement from Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

“ISIL’s gains in Ramadi are a serious setback for its long-suffering inhabitants. It is also a setback for the ISF (Iraqi Security Forces),” said Dempsey. “Setbacks are regrettable but not uncommon in warfare. Much effort will now be required to reclaim the city. We will continue to support Iraq’s security forces with U.S. airstrikes, training and equipment.”

....

Ramadi’s fall also [underscored persisting weaknesses of the Iraqi army](#), which has long suffered from corruption, poor leadership and nepotism.

As a result, analysts said, Baghdad and Washington will have to focus on rebuilding sufficient Iraqi forces to clear Anbar, indefinitely postponing a planned offensive to retake Iraq’s second largest city, Mosul, which the Islamic State seized when it launched its land grab from sanctuaries in Syria last June, experts said.

“Mosul is completely off the radar screen now,” said Kirk H. Sowell, the editor of Inside Iraqi Politics, a newsletter that he publishes from Amman, Jordan. “The liberation of Mosul is out of the question.”

Moreover, even with U.S. airstrikes and reinforcements from Iran-backed Shiite militias that are being dispatched to Anbar, the heartland of the country’s minority Sunnis, it is unlikely that Iraqi security forces will be able to recapture Ramadi, let alone the rest of the province’s key towns and cities, anytime soon, experts said.

Michael Pregent, a Middle East analyst and former U.S. Army intelligence officer who served in Iraq, said that the Shiite militias’ abilities are overblown. Moreover, he said, their main priority now is protecting Baghdad and Shiite holy cities [Najaf, Karbala, and Samarra], not retaking Ramadi.

Jonathan S. Landay & Hannah Allam, "Experts: U.S. claims Ramadi a mere setback are ‘delusional’," [McClatchy](#), 18 May 2015.

Copy at [Kansas City Star](#) and [Miami Herald](#).

Blame for the Rout in Ramadi

Surprisingly, there was little — or no — mention by journalists of blame for the ISIL conquest of Ramadi. Similarly, there was little or no criticism of the Iraqi army by commentators or journalists. I made a number of searches of Google News for these topics on the afternoon of 19 May — and again on the night of 22 May — but I found only a few terse mentions at news websites.

In June 2014, after the Iraqi army's rout in Mosul, *The Washington Post* famously reported: Former U.S. military officials who oversaw the building of the Iraqi military placed much of the blame for that dereliction on Maliki, who has purged the Iraqi army of some of its most capable leaders.

....

[Michael D.] Barbero [, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant general who oversaw the training of Iraqi troops from 2009 to 2011.] said that despite years of training and billions of dollars in U.S. time and equipment, Iraq's military is still a "checkpoint Army," more interested in manning roadblocks than developing intelligence and engaging in counterinsurgency missions.

Kevin Sullivan & Greg Jaffe, "Collapse of Iraqi army a failure for nation's premier and for U.S. military," [Washington Post](#), 12 June 2014.

Ten months later, the capabilities of the Iraqi army were apparently *not* improved. On 27 April 2015, three weeks before the rout in Ramadi, the Associated Press explained the weakness of the Iraqi army:

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 US 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.

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

A so-called army that is qualified only to operate checkpoints on roads is *not* what Iraq needs to expel ISIL from cities.

On 17 May 2015, *IHS Jane's* in England explained some of the problems in the Iraqi army:

The loss of Ramadi reflects how far off the government is from redressing weaknesses that led to the Iraqi Army's initial collapse last summer, including the lack of army morale, poor leadership, and corruption (including large numbers of 'ghost' soldiers on the army's payroll) and lack of effective Iraqi government air support. The reluctance of the Iraqi government to provide weapons to al-Anbar's Sunni tribes has also contributed to the loss, and legislation that would have allowed for the formation of a cross-sectarian National Guard force remains stalled in parliament.

[IHS Jane's Intelligence Weekly](#), 17 May 2015.

On 19 May 2015, there were a few news articles that mentioned problems with the Iraqi army. [Al-Arabiya](#) published an insightful analysis by Abdulrahman al-Rashed, which concludes: "These victories [by ISIL in Mosul and Ramadi] are unsurprising given that Iraqi Shiite sectarian forces reject the arming Anbar tribes to defend themselves." The [Washington Post](#) published an opinion by Ishaan Tharoor that says the Iraqi army "has a reputation for disorganization, corruption, poor leadership and even poorer morale." On 19 May, the [Associated Press](#) said "the army and police remain hobbled by spotty levels of professionalism, deep-seated corruption and low morale".

On 19 May, the Fox News television channel showed an honest assessment of why the Iraqi army lost again in Ramadi:

ROBERT GATES, FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY: {via video clip} I think to refer to what happened in Ramadi as simply a setback, and that we will help — to say that we will help the Iraqis regain it, frankly, the gap between the rhetoric and getting it done, I think, is pretty significant. They have got Ramadi, they have got Fallujah, they have got Mosul. Getting them out of these cities is going to be incredibly tough.

BRET BAIER, ANCHOR: Former Defense Secretary Bob Gates talking about basically the situation with ISIS terrorists on the ground in Iraq. We're back with the panel. Charles, what about this back and forth, how the administration is playing it and the reality on the ground?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER, SYNDICATED COLUMNIST: The administration is delusional or cynical. I would hope cynical, because otherwise we are in deep trouble. This is a tremendous defeat. It isn't only a geographic defeat, the fact that Mosul is gone and Fallujah is gone and now Ramadi is gone. It's that the Iraqi army once again ran.

Our whole idea is we are going to train the Iraqi army. If you train people who want to fight but don't know how to fight, well, that will work. And we actually had that opportunity in Syria. Obama disdained the Syrian non-jihadist who opposed Assad and said there were doctors, engineers, bakers. But they wanted to fight. They were out in the street. They demonstrated. They needed training. We gave them nothing and they got liquidated.

With Iraq you have got the exact opposite, soldiers in name only who want to get paid with corrupt officers and sectarian officers who don't want to fight. All the training in the world is not going to help them because you can be trained, but if you have no interest and no commitment in the war, you are going to run. And that's what happened. And that's why we are losing badly.

Bret Baier, "The politics and policy of the chaos in Iraq," [Fox News](#), 19 May 2015.

On 21 May, a professor at the Missouri State University and also a columnist for *Rudaw* wrote:

.... Iraqi forces who fled [Ramadi] gave accounts about "running out of ammunition," "not receiving promised supplies from Baghdad," "police that had gone unpaid since

six months,” and promised reinforcements never arriving. At around a hundred and twenty kilometers (eighty miles) from Baghdad, one would think that supplies and reinforcements should not have been that difficult for a government earning some \$100 billion a year to provide to its forces in Ramadi.

Following the capture of Ramadi, ISIS also published photos of huge stockpiles of (mostly American) ammunition crates, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and other shiny new weapons that Iraqi forces left behind — which makes one wonder if someone is not telling the truth about lacking supplies and ammunition? Or perhaps supplies and ammunition were only delivered to Iraqi Army Shiite fighters who do not see the point of risking their lives to defend a Sunni town, while Sunni defenders of the city with a will to fight had little to work with?

David Romano, "Truth and Lies in Ramadi," [Rudaw](#), 21 May 2015.

On 24 May — one week after the rout in Ramadi — the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, was the first U.S. Government official to publicly criticize the Iraqi army for the rout in Ramadi:

CARTER: What apparently happened was that the Iraqi forces just showed no will to fight. They were not outnumbered. In fact, they vastly outnumbered the opposing force, and yet they failed to fight, they withdrew from the site. That says to me, and I think to most of us, that we have an issue with the will of the Iraqis to fight ISIL and defend themselves. Now we can give them training, we can give them equipment, we obviously can't give them the will to fight.

Barbara Starr, "Carter: Iraqis showed 'no will to fight' in Ramadi," [CNN](#), 24 May 2015. [transcript](#).

Carter's remarks were reported at [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Arab news sources repeated the Associated Press or Reuters stories: [Rudaw](#)(AP); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters); [Daily Star](#)(AP) in Lebanon.

There was swift reaction from the Iraqi government. The [Associated Press](#) reports that the chairman of the Iraqi Parliament's defense and security committee "said the U.S. should bear much of the blame for the fall of Ramadi for failure to provide 'good equipment, weapons and aerial support' to the soldiers." Ironically, he alleges that the U.S. Military is attempting to "throw the blame on somebody else."

My comment is that this ungrateful little lizard in the Iraqi Parliament ignores the fact that the Iraqi army abandoned tons of U.S. supplied weapons and vehicles in Mosul in June 2014 — and again in Ramadi in May 2015. This Iraqi gift to ISIL greatly enriched ISIL, who are still using U.S. supplied vehicles in their conquest of Syria and Iraq. We don't hear ISIL complaining about the alleged lack of quality of U.S. equipment and weapons that ISIL stole. Amongst decent people, one does *not* criticize a donor for failing to give more gifts or give better gifts, instead one says "thank you". As for the alleged failure of U.S. airstrikes in Ramadi, why doesn't this ungrateful little lizard order the Iraqi air force to provide airstrikes inside Iraq? Well, Iraq no longer has a functioning air force after it was destroyed in 1991, and then never replaced.

In addition to the gross incompetence of the Iraqi government and its army, not to mention

widespread corruption, the irrational outburst of the ungrateful little lizard in the Iraqi Parliament shows that it is pointless to criticize the Iraqis. When people *know* their performance is substandard and inadequate, they tend to be very sensitive to any criticism.

On 27 May, three days after Carter's criticism of the Iraqi army, politicians in Baghdad continued to be upset with Carter's remarks. [Rudaw](#).

On 27 May, Jean-Marc Mojon of Agence France-Presse concluded that the Iraqi army lacked weapons, ammunition, and leadership. But there is an abundance of corruption amongst Iraqi army officers. One former Iraqi soldier is quoted as saying: "When I was in the military, we never got ammunition when we asked for it. Sometimes we would be marooned on a base with no supplies." So that soldier quit the army and joined a militia. "Sarmad al-Taei, a columnist for Iraq's independent and secular Al-Mada newspaper," suggests that the Iraqi army is ineffective because it is a government bureaucracy, while the militias are like private enterprise. [Daily Star](#).

My Comments on Blame for the Rout in Ramadi

There are three blameworthy parties in this rout of Iraqi army at Ramadi:

1. Either:
 - A. there were too few soldiers in Ramadi, so it was futile to fight against ISIL, in which case the Iraqi government and/or top Iraqi army commanders are blameworthy, *or*
 - B. there was an adequate number of soldiers in Ramadi, but they were cowardly.
2. The Iraqi army deserves strong criticism for leaving behind weapons, ammunition, equipment, and vehicles, to be captured (stolen) by ISIL.
3. And the Iraqi government (especially former prime minister Maliki and parliament) deserves the strongest criticism for failing to maintain a competent army of adequate size, and for failing to train and equip the Sunni tribal fighters (and also the peshmerga). The rout of the Iraqi army at Ramadi suggests that the Iraqi government has learned nothing since the rout of the Iraqi army 11 months ago in Mosul.

It is a romantic notion that soldiers valiantly fight to their death, in a futile battle that they had no hope of winning. A smarter strategy is to retreat, be reinforced, and later fight when there is some hope of victory. We do *not* know if it was futile for the Iraqi security forces in Ramadi to fight against ISIL on 17 May, so it is premature to criticize the Iraqi soldiers for fleeing. Similarly, we do *not* know whether the top Iraqi commanders deployed an adequate number of soldiers in Ramadi with adequate amounts of ammunition *before* ISIL attacked Ramadi on 14 May, so it is premature to criticize the top commanders. Alternatively, the Iraqi government may have declared the goal of expelling ISIL from Anbar province, including defending Ramadi, without having an adequate number of soldiers to do this mission.

Ramadi matters because it is a large city (approximately 850,000 people in 2003, but many residents fled in recent months), the capital of Anbar province, and only 115 km from Baghdad. Moreover, it is much more difficult to expel ISIL from a city than to prevent ISIL

from entering a city.

The capture of Ramadi — like the capture of Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014 — was very bad for Iraq, in that both (1) more innocent civilians are now living under ISIL terrorism, and (2) it will be a bloody battle to expel ISIL from these large cities. But even worse, in my opinion, is that the Iraqi army has learned nothing since the similar rout of the Iraqi army 11 months ago in Mosul.

Few people want to publicly talk about corruption and incompetence in the Iraqi army. The Iraqi government has failed to prosecute Iraqi army officers for corruption or desertion, as mentioned [above](#). When foreign nations deliver weapons or ammunition to the Iraqi government, some of the small arms and ammunition is sold to profit corrupt army officers, and little reaches peshmerga or Sunni tribes who are *eager* to fight against ISIL. On 27 April 2015, there was a proposal in the U.S. House of Representatives to supply weapons directly to the peshmerga and Sunni tribes, but that proposal would be a violation of the sovereignty of the Iraqi government. (See, e.g., [Washington Post](#)) Further, when fleeing Iraqi soldiers abandon their weapons, ammunition, and equipment, it is a gift to ISIL. These problems need to be quickly solved, but the silence hides these problems.

Currently the Kurdish peshmerga are responsible for defending Kurdish Iraq, and the Iraqi army and Shiite militias are responsible for defending the remainder of Iraq. The U.S. Government, in agreement with many commentators, have suggested that fighters in Sunni tribes be trained and equipped to defend the Sunni region of Iraq, to prevent sectarian violence when Shiite fighters attack Sunni people and Sunni buildings. I agree with this arrangement that each of the three regions in Iraq should defend themselves. However, having each region defend itself is a first step on the eventual breakup of Iraq into three nations.

Currently, foreign nations send weapons to the central government in Baghdad, which is dominated by Shiites. The central government keeps nearly all of the weapons for the Shiite forces, to avoid empowering Sunnis and Kurds. If each region in Iraq is to defend itself, then foreign nations should be allowed to send weapons directly to each of the three regions. In this respect, bypassing the central government makes the central government irrelevant, and violates the concept of a unified Iraq.

Breaking Iraq into three nations in the middle of an existential war with ISIL would *add* more difficulties to Iraq. However, it currently seems inevitable that at some time the Kurds will declare independence from Iraq, and the Sunni/Shiite sectarian squabbles are likely to persist, making division of Iraq into three nations a logical solution to long-term problems.

Instead of focusing on problems with the sectarian government in Baghdad, and severe problems in the Iraqi army, journalists focused on questioning *Obama's* strategy in Iraq. (See, e.g., [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Fox News](#).) In my previous essays, I have been very critical of Obama for his obsession with deposing Assad in Syria, for sending weapons to rebels in Syria, and for failing to get militarily involved in Iraq in January 2014 when ISIL was beginning to invade Iraq. But it is *not* fair to criticize Obama for the defeat in Ramadi. Obama — quite properly in my opinion — refuses to send U.S. Military in combat roles

inside Iraq. That means the ground war is totally the responsibility of the Iraqi government. And there is strong evidence that the Iraqi government has made a huge botch of the ground war: failing to adequately supply weapons to Sunni tribes and peshmerga, failing to abolish corruption in the Iraqi army, failing to punish deserters from the Iraqi army, failing to train and maintain a competent army of adequate size to defeat ISIL and to hold territory (i.e., prevent recapture or capture by ISIL). In summary, Iraq is a sovereign nation that should take responsibility for its own policy failures.

On 21 May, [Reuters](#) reports that some people in the U.S. Government are losing confidence in Abadi. It seems to me that the real problem is with the Shiite members of the Iraqi Parliament, *not* Abadi. It is the Shiite majority in Parliament that blocked Abadi's proposed training and arming of Sunni tribes. My essays for July 2014 to February 2015 chronicled the glacial slowness of the Iraqi Parliament, their infrequent meetings during crises, and the high absenteeism amongst members of the Iraqi Parliament. (See my [table](#) of meetings of the Iraqi Parliament during July-October 2014.) But it would be difficult for the USA to criticize a democratically elected Parliament.

The way forward

In my essay for April 2015, I said:

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.

Standler, [Syria & Iraq: April 2015](#) at section titled: "Iraq chooses Iran, Iraq rejects USA". (The name of that section is a holdover from my essay for March 2015.)

But after the rout of the Iraqi army in Ramadi on 17 May, there was a new policy. The U.S. Government said the Shiite militias could be involved, but these militias must be under the control of the central government in Baghdad. That means the militias are *not* under the control of advisers from Iran. Only 1000 Sunnis had been trained and equipped, so the Sunnis would initially be a minor component of the battles in Anbar province. And everyone has now abandoned thinking about soon expelling ISIL from Mosul, a very difficult task that is far beyond the current capability of the Iraqi army.

Sources on Shiite militia under Iraqi control:

- [IHS Jane's](#), 17 May ("... the US ambassador in Baghdad Stuart Jones has reportedly indicated ... [that U.S. airstrikes will be] contingent on the counter-attack being led by Iraqi government forces, not the Iranians.")

[The Hill](#), 16:27 EDT, 18 May ("The [Shiite] militias have a part to play in this. As long as they are controlled by the central Iraqi government, then they will participate,' [Col. Steve] Warren said.")

- Press Briefing [White House](#), 19 May (Josh Earnest: "... it's important that these forces [Popular Mobilization Forces, including Shia militia] are under the command and control of the Iraqi central government...." "And this is a principle that we have established previously, that the United States will be very supportive of multi-sectarian efforts who are taking command-and-control orders from the Iraqi central government." "And those forces that have indicated that they will be responsive to orders from the Iraqi central government are forces that the coalition will support.")
- Press Gaggle [White House](#), 20 May (Eric Schultz: "But we've also been very clear that all forces [including Shia militia] there should be under the command and control of the Iraqi security forces.")

Sources on Liberation of Mosul now out-of-reach:

- [Washington Post](#), 18 May ("... Iraqi security forces will almost certainly not be able to recapture Mosul this year" "The disaster in Anbar, ..., has certainly derailed any campaign aiming at an early reconquest of Mosul.")
- [CNN](#), 09:11 EDT, 19 May ("With the fall of Ramadi, nobody is talking about Mosul,")
- [The Daily Beast](#), 19:00 EDT, 19 May ("Where just a few months ago, the U.S. military said the Iraqi forces could lead an assault on Mosul as soon as April [2015], now there is talk of nothing happening until next year [2016].")

On 20 May, the head of the Iraqi federal police in Anbar province was sacked and replaced with a new head. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). On 26 May, the new head began his mission. [All Iraq News](#).

On 29 May, [Politico](#) reported two different ways that the U.S. could respond to the problems with the Iraqi army:

1. send an additional 10,000 U.S. soldiers to Iraq, to quickly train more Iraqis, including Sunni militia.
2. embed U.S. troops with Iraqi combat troops. The U.S. personnel could serve as:
 - A. forward air controllers to direct airstrikes. Also the airstrikes could be delivered more quickly by avoiding going through the bureaucracy in Baghdad.
 - B. operators of electronic surveillance equipment.
 - C. operators of more precise artillery, which could compensate "for a pause in airstrikes during sandstorms or bad weather."

But Politico quotes Steven Biddle, adjunct senior fellow for defense policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, as saying "The central problem in the Iraqi military is combat motivation. It's not technical proficiency." Biddle says that Iraqi soldiers do not want to die to support a corrupt government.

ISIL captures Husaiba

At first, only few journalist reported that ISIL had captured Husaiba, a small town in Iraq. Then people began to realize the significance of this town.

On 21 May, the Iraqi government was *again* defeated by ISIL, this time in the town of Husaiba, which is about 10 km east of Ramadi. The Associated Press reports that "police and tribal fighters withdrew after running out of ammunition". This victory puts ISIL just 5 km from the Habbaniya military base, where Shiite militias have assembled to retake Ramadi.

Sources:

- "Iraqi forces free 300 soldiers held hostage in Baiji," [Al-Arabiya](#), 18:35 GMT, 21 May.
- "Islamic State fighters overrun Iraqi govt lines east of Ramadi," [Reuters](#), 19:42 GMT, 21 May.
- "ISIS overruns Iraqi government lines east of Ramadi," [Daily Star](#), 21:45 GMT, 21 May.
- "IS captures Iraqi town, purges opponents in Syria's Palmyra," [Associated Press](#), 11:31 GMT, 22 May 2015.

Husaiba is also transliterated as Husseiba, Husaybah, or al-Hasiba.

My comment is that Shiite militias have waited at least three days at the Habbaniya military base. In contrast, ISIL is advancing toward these Shiite militias, which will make fighting more convenient for the militias, because the militias will *not* need to travel 10 km to Ramadi.

At approximately 13:00 GMT on 23 May, the Associated Press reported that the combined Iraqi security forces and Shiite militias expelled ISIL from Husaiba. [Daily Star](#); [Rudaw](#).

Iraq attempts to liberate Ramadi

On 25 May, Abadi told the [BBC](#) that the Iraqi forces will recapture Ramadi "in days", presumably meaning during the next few days. Also see: [Los Angeles Times](#); [Rudaw](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Iraqi News](#).

At 07:17 GMT on 26 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iraqi State Television had announced the beginning of a major military operation to liberate Anbar province from ISIL.

On 26 May, the Iraqi forces claim to surround Ramadi on three sides and cut all the supply lines into Ramadi, thereby besieging Ramadi. [All Iraq News](#). The Iraqi forces claim ISIL fled from the southern and western suburbs of Ramadi. [All Iraq News](#). A sandstorm in the vicinity of Ramadi prevented any "major engagement" between the Iraqi forces and ISIL on 26 May. [Associated Press](#).

On 26 May, the Shiite militia in Anbar did two things that are regrettable:

1. The Shiite militia picked the name "Labayk Ya Hussein" for their operation to liberate Anbar. The Associated Press says that name translates to "I am here, Hussein" — a reference to a historic Shiite imam, which will provoke Sunnis. At the Pentagon, Col. Steve Warren said about the blatantly sectarian name: "I think it's unhelpful." [Associated Press](#); [Rudaw](#); [Reuters](#).
2. The Shiite militia declared that it was leading the operation to liberate Anbar province. [Reuters](#); [Daily Star](#)(Reuters); [Voice of America](#).

The Iraqi army in Mosul and Ramadi, amongst other places, has proven its incompetence, so the defiance of the army by the Shiite militia is perhaps desirable. But putting Iranian-supplied Shiite militia in charge appears to violate the U.S. Government condition for coordinating airstrikes: the militia must be under the control of the central government in Baghdad.

On 27 May, Moqtada Sadr, an outspoken Shiite cleric in Baghdad, criticized the "Labayk Ya Hussein" name, because that name would be "misunderstood" by Sunnis. [Daily Star](#).

On 27 May, the Iraqi government declared that the official name of the military operation to liberate Anbar province would be "Labbayk Ya Iraq". [All Iraq News](#). On 27 May, [Reuters](#) confirms the rebranding of the Anbar liberation to "Labeyk Ya Iraq", which translates to "At Your Service, Iraq". Also Reuters reports that 2000 additional militiamen have arrived at the Habbaniya air base, east of Ramadi. That brings the total Shiite militia in Anbar to at least 5000.

On the morning of 28 May, the Iraqi government claimed that Ramadi is now surrounded and ISIL can send *neither* reinforcements *nor* supplies to Ramadi. [All Iraq News](#); [Rudaw](#).

On 29-30 May, there were no report of progress about the liberation of Ramadi in three English-language news websites in Iraq — *All Iraq News* or *Iraqi News* or *Rudaw*. One can find news about battles near Baiji and Fallujah, but not at Ramadi. Given the highly publicized beginning of the operation to liberate Ramadi on 26 May, I find it strange that this story has disappeared from the news. I wonder if the military operation to liberate Ramadi stalled on its fourth day.

On 29 May, [Reuters](#) reported that ISIL had settled into Ramadi, and ISIL was planting mines and bombs to stop the future Iraqi invasion.

On 30 May, Agence France-Presse reported that the Iraqi security forces and Shiite militia had "liberated the Anbar traffic police building" in a town west of Ramadi. The Anbar police chief told AFP that "ordnance disposal teams were busy removing roadside bombs and checking buildings for booby traps in reconquered positions on the outskirts of Ramadi." [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Al-Arabiya](#). The liberation of the traffic police building is also reported in [All Iraq News](#).

I mentioned above that the English-language Iraqi news media had no reports of progress in liberating Ramadi during 29-30 May. On 31 May, *Rudaw* confirmed my observation:

Anbar officials' displeasure over the "Labaik Ya Iraq" operation is rising days after the operation started with the aim to drive ISIS jihadis out of the Anbar provincial capital Ramadi.

A security source spoke to *Rudaw* Saturday [30 May] on condition of anonymity and claimed that despite the numerous Iraqi forces deployed in the region "they have not seen any significant offensive against the militants." The source also said "the slow operation disappointed residents of Anbar province."

"Officials: No significant advance in anti-ISIS Anbar operation," [Rudaw](#), approximately 08:00 GMT, 31 May 2015.

Another *Rudaw* news story mentions recent Iraqi victories near Tikrit, and then tersely says:

Saturday's [30 May] announcements of progress in Salahaddin come as Iraqi forces and thousands of Shiite militiamen are battling ISIS in the Sunni-dominated Iraqi province of Anbar, reportedly with no significant advances so far.

"Ministry of Defense: Iraqi forces recapture areas around Tikrit," [Rudaw](#), approximately 10:00 GMT, 31 May 2015.

On the evening of 31 May, *Rudaw* reported:

Iraqi forces reported gains against ISIS in the city of Ramadi in Anbar province, reporting that the militants have lost the will to fight and that government had received reinforcements for a multi-pronged assault.

....

"In the next few hours the equations of power will dramatically change in Ramadi, because the ISIS militants have lost their morale and we have received a supporting force to launch a multi-pronged assault inside Ramadi." Fahdawi [a member of the Anbar provincial council] announced.

In a separate announcement Farhan Mohammed, another member of the Anbar provincial council, told *Rudaw* that the battle for Ramadi would take time because the Iraqi forces did not launch an immediate counter-attack against ISIS, after losing Ramadi about a fortnight ago. He ISIS took advantage of time to get more weapons into areas it controls.

"Iraqi forces say they are grouping for major assault on ISIS in Ramadi," [Rudaw](#), approximately 18:00 GMT, 31 May 2015.

My comment is that ISIL has had two weeks "to get more weapons into areas it controls" in Ramadi, as well as to install land mines, roadside bombs, and booby-traps in buildings. The delay in liberating Ramadi from ISIL makes the liberation more difficult and increases casualties amongst the Iraqi army and militias.

On 31 May, *Iraqi News* reported the liberation of Ramadi began two days ago:

A senior source within the leadership of al-Hashed militia announced on Friday

[29 May] the start of the biggest operation to liberate Ramadi city from Husaybah al-Sharqiya hand.

The source said in an interview for IraqiNews.com, “a major operation has begun to liberate Ramadi from ISIS control,” noting that, “the operation was launched from Husaybah al-Sharqiya area.”

"Major operation started to liberate Ramadi from Husaybah al-Sharqiya side," [Iraqi News](#), 31 May 2015.

My comment on the above *Iraqi News* story: it is **not** credible, because other news sources (e.g., Reuters and Associated Press) are not reporting what — if true — would be a very significant development. *Rudaw* reports the liberation of Ramadi will begin soon, which is plausible. I normally ignore unconfirmed news reports, but I include this *Iraqi News* story to show how hysterical exaggerations appear in Iraqi news media.

Kobani in Syria destroyed

In October 2014, ISIL invaded Kobani in Syria. In January 2015, Kurdish peshmerga defeated ISIL in and around Kobani. (See my essay for [Jan 2015](#).) While people were celebrating the victory over ISIL, few people noticed that Kobani had been destroyed in the fighting.

On 1 May 2015, the Associated Press reported:

The battle for the Syrian border town of Kobani was a watershed in the war against the Islamic State group — Syrian Kurdish forces fought the militants in rubble-strewn streets for months as U.S. aircraft pounded the extremists from the skies until ultimately expelling them from the town earlier this year.

It was the Islamic State's bloodiest defeat to date in Syria. But now, three months since Kobani was liberated, tens of thousands of its residents are still stranded in Turkey, reluctant to return to a wasteland of collapsed buildings and at a loss as to how and where to rebuild their lives.

The Kurdish town on the Turkish-Syrian border is still a haunting, apocalyptic vista of hollowed out facades and streets littered with unexploded ordnance — a testimony to the massive price that came with the victory over IS.

There is no electricity or clean water, nor any immediate plans to restore basic services and start rebuilding.

....

Today more than 70 percent of Kobani lies in ruins. More than 560 Kurdish fighters died in the battles.

About 70,000 of the refugees have returned to the town and surrounding areas, some

only to pitch tents outside their destroyed homes, according to Aisha Afandi, co-chair of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, or PYD.

With no outside help, the Kurdish fighters use primitive tools to dismantle mines and booby traps left behind by IS militants. The rotting bodies of dead fighters are still trapped under the rubble, and as the weather gets warmer, there are concerns of spreading disease.

Zeina Karam & Mohammed Rasool, "Kobani still a ghost town, months after liberation from IS," [Associated Press](#), 18:22 GMT, 1 May 2015.

On 5 May, [CNN](#) reported that Kobani is 70% destroyed. Turkey keeps the main border crossing closed, which prevents building materials from entering Kobani.

It is possible that Tikrit and Mosul in Iraq will suffer the same fate as Kobani in Syria: destroyed in the liberation.

In May, there were reports that ISIL was again attacking Kobani, after the Iraqi peshmerga have returned home. [ARA News](#), 7 May; [ARA News](#), 15 May. Such attacks by ISIL are apparently confirmed by the U.S. Central Command's press releases on 1, 2, 9, 11, 13-15, 17, 20-24, 29-31 May of airstrikes "near Kobani". I say "apparently" because we do not know whether these airstrikes were at Kobani. The airstrikes *may* have been somewhere out in the desert, but closer to Kobani than to any other town.

Fighting Continues at Baiji

The town of Baiji is near the largest oil refinery in Iraq, and ISIL desires to control both the town and the refinery. My essay for [June 2014](#) cites conflicting information on whether ISIL or Iraq control the refinery, leading me to the conclusion that information from the Iraqi government was unreliable. My essay for [Nov 2014](#) cites reports that the Iraqi army finally captured the town of Baiji.

The refinery processed approximately half of Iraq's oil, until June 2014 when the refinery was shut down because of attacks by ISIL. *If* Iraq could continuously control the refinery — and also control the area surrounding the refinery — then the refinery could significantly boost Iraq's exports, and provide much needed revenue to the Iraqi government. Moreover, the town of Baiji is located on the road between Baghdad and Mosul, so Baiji needs to be liberated before Mosul.

My essay for [April 2015](#) mentions that ISIL breached the perimeter of the refinery on 11 April, but the Iraqi army claimed complete control of the refinery on 20 April. However fighting continued in the area, as shown by continuing airstrikes near Baiji.

On 4 May, [Iraqi News](#) reports that the refinery is again under "fierce attacks" by ISIL. [Reuters](#) reports: "Iraqi forces besieged inside the country's largest oil refinery are running low on food and pleading for reinforcements to save them from Islamic State militants who have advanced deep into the compound in the past week. the insurgents had now pushed

so far into the complex that it was almost impossible for planes to target them without damaging the refinery as well."

On 5 May, the [Associated Press](#) reports that the Iraq government has sent reinforcements to soldiers at the oil refinery.

On 6 May, [Reuters](#) reports that ISIL "holds large sections of the sprawling Baiji refinery complex."

As I read the dismal reports from journalists about what is happening at Baiji, I recall a [CENTCOM](#) propaganda release on 1 May that asserts that ISIL is "experiencing setbacks in Iraq". (Also see the [Pentagon](#) press release.) These releases honestly admit "Beiji and Ramadi in Iraq remain contested". But Beiji and Ramadi are currently the two biggest battles, and the Iraqi army could lose both battles.

On 7 May, the situation at the oil refinery was bleaker for the Iraqi government. [CNN](#) reported that the "refinery is now 80% controlled" by ISIL. The Iraqi army in the refinery is now surrounded by ISIL. [Reuters](#) reports that the U.S. dropped 18 pallets of supplies to the Iraqi army at the refinery.

On 10 May, [Rudaw](#) reported that the Iraqi army had broken ISIL's siege of the refinery. However, fighting continues at and near the refinery.

On 12 May, [Rudaw](#) reported that ISIL controls half of the refinery.

On the morning of 13 May, Reuters posted a story with the grim title: "Iraqi refinery may be destroyed in battle to save it".

Islamic State militants have dug trenches around natural gas and hydrogen tanks at Iraq's largest refinery, raising the stakes in a battle where the price of victory may be the refinery itself.

The Baiji refinery remains contested despite more than 300 coalition air strikes in the vicinity since the Islamist insurgents overran the area last June.

The militants launched their fiercest attack on the installation last month and now control large parts of the complex in which 200 Iraqi security forces are trapped.

....

Islamic State appears to have committed itself to an all-out fight there, proving it can still seize the initiative after being ejected from the city of Tikrit further south in early April, military officials and experts say.

....

For Islamic State, the value of the refinery, which has not been working since last June, is mainly symbolic, although the group may be able to siphon off some crude oil and fuel from storage tanks, analysts and officials say.

The latest fighting has inflicted damage that will take years to repair, rendering the refinery idle at a time when Iraq is short of cash due to plummeting oil prices.

....

The refinery was liberated once before in November, but security forces failed to secure the area and deployed to other fronts, leaving the refinery a soft target.

"They handed it over to weak army units that crumbled under pressure," said the Iraqi security source.

[Reuters](#), 08:54 GMT, 13 May 2015.

In the story cited in the previous paragraph, Reuters makes the obvious comparison with the town of Kobani in Syria, in which Kobani was destroyed in the so-called victory over ISIL, as mentioned [above](#). Since the refinery was shut down in June 2014, destroying the refinery would *not* change Iraq's current economy. However, destroying the refinery would make the economic recovery of Iraq slower, by both (1) delaying when the refinery can again process crude oil and (2) increasing the expenses of rebuilding damaged infrastructure.

On 15 May, The [Washington Post](#) reported that ISIL could capture the oil refinery at Baiji.

On 15 May, a member of the Iraqi parliament said the Iraqi air force had mistakenly dropped weapons and ammunition at the wrong location at the Baiji refinery, and ISIL had seized most of these air-dropped supplies. [Daily Sabah](#).

The rout of the Iraqi army at Ramadi on 17 May pushed Baiji out of the news. But on 22 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iran has contributed "small numbers of troops — including some operating artillery and other heavy weapons and surveillance and reconnaissance drones" to the Iraqi fight against ISIL at the Baiji oil refinery. The [Pentagon](#), and also the above cited Associated Press article, reports that the Iraqi security forces, with the help of U.S. airstrikes, has broken the siege of the refinery, and opened the road into the refinery.

On 30 May, the Iraqi army claimed they had "secur[ed] all the outskirts of Baiji refinery". [All Iraq News](#).

Snitch on Baghdadi, win US\$10 million

On 5 May 2015, the U.S. State Department announced:

The U.S. Department of State's Rewards for Justice Program is offering rewards for information on four key leaders of the terrorist group Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The Secretary of State has authorized rewards of up to \$7 million for information on 'Abd al-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli; up to \$5 million each for information on Abu Mohammed al-Adnani and Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili; and up to \$3 million for information on Tariq Bin-al-Tahar Bin al Falih al-'Awni al-

Harzi.

Established in 2004 as “al-Qaida in Iraq” and later known as the “Islamic State of Iraq,” ISIL has recruited thousands of followers from across the globe to fight in Iraq and Syria, where ISIL members continue to commit gross, systematic human rights abuses, including mass executions, persecution of individuals and entire communities on the basis of their identity, killing and maiming of children, rape, and numerous other atrocities.

In April 2013, ISIL’s current leader **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**, also known as Abu Du’a, publicly declared that the Islamic State of Iraq was operating under the moniker of ISIL. ISIL has since asserted publicly that it is the true inheritor of Usama bin Ladin’s legacy.

‘Abd al-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli is a senior ISIL official who rejoined ISIL following his release from prison in early 2012. He traveled to Syria where he has worked with an ISIL network. He originally joined al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) in 2004 and served as AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s deputy and as AQI emir of Mosul, Iraq. The U.S. Department of the Treasury designated al-Qaduli as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist pursuant to Executive Order 13224 on May 14, 2014.

Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, whose birth name is Taha Sobhi Falaha, is a senior leader of and official spokesman for ISIL. He is the main conduit for the dissemination of ISIL messages, including its declaration of ISIL’s creation of an Islamic caliphate. In public statements, al-Adnani has repeatedly called for attacks against Westerners and has vowed “defeat” for the United States. The U.S. Department of State designated al-Adnani as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on August 18, 2014.

Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili has served as a senior ISIL commander and Shura Council member. Batirashvili has overseen an ISIL prison facility in al-Tabqa where ISIL possibly held foreign hostages, has worked closely with ISIL’s financial section, and has managed ISIL operations in the Manbij area of Syria. In May 2013, he was appointed ISIL’s northern commander of operations in Syria’s Aleppo, al-Raqqah, Latakia, and northern Idlib provinces. The U.S. Department of the Treasury designated Batirashvili as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on September 24, 2014.

Tariq Bin-al-Tahar Bin al Falih al-‘Awni al-Harzi was one of the first terrorists to join ISIL and has served as an ISIL official operating in Syria. He has helped to raise funds from Gulf-based donors for ISIL and has recruited and facilitated the travel of ISIL fighters. He was named ISIL’s leader for the border region between Syria and Turkey. As of late 2013, al-Harzi was chief of ISIL’s suicide bombers, overseeing ISIL’s suicide bomber facilitation pipeline. Al-Harzi also has procured and shipped weapons from Libya and Syria for ISIL operations in Iraq. On September 24, 2014, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated al-Harzi as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.

"Rewards for Justice - Reward Offers for Information on Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Terrorists," [State Dept.](#), 5 May 2015.

The U.S. State Department has created a website for the [Rewards](#) program.

One could question a program that pays for information on Islamic terrorist leaders. In three prominent cases, the program has had no effect:

1. On 4 Nov 1998, the [Rewards](#) program offered US\$ 5 million "for information that leads to the arrest and/or conviction anywhere in the world of Osama Bin Laden." The reward was later increased to US\$ 25 million. In May 2011, Osama was killed in Pakistan by a U.S. Navy Seal team. Information on Osama's location came from a fake immunization campaign organized by the CIA, *not* from a source that could receive a reward.
2. In August 1998, a US\$ 5 million reward was offered "for information leading directly to the apprehension or conviction of [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#)". In July 2010, the reward was increased to US\$25 million. al-Zawahiri is the head of Al-Qaeda since the death of Osama bin Laden. al-Zawahiri is still functional more than 16 years after the USA first put a bounty on his head.
3. On 4 Oct 2011, a US\$ 10 million [reward](#) was offered "for information that leads to the location of Abu Du'a." Abu Du'a is now known as al-Baghdadi. Since the reward was offered, al-Baghdadi has expanded his terrorist group. In May 2013, he invaded Syria and renamed his group ISIL. In June 2014, he declared a caliphate and renamed his group "Islamic State". Baghdadi has since expanded his group into Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.

Payments of rewards are secret, so we do not know the effectiveness of the program. Osama bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and al-Baghdadi are all reclusive, and probably only a few trusted aides know their location. Experience shows that the aides of these top Islamic terrorists will *not* betray their leader in exchange for a reward of millions of dollars.

7 May 2015: ISIL Hotel in Mosul

On 7 May 2015, ISIL reopened the Ninawa International Hotel in Mosul, Iraq. This is a 262-bed luxury hotel. Amongst all of the grim news from Syria and Iraq, comes some humorous news. *The Express* in England informs us:

... dancing, music, smoking or gambling are now forbidden [at the Ninawa Hotel] and women must dress head-to-toe in black.

Members of the group's notorious al-Khansaa brigade — its female police force — are understood to be tasked with patrolling the grounds to check clients are obeying strict Sharia law.

Patrons risk amputation or beheading for failing to adhere to the Islamic rules that govern the area.

....

Another Tripadvisor, presumably made aware of the IS refurbishment, posted a tongue-in-cheek question on the popular travel website yesterday, asking the hotel staff and other travellers: "Do you do a full English breakfast [containing bacon and pork sausages] included in the stay? Also, my wife wants to know your policy on topless sunbathing."

"PICTURED: Islamic State opens luxury hotel but guests face beheading if they break rules," [The Express](#), 6 May 2015.

A news website in Australia reports:

The TripAdvisor page of a luxury hotel taken over by Islamic State terrorists is being trolled, with users asking if they can get Kosher meals or host Mohammad drawing competitions there.

"Can I inquire the manager [sic] on hosting my second annual Mohammad drawing contest here?" one user known as BlastedCannon wrote on the TripAdvisor page.

One asked about the availability of Kosher dining, while another said the management is only "OK if you're Muslim."

"IS claims to have taken over luxury hotel in Mosul," [news.com.au](#), 7 May 2015.

The hotel was actually opened on 1 May. It took a few days for the sarcasm to accumulate.

My comment is that the reopening of this hotel reminds us that people formerly *voluntarily* traveled to Iraq. "Formerly" means before Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990. I wonder if ISIL charges hotel guests for an amputation or beheading? Does the hotel give frequent infidel points for violation of Sharia law?

Iraqi government makes another false statement

On 13 May 2015, the Iraqi defense ministry claimed that al-Afari — ISIL's second highest ranking leader — had been killed by a U.S. airstrike on a mosque in Tal Afar at night on 12 May. [Iraqi News Rudaw](#); [Reuters](#), 14:58 GMT; [Associated Press](#), 18:19 GMT; [Daily Star](#), 21:24 GMT; all on 13 May.

The Associated Press story cited in the previous paragraph notes that the Iraqi interior ministry said it was "not clear" what happened to al-Afari (partly contradicting the defense ministry claim) and the U.S. Pentagon denied that an airstrike hit a mosque. The Associated Press then dryly says: "This wouldn't be the first time Iraqi authorities put out incorrect information in its war against the Islamic State group". On the morning of 14 May, [Reuters](#) says: "The Iraqi government has previously announced the death of Islamic State militants only for them to resurface alive."

Back on 8 Nov 2014, the Iraqi government claimed the ISIL leader, al-Baghdadi, had been wounded in an airstrike, a claim that was totally bogus. (See my essay for [Nov 2014](#).) In [August 2014](#), I noted "hysterical exaggerations by the Iraqi government" in claiming deaths

of ISIL fighters. In [June 2014](#), I noted conflicting information from the Iraqi government about who controlled the Baiji oil refinery, and I then concluded that Iraqi news sources had a "lack of credibility". In summary, the Iraqi government has a long history of releasing false information in an apparent propaganda campaign to make it appear that the Iraqis are successfully defeating ISIL.

On 13 May, [CENTCOM](#) issued a press release that said: "We are aware of media reports that the second-in-command of ISIL has been killed in a Coalition air strike in Tal Afar and have no information to corroborate these claims. However, we can confirm that Coalition aircraft did not strike a mosque as some of the press reporting has alleged."

16 May 2015: U.S. incursion in Syria

On the night of 15 May, a U.S. Army Delta Force team entered eastern Syria on Black Hawk helicopters and V-22 Osprey aircraft.

The objective was to capture an ISIL senior leader, Abu Sayyaf, who "was involved in ISIL's military operations and also helped direct the terrorist organization's illicit oil, gas[,] and financial operations". (quoting Pentagon's press release)

Abu was killed when he "engaged" U.S. forces. The U.S. Army kidnapped Abu's wife and rescued a Yazidi woman, who Abu held as a slave. U.S. military personnel were neither injured nor killed in the operation. The Associated Press reports that the U.S. Military estimates that approximately a dozen ISIL fighters were killed, and the U.S. forces returned to their base in Iraq at 04:00 GMT.

On the afternoon of 16 May, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* report that "laptop [computers], cellphones, files" were taken from Abu Sayyaf by the U.S. Army. These materials could yield information on ISIL operations.

Sources: (all on 16 May 2015)

- "Carter: Special Operations Troops Conduct Raid in Syria," [Pentagon](#).
- "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on Counter-ISIL Operation in Syria," [White House](#).
- "US commandos kill senior IS commander in Syria raid," [Associated Press](#), 14:06 GMT, updated at 19:45 GMT.
- "U.S. says did not warn Syrian government of Islamic State raid," [Reuters](#), 13:55 GMT.
- "U.S. conducts raid in Syria, says it kills senior Islamic State leader," [Reuters](#), 23:18 GMT.
- "ISIS Official Killed in U.S. Raid in Syria, Pentagon Says," [NY Times](#).

- "Senior ISIS leader killed in U.S. raid in Syria," [Washington Post](#), 22:10 GMT.
- "US special forces kill senior ISIS leader in Syria: Pentagon," [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon, 12:23 GMT, updated at 18:23 GMT.
- "US special forces kill 'senior Isil leader' Abu Sayyaf in rare Syria raid," [The Telegraph](#), 17:41 GMT.
- "U.S. Special Forces kill senior ISIS figure in Syria," [Al-Arabiya](#), 17:26 GMT.

My comments on 16 May: This military incursion into the territory of Syria, a sovereign nation, was almost certainly a violation of international law. This conclusion becomes clearer with a hypothetical example: Suppose North Korea conducted a similar raid into the territory of South Korea, then the U.S. Government — amongst others — would be condemning the raid by North Korea.

Unlike the U.S. raid into Syria in July 2014 (See my essay for [August 2014](#).), the goal on 15 May was *not* to rescue a U.S. citizen being held hostage in Syria. Any benefit to the USA from the 15 May raid was tenuous and indirect.

Why did Obama authorize this raid inside Syria?

1. Perhaps Obama authorized this raid to show the Gulf nations that the U.S. would boldly intervene militarily in Arab nations. (See [summit](#), above.)
2. Perhaps Obama authorized the raid to splatt ISIL at a time when ISIL is winning battles in [Ramadi](#), [Baiji](#), and elsewhere in Iraq.
3. Perhaps Obama intended to poke Assad, by making a raid that violated the sovereignty of Syria.
4. This is definitely an escalation of the U.S. war against ISIL, in which the USA now begins to capture — or to kill — leaders of ISIL. Obama *may* intend to increase the effectiveness of the war against ISIL, by disrupting financing of ISIL, by removing senior leaders of ISIL, and by collecting more information on ISIL.

Note that this raid is consistent with Obama's draft AUMF in February 2015, which would authorize "the use of special operations forces to take military action against ISIL leadership". (See Obama's 11 Feb letter to Congress, quoted in my essay for [Feb 2015](#).)

Disrupting ISIL's sales of oil on the black market is good, but the end does *not* justify the means. I am concerned about the the U.S. violation of Syria's territory. On the other hand, Assad's government benefitted from any harm to ISIL, which mitigates the U.S. violation of Syria's borders.

The Associated Press (citation above) reports that Abu Sayyaf was a relatively minor ISIL leader, who was *not* well known to experts on Islamic terrorism. I suggest that Abu was easier to kidnap than the principal leaders of ISIL, who are in secure locations at ISIL headquarters in Mosul (Iraq) or Raqqa (Syria).

On 17 May, Agence France-Press cites the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights as saying the U.S. Army killed 32 ISIL fighters, including 4 leaders. [Daily Star](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 17 May, the [Guardian](#) reports that "senior figures on [U.S.] congressional committees on intelligence and security said the discovery [of intelligence material] was potentially more significant than the killing of Abu Sayyaf". Note the shift in emphasis from killing Abu Sayyaf to collecting military intelligence.

Any propaganda value of the daring U.S. raid inside Syria was spoiled by the rout of the Iraqi army in Ramadi on 17 May.

New Threat from ISIL

On 23 May 2015, *Iraqi News* reported:

ISIL has used the ninth edition of its propaganda magazine *Dabiq* to say that it is expanding so rapidly and it could buy its first nuclear weapon within a year.

In an article entitled 'The Perfect Storm' and attributed to the British captive John Cantlie, ISIL claims that militant groups such as Boko Haram, which recently pledged allegiance to ISIL, are uniting across the Middle East, Africa and Asia to create one global movement.

"Let me throw a hypothetical operation onto the table. The ISIL has billions of dollars in the bank, so they call on their Wilayat in Pakistan to purchase a nuclear device through weapons dealers with links to corrupt officials in the region," The article reads.

"It is the sum of all fears for Western intelligence agencies and it is infinitely more possible today than it was just one year ago," the article also adds. "And if not a nuke, what about a few thousand tons of ammonium nitrate explosive? That is easy enough to make."

....

The article continues, "They will [ISIL militants] be looking to do something big, something that would make any past operation look like a squirrel shoot, and the more groups that pledge allegiance the more possible it becomes to pull off something truly epic."

Amre Sarhan, "ISIL claims it could buy nuclear weapon from Pakistan within a year," [Iraqi News](#), 23 May 2015.

See also [The Telegraph](#) and [The Independent](#), newspapers in London, England.

My comment is that such a nuclear attack by ISIL in Western Europe or the USA is a plausible threat. Everyone in the USA remembers 11 Sep 2001, when 19 Islamic terrorists from Al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes in the USA, flew two of them into the World Trade

Center in New York City and flew one into the Pentagon, killing approximately 3000 people. In response, the U.S. Congress reorganized the U.S. Government, creating a new department of Homeland Security. Intrusive inspections of *all* airline passengers were begun, in an effort to stop future Islamic terrorists. And the USA became involved in the war in Afghanistan, in an attempt to destroy Al-Qaeda.

In contrast to the 3000 killed on 11 Sep 2001, detonation of a nuclear weapon in a major city could kill 100,000 people. We know this from the death toll in Hiroshima in 1945. (See, e.g., [BBC](#).) making such an attack at least *thirty times worse* than 11 Sep 2001. Such a large number of deaths is difficult to imagine.

Every physicist who knows how to construct a nuclear weapon should feel an intense moral obligation — in addition to laws punishing release of classified information — *never* to disclose how to design a nuclear weapon. Helping nations build nuclear weapons aids the proliferation of nuclear weapons, making the world less safe. But — to the eternal shame of the Pakistanis — Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan sold instructions for nuclear weapons to North Korea, Iran, Libya, and possibly other nations during 1989-1997. In putting his personal profit ahead of the lives of millions of people who would be endangered by nuclear weapons in the hands of three rogue nations, Khan showed that Pakistanis were *not* trustworthy custodians of nuclear weapons. Adding to this concern is widespread terrorism and corruption in Pakistan. And so I believe it is possible that some individual Pakistanis could sell nuclear weapons to ISIL.

If Pakistan will not sell a nuclear weapon to ISIL, then ISIL can still carry out a massive attack with conventional explosives. As the ISIL article in *Dabiq* says: "And if not a nuke, what about a few thousand tons of ammonium nitrate explosive? That's easy enough to make." (In April 1995, Timothy McVey used 922 kg of ammonium nitrate plus fuel oil and nitromethane to destroy the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168 people.) "A few thousand tons" is hyperbole. One ton is enough to destroy a building.

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 May 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 1 May 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 30, and 8 a.m., May 1, local time. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. 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.

“The Coalition continues its commitment to defeating Daesh with airstrikes, surveillance, intelligence, advise and assist elements, and Build Partner Capacity trainers in Iraq and Syria, which enables Iraqi and Kurdish forces to counter Daesh, reestablish the border, retake lost terrain and restore stability and security,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR Chief of Public Affairs.

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kobani, six airstrikes struck an ISIL large and three small tactical units, destroying seven ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL defensive position.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL resupply cache.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

2 May 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 2 May 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., May 1, and 8 a.m., May 2, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 17 airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. 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.

"Raqqah and Mosul represent Daesh centers of power," said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. "The coalition will continue to strike Daesh in these cities as we dismantle and ultimately defeat Daesh."

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

Syria

- Near Raqqah, seven airstrikes struck land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage.
- Near Kobani, seven airstrikes struck one large and six smaller ISIL units, destroying six ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Dair Az Zawr, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, one airstrike struck a large ISIL unit, destroying two buildings, two excavators and four fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL supply cache and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 2 May 2015. (Posted at CENTCOM website on 4 May.)
Not posted at the Pentagon

On 2 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a pro-rebel organization, claimed that airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition "massacred" civilians in Syria on 1 May.

The number of civilians who were killed by the U.S led coalition air strikes on Ber Mahli near Seren town northeast of Aleppo has raised to 52 including 7 children and 9 women, civilians from the area confirmed to SOHR that the dead were from 6 different families. the number is likely to rise because of 13 missing civilians.

We in SOHR condemn in the strongest terms this massacre committed by the U.S led coalition under the pretext of targeting the IS in the village, and we call the coalition countries to refer who committed this massacre to the courts, as we renew our calls to neutralize all civilians areas from military operations by all parties.

"65 killed and missing in a massacre by the U.S led coalition aircrafts," [SOHR](#), 2 May 2015.

In contrast to the inflammatory report by SOHR, Reuters had reasonable reporting:

Rami Abdulrahman, who runs the British-based Observatory for Human Rights, said

the death toll from Friday's strike was the highest civilian loss in a single attack by U.S. and Arab forces since they started air raids against hardline Islamist militant groups in Syria such as Islamic State.

....

U.S.-led strikes had killed at least 66 civilians in Syria from the start of the raids on Sept. 23 until Friday's [1 May] strike, which brought the total to at least 118. The campaign has also killed nearly 2,000 Islamic State fighters, the Observatory said.

....

"We currently have no information to corroborate allegations that coalition air strikes resulted in civilian casualties," Major Curt Kellogg, spokesman for U.S. Central Command, said in an email.

"Death toll from U.S.-led strike rises to 52 civilians in Syria," [Reuters](#), 18:25 GMT, 2 May 2015.

My comment is to deplore the hysteria by SOHR. On 28 April, [SOHR](#) reported that ISIL had executed 2154 people in Syria since the caliphate was declared on 28 June 2014. That number does *not* include deaths caused by ISIL attacking towns in Syria or other military battles. So which is better: (1) deliberate and malicious executions of 2154 people by ISIL or (2) accidental killing of less than 120 civilians by those who are fighting against ISIL?

3 May 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 3 May 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., May 1, and 8 a.m., May 2, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using remotely piloted 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 Ar Raqqa, three airstrikes struck land features denying ISIL tactical advantage.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL VBIED, destroying two ISIL staging points.
- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck one large and three small ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar tube and an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL staging areas and two ISIL excavators.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL buildings and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

[Central Command](#), 3 May 2015. (corrected version)

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 3 May 2015. (includes airstrikes reported on 2-3 May, and may contain errors.)

4 May 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq between 8 a.m., May 3, and 8 a.m., May 4, local time. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“In support of the government of Iraq, the coalition continues to make progress against Daesh in the region by striking military resources such as caches and weapon systems,” said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff.

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

Syria

CJTF-OIR conducted no airstrikes in Syria between 8 a.m., May 3, and 8 a.m., May 4, local time.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL excavators.
- Near Al Huwayjah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL staging areas.
- Near Al Qaim, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, eight airstrikes struck one large and five small ISIL tactical units, destroying five ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL command and control facility, an ISIL mortar system, and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike destroyed four ISIL caches.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL

buildings and two ISIL fighting positions.

- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL fighting positions, destroying an ISIL excavator.

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

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

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

On 4 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights continued its inflammatory accusations of 2 May:

SOHR documented the death of 64 civilians, were killed by a massacre by the U.S led coalition warplanes on Friday's night 30/04/2015 by targeting Ber Mahli village near the town of Seren in Aleppo with several air strikes, and the dead included:

- 31 children under the age of 16 including (16 females and 15 males).
- 19 women above the age of 18.
- 13 men above the age of 18.
- a 18 years old boy.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights condemns with the strongest terms targeting the civilians by the U.S coalition warplanes in the village of Ber Mahli, after they had information about a procession of IS vehicles in the village, what made the coalition warplanes heavily target the village "which its civilians were sleeping".

We in SOHR were shocked when we heard the denial of the U.S led coalition forces on this massacre, rather than starting a serious investigation to bring those responsible to justice and to compensate the survivors and the affected.

"64 civilians including 50 children and women killed by a massacre by the U.S led coalition warplanes," [SOHR](#), 4 May 2015.

On 4 May, the Associated Press reported:

U.S. Army Col. Steve Warren, a Pentagon spokesman, said that so far there was no information to indicate there were civilians present in the village. He said U.S. Central Command is assessing the claims of civilian deaths in order to determine if a formal investigation should be opened.

Earlier, U.S. Central Command spokesman Maj. Curtis Kellogg said there was no indication that any civilians were killed in the airstrikes Thursday night on the northern Syrian village of Bir Mahli.

....

Kellogg said that prior to the airstrikes, Kurdish forces in the area said the village has been emptied of civilians for at least two weeks.

Shorsh Hassan, a spokesman in Kobani for the main Kurdish militia known as the People's Protection Units had earlier told The Associated Press that Bir Mahli was emptied of civilians.

Sarah El Deeb [and Lolita Baldor], "Rights group: 64 civilians killed in Syria coalition strike," [Associated Press](#), 13:41 EDT, 4 May 2015.

My comments:

Note that SOHR complains of an airstrike on "Friday's night 30/04/2015", while Major Kellogg considers "Thursday night", which is the night of 30 April. SOHR has an inconsistent day and date. On 2 May, Reuters (quoted above) mentioned a date of Friday, 1 May, which could be consistent with after midnight on Thursday night, 30 April.

The Associated Press reported that ISIL had produced two slick videos with images of dead children who were allegedly killed by bombs from the U.S.-led coalition. But neither CENTCOM nor the Pentagon had any press releases that mentioned this incident. The U.S. Military has failed to fight in the propaganda war against ISIL, leaving ISIL with another victory.

Note that on 1-2 May, the U.S. Military reported a total of 28 airstrikes in Syria. But, after the accusations by SOHR, on 4-6 May there were reports of only 1 airstrike in Syria. This change suggests to me that the U.S. Military temporarily halted airstrikes, to evaluate what had happened.

5 May 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 5 May 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., May 4, and 8 a.m., May 5, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one airstrike using attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Our counter-Daesh strategy calls for Coalition forces to conduct a systematic air campaign in Iraq and Syria," said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. "This enables us to continue the reduction of Daesh capabilities."

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 one large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL structures, an ISIL warehouse, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL rocket-propelled grenade.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL

- structures, two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL mortar tube.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck three ISIL fighting positions, destroying an ISIL excavator.
 - Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying three ISIL structures, three ISIL tanks and an ISIL armored vehicle.
 - Near Tal Afar, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 5 May 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 5 May 2015.

6 May 2015: airstrikes

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

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq between 8 a.m., May 5, and 8 a.m., May 6, local time. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The coalition continues to demonstrate its ability to strike Daesh unimpeded,” said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. “The coalition takes every possible measure during the targeting process to mitigate possible risk to civilians, while maximizing the effects on Daesh.”

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

Syria

CJTF-OIR conducted no airstrikes in Syria between 8 a.m., May 5, and 8 a.m., May 6, local time.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL staging areas, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck one large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying five ISIL fighting positions, eight ISIL structures, six ISIL fuel tanks, three ISIL VBIEDS and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL buildings and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck one large and one small ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL structures and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL buildings.

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

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

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

7 May 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, 7 May 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., May 6, and 8 a.m., May 7, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The coalition strikes in Mosul represent increased pressure against Daesh,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. “The coalition continues to conduct successful strikes upon Daesh units, fighting positions, and safe havens, which is limiting their freedom of movement within Iraq.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four airstrikes struck one large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying 12 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL trench system and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL generator.
- Near Bayji, six airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL structures, an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck two ISIL fighting positions, destroying an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

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

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

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

8 May 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 8 May 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., May 7, and 8 a.m., May 8, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using attack, bomber fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The coalition is striking to secure current operational objectives and prepare for future operations,” said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. “In addition to airstrikes, the coalition continues to train the ISF and KSF to provide security to the population and restore the territorial integrity of Iraq.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building.
- Near Al Qaim, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying six ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL armored personnel carrier.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying seven ISIL buildings and destroying nine ISIL heavy machine guns.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 8 May 2015.

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

9 May 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 9 May 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., May 8, and 8 a.m., May 9, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces

conducted 15 airstrikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The coalition is keeping the pressure on ISIL militants in both Iraq and Syria,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. “The coalition is steadfastly supporting Iraqi and Kurdish forces with intelligence, airstrikes and advice in support of their operations across Iraq and Syria.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, 13 airstrikes struck three large and seven small ISIL tactical units, destroying nine ISIL fighting positions, 10 ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Aleppo, one airstrike struck an ISIL building and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Kobani, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL VBIEDS, two ISIL IED staging areas, an ISIL structure, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL IED.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL weapons facility, an ISIL IED staging facility, an ISIL VBIED facility, destroying an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL excavator, 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](#), 9 May 2015. (posted 11 May)

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

10-11 May 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday 10 May, neither CENTCOM, the Pentagon, nor Reuters reported on airstrikes.

On Monday, 11 May 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., May 10, and 8 a.m., May 11, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately

in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“Our strikes in Syria are having a significant effect on Daesh forces,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. “These strikes represent increased pressure against Daesh leadership, and result from Daesh repeatedly ceding territory to Kurdish forces.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, six airstrikes struck one large and one small ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL vehicles, two ISIL mortar positions, four ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL supply point
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Haditha, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position and struck land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying four ISIL buildings and three ISIL heavy machine guns.

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

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

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

12-13 May 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 12 May 2015, neither the U.S. Central Command, the Pentagon, nor Reuters reported airstrikes in Iraq and Syria.

On Wednesday, 13 May, the U.S. Central Command reported:

Coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq between 8 a.m., May 12, and 8 a.m., May 13, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces

conducted five airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The Coalition again struck Daesh targets around Mosul,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. “These strikes help set the conditions for future operations to liberate the city from Daesh terrorists.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL trench system, destroying six ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL tank.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kobani, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck one large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying 10 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area, destroying an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying six ISIL heavy machine guns and five ISIL buildings.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

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

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

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

Every day since 9 Aug 2014, CENTCOM has said "All aircraft returned to base safely." But that did *not* happen with airstrikes conducted on 12 May. On 12 May, the Associated Press reported:

The U.S. Navy says one of its fighter jets has crashed in the Persian Gulf, and the plane's two pilots ejected and were rescued without serious injury.

The Navy's 5th Fleet said the F/A-18 Super Hornet crashed shortly after taking off Tuesday [12 May] from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, operating in the Gulf.

....

The Navy offered no reason for the crash but said it was not caused by hostile activity. "Navy fighter crashes in Persian Gulf; pilots safe," [Associated Press](#), 17:11 GMT, 12 May 2015.

14 May 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, 14 May 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., May 13, and 8 a.m., May 14, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“Coalition airstrikes targeted Daesh terrorists and equipment near Al Hasakah, Syria,” said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. “These strikes degrade their ability to conduct operations near this city result in more and more territory being ceded to Kurdish forces.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, eight airstrikes struck six ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL warehouse and an ISIL building.
- Near Kobani, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and occupied land features, denying ISIL a tactical advantage and destroying an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Al Qaim, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, eight airstrikes struck one large and six small ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL weapons caches, three ISIL buildings, three ISIL vehicles, two ISIL structures, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL staging point.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL excavators and an ISIL crossing point.
- Near Mosul, six airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and two ISIL staging areas, destroying three ISIL excavators, an ISIL building, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 14 May 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 14 May 2015.

15 May 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 15 May 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., May 14, and 8 a.m., May 15, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“Daesh targets were again struck near Al Hasakah, Syria,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. “These strikes continue to take their toll against Daesh terrorists there.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, six airstrikes struck one large and four small ISIL tactical units, destroying five ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Aleppo, one airstrike struck multiple fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kobani, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL tank.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and multiple ISIL structures, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building and an ISIL structure.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike destroyed three ISIL buildings and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL heavy machine gun firing position, destroying an ISIL mortar system.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 15 May 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 15 May 2015.

16 May 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 16 May 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., May 15, and 8 a.m., May 16, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes using 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 continues to strike Daesh terrorist targets in and around Ramadi, Iraq” said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. “Our ISF partners are fighting to retain this terrain, and we are resolved to support them with intelligence, planning assistance and airstrikes in this important effort.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, six airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

Iraq

- Near Al Hawijah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL encampment, destroying an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL structures and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL buildings, two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Ramadi, four airstrikes struck one large and three small ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL vehicles, three ISIL structures, two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL buildings, an ISIL cache, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 16 May 2015. (first posted 18 May)
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 16 May 2015.

17 May 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 17 May 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., May 16, and 8 a.m., May 17, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes using bomber, attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, 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, six airstrikes struck one large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying six ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL motorcycle and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying six ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL staging areas.
- Near Ramadi, seven airstrikes struck one large and five small ISIL tactical units and an ISIL IED facility, destroying four ISIL resupply structures, three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns and two ISIL buildings.

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

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

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

18 May 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 18 May 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., May 17, and 8 a.m., May 18, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes using bomber and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using

attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Coalition airstrikes continued across Iraq including eight strikes in Ramadi," said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. "We're continuing to monitor reports of the fluid and contested situation in and around Ramadi. We have always known the fight would be long and difficult, particularly in Anbar. The Coalition continues to coordinate with GOI forces and provide requested support to their ongoing operations."

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, six airstrikes struck one large and three small ISIL tactical units, destroying 14 ISIL vehicles, five ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL armored vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL armored personnel carriers and two ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Ramadi, eight airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and three ISIL buildings, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL buildings, two ISIL armored vehicles, two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL armored personnel carrier, an ISIL ammunition structure, and an ISIL command and control facility.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL sniper position, destroying six ISIL buildings and six ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL excavator, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL VBIED.

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

[Central Command](#), 18 May 2015.

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

19 May 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 19 May 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., May 18, and 8 a.m., May 19, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against

ISIL terrorists.

"In northern Syria, Daesh continues to cede military capacity, fighters and terrain," said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. "The Coalition remains committed to targeting Daesh across Iraq and Syria."

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, seven airstrikes struck two large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying seven ISIL vehicles, three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL armored vehicles and an ISIL shipping container.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one airstrike struck an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck one large and one small ISIL tactical unit, destroying six ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL staging area, destroying an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL resupply vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL rocket firing position, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL fighting position.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 19 May 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 19 May 2015.

20 May 2015: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 20 May 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., May 19, and 8 a.m., May 20, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Our airstrikes struck Daesh elements near along the Euphrates river valley," said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. "The Coalition applies significant mitigation measures in our targeting process and during the conduct of strike operations

to reduce the risks of collateral damage and non-combatant casualties.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, seven airstrikes struck two large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL armored vehicles and an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery system.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, six airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL structures, an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Huwayjah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL structure and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck a large ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL buildings.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL weapons manufacturing facility and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

21 May 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, 21 May 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., May 20, and 8 a.m., May 21, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 10 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

"Despite the setback in Ramadi, the Coalition continues to apply pressure on Daesh across Iraq and Syria in line with the campaign plan to defeat Daesh," said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. "This campaign will take time, and we remain focused on fully supporting the government of Iraq in their operations throughout the country."

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL trench system, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Aleppo, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Kobani, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL mortar positions and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck one large and one small ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL structure.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Makhmur, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL tunnel system, destroying three ISIL buildings and three ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL buildings and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tunnel system, destroying an ISIL VBIED.

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

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

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

22 May 2015: airstrikes

The U.S. Central Command website did *not* post any new press releases during 22-25 May, so I used the versions at the Pentagon.

On Friday, 22 May 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Attack and fighter aircraft conducted five airstrikes in Syria:

- Near Hasakah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two airstrikes struck two ISIL wellheads.
- Near Kobani, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted conducted 15 airstrikes in Iraq, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Asad, two airstrikes destroyed five ISIL buildings.

- Near Haditha, one airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL tunnel systems, an ISIL motorcycle, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL cache.
- Near Ramadi, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying five ISIL armored vehicles, two ISIL tanks, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL armored personnel carrier, three ISIL IEDs, five abandoned tanks, two abandoned armored personnel carriers and two abandoned armored vehicles.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL buildings, two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL mortar system.

[Pentagon](#), 22 May 2015.

Later posted at [Central Command](#).

23 May 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 23 May 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

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

- Near Hasakah, two airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tank and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL semi-truck.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike struck a large ISIL large tactical unit, destroying six ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tadmur, an airstrike destroyed six ISIL anti-aircraft artillery systems and an ISIL artillery piece.

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 22 airstrikes in Iraq, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Asad, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Beiji, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL command and control facility, an ISIL structure and an ISIL vehicle bomb.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Haditha, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL structure and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Makhmur, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL checkpoint, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL building.
- Near Ramadi, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying multiple heavy machine guns, two ISIL vehicle bombs, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, and three armored vehicles and a tank in ISIL-controlled territory.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL

buildings and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL buildings and two ISIL fighting positions.

[Pentagon](#), 23 May 2015.

Not posted at Central Command website.

24 May 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 24 May 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Attack, bomber and fighter aircraft conducted 11 airstrikes in Syria:

- Near Hasakah, nine airstrikes struck two large and three small ISIL tactical units, destroying eight ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL vehicles, an ISIL tank and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL fighting position.

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 17 airstrikes in Iraq, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Baghdadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Qaim, two airstrikes struck an ISIL explosive manufacturing facility, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Makhmur, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL buildings and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL weapons manufacturing facility and an ISIL defensive position, destroying an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL building and an ISIL tank.
- Near Ramadi, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL armored personnel carrier and an ISIL armored vehicle, as well as 15 armored vehicles, two armored personnel carriers and two other support vehicles located in ISIL controlled territory.
- Near Sinjar, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying three ISIL buildings, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Tal Afar, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL mortar position, destroying three ISIL heavy machine guns and four ISIL fighting positions.

[Pentagon](#), 24 May 2015.

Later posted at [Central Command](#).

25 May 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 25 May 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

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

- Near Hasakah, seven airstrikes struck two large and four small ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL checkpoint, an ISIL excavator, an ISIL vehicle bomb and an ISIL vehicle. No civilian casualties from the airstrikes were observed, officials said, adding that Kurdish fighters reported an ISIL vehicle bomb detonation that resulted in an undetermined number of civilians injured in the area.
- Near Raqqah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL tank.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL multiple rocket launcher vehicle.

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 25 airstrikes in Iraq, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Baghdadi, five airstrikes struck one large and two small ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL structures, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL armored excavator, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle bomb.
- Near Beiji, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL dump truck, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL tanker.
- Near Fallujah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery piece and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, an airstrike struck an ISIL vehicle-bomb facility.
- Near Mosul, nine airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units and an ISIL staging area, destroying four ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL armored vehicle, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL vehicle bomb.
- Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL buildings, two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL rocket-propelled grenade.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL vehicle, destroying two ISIL buildings, two ISIL heavy machine guns and two ISIL mortar systems.

[Pentagon](#), 25 May 2015.

Later posted at [Central Command](#).

26 May 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 26 May 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., May 25, and 8 a.m., May 26, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft. 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.

“Coalition airstrikes struck multiple targets near Mosul, Iraq,” said Col. Wayne

Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. “The Coalition continues to shape this region for future offensive operations.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, seven airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units, an ISIL natural gas production plant and an ISIL headquarters, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL mortar position.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL excavator.
- Near Fallujah, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL homemade explosives resupply vehicles and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Hit, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL resupply vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL rocket firing position, destroying two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL building and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL buildings and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL heavy machine gun, destroying two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

27-28 May 2015: airstrikes

Neither the U.S. Central Command nor the Pentagon reported airstrikes on Wednesday, 27 May 2015.

On Thursday, 28 May 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., May 27, and 8 a.m., May 28, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes using attack, and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“Coalition airstrikes struck across Iraq,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR chief of public affairs. “When Daesh terrorists expose themselves and their equipment, we will strike them.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL trench system, destroying four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three airstrike struck three ISIL crude oil collection points.

Iraq

- Near Baghdadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL homemade explosives cache.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes destroyed five ISIL vehicles, an ISIL building and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL armored vehicles and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Makhmur, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL staging area, destroying two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL trench system.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage.

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

29 May 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 29 May 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., May 28, and 8 a.m., May 29, local time. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using bomber, and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 airstrikes approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense using attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL terrorists.

“The Coalition strikes Daesh with extreme precision,” said Brig. Gen. Thomas Weidley, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. “The efficient application of weapons, the weapon-to-target-to-effect match and a proven Coalition strike process has combined to

produce devastating effects on Daesh while at the same time gaining and maintain the trust of our partners on the ground.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kobani, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Baghdadi, three airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position and land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage.
- Near Bayji, five airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage, destroying five ISIL vehicles, two ISIL excavators, an ISIL armored personnel carrier and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, three airstrikes struck land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage, destroying an ISIL boat, an ISIL river crossing point and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Makhmur, three airstrikes struck an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL staging area, destroying an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage, destroying five ISIL buildings and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL mortar position, destroying an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL IED, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL mortar system.

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

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

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

30 May 2015: airstrikes

On 30-31 May, the U.S. Central Command website was not updated to include reports of airstrikes, so I used the version at the Pentagon.

On Saturday, 30 May 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

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

- Near Al Hasakah, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Kobani, one airstrike destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 16 airstrikes in Iraq, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Baghdadi, two airstrikes struck three ISIL command and control facilities.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL flatbed truck and an ISIL armored personnel carrier.
- Near Kirkuk, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL mortar systems and two ISIL buildings.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL staging area, destroying three ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL buildings and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Tal Afar, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units, destroying two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL mortar systems and an ISIL fighting position.

[Pentagon](#), 30 May 2015.

Not posted at Central Command.

31 May 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 31 May 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Attack and bomber aircraft conducted four airstrikes in Syria:

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit, destroying an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building, an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL vehicle.

Attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 13 airstrikes in Iraq, approved by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense:

- Near Baghdadi, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL crossing point.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Makhmur, one airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.

- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL mortar system and land features denying ISIL a tactical advantage, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, destroying an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL armored personnel carrier and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Sinjar, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL mortar position, destroying five ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL tunnel systems.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroying an ISIL building and an ISIL mortar system.

[Pentagon](#), 31 May 2015.

Later posted at [Central Command](#).

Terrorists attack Garland, Texas

On 3 May 2015, there was a contest in Garland Texas — a suburb northeast of Dallas — to sketch cartoons of the prophet Mohammed. This was a provocative contest, because *any* depiction of Mohammed is offensive to Muslims. Moreover, Geert Wilders, an anti-immigrant Dutch politician, attended the contest in Garland and gave the keynote speech.

The contest was held on a Sunday in the Curtis Culwell Center, a Garland School District building. The city required the contest organizers to pay \$10,000 for security services provided by Garland police. [Dallas Morning News](#).

At 18:50 CDT on 3 May, two gunmen drove in a car to the Curtis Culwell Center and began shooting with assault rifles. One unarmed school security officer was wounded. A traffic policeman used his pistol to kill both gunmen. Both gunmen were wearing body armor, so the policeman probably shot them in the head, which is more difficult than shooting them in the torso. If the gunmen were not stopped outside the building, then the gunman probably intended to kill many of the 200 people inside the building.

Police very slowly and very carefully examined the gunmen's car for explosives, because Islamic terrorists often use car bombs to kill innocent people. No explosives were found.

Sources: (All times are CDT on 4 May 2015.)

- Breaking news, [Dallas Morning News](#) (URL now points to later story), 3 May;
- "Texas Police Kill Gunmen at Exhibit Featuring Cartoons of Muhammad," [NY Times](#), 3 May;
- "City: 2 gunmen killed outside Muhammad cartoon contest," [Associated Press](#), 00:20;
- "Officials: Security did its job at Muhammad drawing contest in Garland," [Dallas Morning News](#), 14:08;
- "Garland police: Suspects were 'there to shoot people'," [WFAA](#) in Dallas, 15:45;
- "Police: Men killed in Garland shooting had assault rifles, body armor," [Dallas](#)

[Morning News](#), 15:05;

- "The Latest on prophet cartoon case: SWAT helped kill gunmen," (collected stories from 08:30 to 20:15 CDT) [Associated Press](#), 20:34.

At 22:25 CDT on 3 May, the [Los Angeles Times](#) reported a message at an ISIL Twitter account posted at 18:35 CDT, 20 minutes before the attack, that announced the attack in Texas. The tweet included: "May Allah accept us as mujahideen." See also [WFAA](#), 01:50 CDT on 4 May; and [NY Times](#) on 5 May.

The Gunmen

On 4 May, the two gunmen were identified as Elton Simpson and Nadir Hamid Soofi, who shared an apartment in Phoenix, Arizona. Simpson is a U.S. citizen (born in Illinois). Nadir Soofi is a U.S. citizen (born in Dallas), the son of a father from Pakistan and an American mother. Nadir lived in Pakistan for six years with his father, before Nadir returned to the USA. Both Simpson and Nadir Soofi are Muslims.

Sources about gunmen:

- Associated Press, "Phoenix men linked to Texas shooting" [KNXV](#) in Phoenix, 06:38 CDT on 4 May.
- "Police: Men killed in Garland shooting had assault rifles, body armor," [Dallas Morning News](#), 17:00 on 4 May.
- "Gunman in Texas Shooting Was F.B.I. Suspect in Jihad Inquiry" [NY Times](#), 4 May.
- "Garland, Texas, shooting suspect linked himself to ISIS in tweets," [CNN](#), 21:55 CDT on 4 May.
- "Garland gunman's grandmother speaks out," [KPRC](#), 22:26 on 4 May.
- "2 Garland shooters' lives twined to tragic end," [Dallas Morning News](#), 00:22 on 5 May.
- "Foiled attack at Garland center looks to be homegrown jihad case," [Dallas Morning News](#), 00:33 on 5 May.
- "Texas Shooting Suspect Elton Simpson's Private Messages: 'The Noose Is Tightening'," [ABC News](#), 07:10 CDT on 5 May; [KNXV](#).
- "Texas Attackers' Trails of Extremism on Twitter, Guided by Appeal of Militants," [NY Times](#), 5 May.
- "Father of Garland shooter Nadir Soofi: 'Someone pushed him into this situation'," [Dallas Morning News](#), 11:49, 6 May.

The Gunmen: Academic History

Elton Simpson attended a "junior college" for one year (2002-2003) and then dropped out. He did play basketball while at that college. [KNXV](#); [Associated Press](#); [KTAR](#); [Fox News](#). Nadir Soofi attended the University of Utah for five and a half years (1998-2003), but never earned a bachelor's degree. [Associated Press](#); [Salt Lake Tribune](#). It normally takes four years to earn a bachelor's degree. From this history, we can conclude that both Elton and Nadir were either stupid or *not* intellectually motivated.

The Gunmen: Criminal History

The FBI had Elton Simpson under investigation, beginning in 2006. Elton Simpson was convicted in federal court in 2011 of making a false statement to an FBI agent about Elton's plans to go to Somalia. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Dallas Morning News](#); [KNXV](#).

While at the University of Utah, Nadir Soofi "has a criminal history in Utah including assault, underage drinking, driving under the influence and reckless driving from 1998 to 2002." [KSTU](#). Soofi's pled guilty to "possession of alcohol by a minor, alcohol-related reckless driving and driving on a suspended license in 2001, court records show, and misdemeanor assault the following year." [Associated Press](#). *The Salt Lake Tribune* has a more comprehensive description of Soofi's criminal history:

Soofi was charged in about 20 court cases between 1997 to 2005. The cases consist mostly of traffic violations, many of them for speeding. But Soofi also had several drug- and alcohol-related convictions.

In 2003, Soofi was charged in Salt Lake City's justice court with class B misdemeanor counts of distributing a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia. The case was dismissed in July 2003. The court docket says the dismissal was in conjunction with a guilty plea to a 2002 federal court case that is not found in U.S. District Court records. Also in July 2003 in justice court, Soofi pleaded guilty to class B misdemeanor simple assault. A misdemeanor count of criminal mischief was dismissed along with disturbing the peace, an infraction.

In March 2002, Soofi pleaded guilty in Salt Lake City's 3rd District Court to class B misdemeanor reckless driving. A speeding violation — 65 mph in a 35 mph zone — was dismissed. In June 2002, he pleaded guilty to class B misdemeanor driving on an alcohol-related suspended license. In June 2001, Soofi, then 20 years old, pleaded guilty to class B misdemeanor unlawful purchase of alcohol by a minor.

Jennifer Dobner, "Texas gunman attended U. of U. from '98 to '03," [Salt Lake Tribune](#), 5 May 2015.

Soofi's use of illicit drugs continued, as he was found guilty in April 2015 of possession of marijuana. [Dallas Morning News](#).

Elton's criminal history points to an apparent eagerness to participate in jihad since 2006. Nadir — at least during 1998-2003 — was a habitual petty criminal.

Attack *Not* Sponsored by ISIL

On 5 May, the Al-Bayan radio station in Raqqa Syria said ISIL claimed that "two soldiers of the caliphate" carried out the attack in Garland, Texas. ISIL propaganda *may* have inspired the gunmen, but there is no evidence that ISIL either trained, supported, or knew the two gunmen *before* the attack. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#). The [Associated Press](#) reports: "counterterrorism experts said IS has a history of asserting involvement in attacks in which it had no operational role."

Problem of "Lone Wolf"

On 6 May, journalists began to focus on the nationwide problem of so-called "lone-wolf terrorists", either a single individual or a group of two or three, who are *not* affiliated with any large terrorist organization. Such lone wolves are very difficult for law enforcement to detect and stop prior to an attack. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The [Associated Press](#) published a list of 9 people in the USA who had been arrested in the past four months for either (1) planning a terrorist attack in the USA or (2) planning to travel to Syria to fight with ISIL.

On 7 May, FBI Director James Comey explained:

"The siren song sits in the pockets, on the mobile phones, of the people who are followers on Twitter," Comey said. "It's almost as if there's a devil sitting on the shoulder, saying 'Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!' all day long."

Eric Tucker, "FBI sent out bulletin about gunman before Texas attack," [Associated Press](#), 22:21 EDT, 7 May 2015.

My comment is that decent people, who had a moral upbringing, would know to say "Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!" to ISIL propaganda. *Why* are Muslims responding to this ISIL propaganda, and willing to join an Islamic terrorist organization?

On 8 May, Agence France-Presse reported that "the U.S. government is struggling to counter ISIS' fast-paced online propaganda", because "the lightning tempo and vast scale of ISIS' social media campaign poses a daunting challenge, particularly for a government bureaucracy ill-equipped to respond quickly or to experiment". [Daily Star](#). ISIL, which is small, can be more adaptable than any large bureaucracy.

My comments

I think a fair assessment of this Islamic terrorist attack in Garland is that the two perpetrators were terrorist wannabes, who were *not* agents of ISIL. One wonders why ISIL wants credit for this attack, since none of the intended targets were harmed and the only people killed were the Muslim attackers. In the history of Islamic terrorism, the attack in Garland was a botch.

This attack is an example of how apparently normal Muslims are being converted to Islamic terrorists by propaganda from ISIL. Both mainstream Islam and Western Civilization are continuing to lose the propaganda war with Al-Qaeda and ISIL. We need to understand *why* people would be inspired by extremist Islamic propaganda, and we need to effectively counter that propaganda. See my remarks on the Islamic public relations problem, [above](#).

It appears that Islamic terrorism has an especial appeal to Muslims who are living on the margins of society, such as petty criminals, dropouts from schools/colleges, and/or unemployed. While these people are on the margins of conventional society, ISIL propaganda offers them the opportunity to make an important contribution to jihad.

France is reported to have contributed more foreigners to jihad in Syria than any other Western European nation, but my rough calculation shows that only 0.04% of Muslims in France went to Syria to participate in jihad. (See my essay for [April 2015](#), at section titled "Foreign Fighters Join ISIL".) So only a tiny fraction of Muslims is responding to the propaganda from ISIL. But in a nation with one million Muslims, 0.04% is 400 terrorists, a number that could overwhelm law enforcement.

My Suggestion to Counter ISIL Propaganda

I suggest that the U.S. government fund a hundred small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab nations to hire native speakers of Arabic-language to counter ISIL propaganda. Some of these employees could monitor social media and post counter-propaganda. Other employees could design websites that explain why ISIL is violating teachings of Islam, violating Fatwas, and list atrocities committed by ISIL. Using small companies (e.g., 30 employees per company) ensures that they are quickly adaptable to changing conditions. Using native speakers of Arabic adds authenticity. A few thousand Arabs might be able to swamp ISIL's propaganda operation.

There are millions of Arabs who have fled from their homes in Syria and Iraq, because of Islamic terrorists. Many of these refugees are either unemployed or have minimal income. Putting them to work countering propaganda on the Internet from Al-Qaeda or ISIL would not only help defeat Islamic terrorism, but also provide much needed income to refugees.

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 cooperate with Syria's Assad regime to combat ISIS," [The Independent](#), 22 Aug 2014 ("The former head of the Army has said Britain must work with the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to combat the Islamic State (ISIS). Lord Dannatt, the former Chief of General Staff, called on the West to reconsider its relationship with the leader, who was internationally condemned for a crackdown on civil liberties during the 2011 Arab Spring."). See also [The Telegraph](#) ("Britain must co-operate with President Assad, the Syrian dictator, in order to confront ISIL, the former head of the Army has said.").

- Max Abrahms, "The U.S. Should Help Assad to Fight ISIS, the Greater Evil," [NY Times](#), 18:27 EDT, 22 Aug 2014 (Assad does *not* threaten the USA; ISIL does threaten the USA. "But it's time for the Obama administration to pick its poison by prioritizing the safety of American civilians over the moral objection of helping out a leader who massacres his own.").
- Rajeev Syal, "David Cameron must 'consider cooperating with Syria' to crush Isis," [The Guardian](#), 5 Sep 2014 (Lord Richards, former chief of the U.K. defence staff, urged the current U.K. prime minister to cooperate with Assad in defeating ISIL.).
- Ahmad Samih Khalidi, op-ed, "To Crush ISIS, Make a Deal With Assad," [NY Times](#), 15 Sep 2014 ("... the West appears to be primarily appeasing Arab Persian Gulf allies that have turned the overthrow of Mr. Assad into a policy fetish that runs against any rational calculation of how to defeat Islamist terrorism. the only real 'boots on the ground' capable of destroying ISIS are the Syrian Army and its local allies, including Hezbollah.").

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

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 31 May 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.

My essays for July 2014 through February 2015 summarized the infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. (See the summary for July through October 2014 in my [webpage](#).) Clearly, the Iraqi Parliament made the existential problems in Iraq worse by their delay or failure to solve major problems.

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 2014 (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 by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout

in Ramadi. 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/syria21.pdf>
begun 30 April 2015, last modified 1 June 2015.

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

[my homepage](#)