

Syria & Iraq: September 2015

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 22 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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. Israeli summer time, Damascus summer time, Baghdad, and

Moscow are each +3 hours from GMT.

Every day, I checked the websites of

- [All Iraq News](#),
- [Rudaw](#) in Kurdish Iraq,
- the Pentagon and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM),
- the Associated Press,
- Reuters in the United Kingdom,
- *The Washington Post*, and
- news sources in Turkey (e.g., Anadolu Agency, Today's Zaman)

for news to summarize in this essay. When I found significant news, I attempted to find and cite the original source.

Terse Summary of Syria Fighters

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

1. The so-called "rebels" are moderates, many of whom are part of the Free Syrian Army. 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 a large group of jihadists, formed on 22 November 2013. Ahrar al-Sham is one of the major organizations in the Islamic Front.
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.

[Stanford Univ.](#) has a website with descriptions of ten terrorist organizations in Syria (e.g., Nusra, ISIL, etc.). The U.S. Government National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has a history of many international terrorist [groups](#).

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 [review](#).

Chemical Weapons

Beginning in October 2013, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued monthly reports on chemical weapons on Syria. My [webpage](#) has links to each of these reports.

The international community's lack of interest in chemical weapons in Syria is shown by the difficulty in finding a copy of the OPCW monthly reports submitted to the U.N. Security Council from June 2015 to August 2015.

In early September 2015, OPCW "reorganized" its website, so that old links no longer function. In my opinion, an organization has too much money and too little useful work, when its webmaster has time to reorganize a website and create dead links.

Chemical Weapons 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 May 2014.

In my essay for [April 2015](#), I cited three separate chlorine attacks in Syria from 16 March to 29 April 2015. In my essay for [May 2015](#), I cited two chlorine attacks in Syria on 2 and 7 May.

On 21 August, ISIL apparently used mortar shells to deliver a chemical weapon (mustard gas?) to civilians in the village of Marea, north of Aleppo in Syria. My essay for [August 2015](#) cited 6 news articles about this use of chemical weapons by ISIL.

U.N. begins to ask *who* used chemical weapons in Syria?

On 9 July 2015, the U.S. asked the United Nations Security Council to form a committee to determine *who* used chemical weapons in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [New York Times](#)(AP).

On 7 August 2015, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2235 that requests the U.N. Secretary General form a committee to determine *who* released toxic chemicals (including chlorine) in Syria. U.N. Secretary General Ban waited until the deadline (27 Aug) specified in Resolution 2235 to suggest a three-man committee. For details, see my essay for [August 2015](#).

According to Resolution 2235, the U.N. Security Council was supposed to respond to the Secretary General's proposal within 5 days (i.e., on or before 1 Sep 2015). Because of questions and concerns by Russia, the Security Council stalled on 2 September. Russia seems to have two big concerns:

1. Russia worries that voluntary contributions by nations to finance the investigation might influence the "impartiality" of the investigation.
2. Russia now wants a new Resolution to give OPCW authority to investigate chemical weapons use in Iraq.

[Associated Press](#), 2 Sep; [Reuters](#). In my opinion, this is a delaying tactic by Russia. There will never be a perfect written plan for an investigation, especially since a U.N. investigation into who used chemical weapons is an unprecedented activity. While an investigation in Iraq would be good, broadening the investigation to include Iraq is not a good reason to delay the already long-overdue investigation in Syria. Syria and Iraq are separate nations, with independent governments and somewhat different issues.

On 10 September, the current U.N. Security Council president, Vitaly Churkin, sent a letter to

the Secretary General. The letter approves the Secretary General's recommendations for a Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) composed of three diplomats plus experts, with the supposed freedom to travel anywhere in Syria. The letter was approved by all of the members of the Security Council. Now the Secretary General and the Director of OPCW will "without delay" form the JIM. [UNSG](#); [UN News](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The Russians delayed 9 days past the Security Council's self-imposed deadline, which is not a serious delay by the standards of the United Nations bureaucracy.

On 15 September, the United Nations announced the three members of the JIM:

1. Virginia Gamba of Argentina, currently deputy U.N. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
2. Adrian Neritani of Albania, an attorney and currently Permanent Representative of Albania to the United Nations
3. Eberhard Schanze of Germany, an attorney and German diplomat, German Ambassador to OPCW

[U.N. News](#); [Reuters](#).

I found on the Internet the information on the current jobs of these three.

My comment: I find it strange that in a forensic investigation to determine *who* used chemical weapons, all three of the leaders are professional diplomats, and two of them are attorneys by education. Any forensic specialists and any chemists — the people who do the actual work of the JIM — will be controlled by diplomats. Perhaps the U.N. Secretary General believes that professional diplomats will be able to magically negotiate access anywhere in Syria where chemical weapons are alleged to have been used. But if diplomats had such magical powers, the Syrian civil war would have ended in 2012 when Kofi Annan was the first U.N. Envoy for Syria.

On 26 September, the United Nations announced the first report of the JIM would be released in January 2016. [Al-Arabiya](#);

ISIL Releases Chemical Weapons in Iraq

Introduction

My essay for [November 2014](#) mentions two different instances of ISIL releasing chlorine gas in Iraq.

My essay for [July 2015](#) cited six news reports about ISIL releasing chlorine gas during fights with Kurds in Iraq.

My essay for [August 2015](#) cited 12 news articles about ISIL firing mortar shells containing chemical weapons (mustard gas?) in Makhmur, Iraq on 11 August.

Apparently, no one at OPCW or the United Nations wants to investigate these reports of ISIL

using chemical weapons in Iraq. I speculate that *if* ISIL were found to be releasing chemical weapons in Iraq, then it would be more plausible that ISIL is also responsible for releases of chemical weapons in Syria, thereby giving reasonable doubts to blaming Assad for *all* releases of chemical weapons in Syria. This is a problem with deciding to blame Assad *before* the investigations are completed, what lawyers call a "rush to judgment".

September 2015: Iraq

On 7 September, the German newspaper *Bild* reported that the German foreign intelligence organization — Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) — had analyzed blood samples of Kurds who had been injured by the poison gas, and concluded that mustard gas had been used in Iraq on 11 August. The Associated Press reported that the BND believes "the mustard gas either came from old Iraqi stockpiles produced under Saddam Hussein's rule[,] or was manufactured by ISIS after it seized the University of Mosul." [Associated Press](#); [Rudaw](#). [Bild](#) requires a subscription to read its German-language article.

On 10 September, the [BBC](#) reported an anonymous "U.S. official" said: "We've seen [Islamic State/ISIL] use [mustard] on at least four separate occasions on both sides of the border — both Iraq and Syria." Further, the official says "the most plausible explanation" is that ISIL is manufacturing their own mustard agents "in powder form" that is "packed into traditional explosives like mortar rounds". Alternatively, ISIL may have stolen the mustard from Assad's warehouses in Syria.

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 2014, 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 2014, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil

war. On 17 July 2014, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug 2014, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels. On 5 Sep 2014, 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 2014, 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 2014, 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](#) 2014.) 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 2014, 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 2014, 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 2 October 2015, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights posted a new death toll: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 4219 people in September 2015.

The death toll is as follows:

- 1201 civilians, including 257 children and 141 women, distributed as follows:
 - 489 civilians, including 104 children and 66 women, killed by airstrikes carried out by the regime warplanes and helicopters.
 - 41 civilians, includes 4 women, executed by IS.
 - 18 civilians killed by US-led coalition airstrikes.
 - 473 civilians, including 152 children and 70 women, killed under torture inside the regime jails and due to shells launched by YPG, Jabhat al-Nusra, IS, the rebels and Islamist factions, as well as in shelling by the regime forces, firing by the Turkish border guards, explosions and unknown circumstances.
- Syrian fighters of YPG, Rebel and Islamist factions: 557.
- Non-Syrian fighters of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaysh al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army, Turkestan Islamic Party and the Chechen Jonound al-Sham: 1170.
- Defected soldiers: 4.
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 606.
- Militiamen of the Peoples Committees and NDF as well as informers: 615.
- Hezbollah militiamen: 30.
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 22.
- Unidentified victims (documented by photos and footage): 10.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion and pro-regime militants is approximately hundreds of 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 is not going to stop to calls upon the members of the UN Security Council to issue a binding resolution that prohibits targeting the civilians in Syria, where massacres committed against them every day under the nose of the international community which do not make any step to stop the ongoing violations committed against the Syrian people who dream of establishing the state of democracy, justice, freedom and equality.

"More than 4000 people killed in Syria in September 2015," [SOHR](#), 2 Oct 2015.

Using the data in the double-indented list, there are a total of 1021 civilians killed in September, *not* 1201. Adding the number of fighters and unidentified victims, there are 3014. Adding 3014 to 1201 gives 4215, *not* 4219. Despite these discrepancies, I have used the SOHR total of 4219, because I do not know which numbers are incorrect.

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.

Using data from SOHR, I calculate a total death toll of *at least* 248,650 dead since the Syrian civil war began on 18 March 2011.

Rebels in Syria

Introduction

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.

Back on 26 Sep 2014, General Dempsey said that “ ‘Five thousand’s never been the end state,’ the general said of the number of trained rebels he believes are needed in Syria. An estimated 12,000 to 15,000 would be needed ‘to recapture lost territory in eastern Syria.’ ” The vetting also “make[s] sure they don’t pose a threat to the U.S. troops who would train them”. [Washington Post](#).

The U.S. Congress approved the training and equipping of Syrian rebels on 18 Sep 2014. The Pentagon moved with glacial slowness for seven months on this project. My essay for [May 2015](#) mentions that training finally began in Jordan and Turkey. My essay for [June 2015](#) mentions that there were fewer than 100 Syrian rebels being trained by the U.S. Military on 29 June 2015 and none had completed training.

Back on 7 May 2015, CENTCOM began calling the U.S.-trained Syrian rebels the "New Syrian Forces" (NSF). [Pentagon](#); [Foreign Policy](#). NSF was a grandiose name for a program that — on 16 September 2015 — had only 5 trained rebels on the ground in Syria and a

maximum of 120 rebels currently in training.

Separate from the above-mentioned train-and-equip program, there is a clandestine CIA program that trains and equips moderate rebels who are fighting against Assad. On 28 Feb 2013, *The New York Times* publicly revealed this CIA program that began sometime in the year 2012. [NY Times](#). On 24 March 2013, the [Times](#) reported again on the so-called secret CIA program.

September 2015: Rebels in Syria

On 14 June 2015, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) formed a committee to create a new Free Syrian Army (FSA) Supreme Military Command during the next month. [SNC](#) and [SNC](#).

On 20 July 2015, the SNC issued a press release that denounced efforts by "the dissolved FSA Supreme Military Council" to establish military leadership. [SNC](#). On 1 August, the SNC extended the task to create a new FSA High Military Command for "another two months". [SNC](#) On 25 August, the SNC announced it "is finalizing new plans for forming a new FSA High Military Command." [SNC](#). There was no news at the SNC website on this topic during September 2015. This series of events since June 2015 shows that the FSA continues to be disorganized and fragmented.

On 20 September, [SOHR](#) reported that 75 U.S.-trained rebels had entered Syria on the night of 18 Sep, after training in Turkey. The rebels had a dozen four-wheel drive vehicles with a machine gun mounted on each vehicle. See also [Reuters](#).

On 21 September, CENTCOM confirmed the SOHR report of approximately 70 trained rebels. The entire press release says:

Approximately 70 graduates of the Counter-ISIL Coalition's Syria Train and Equip program have successfully re-entered Syria complete with their weapons and equipment and are currently operating as New Syrian Forces.

With support from the Coalition, the NSF will fight alongside vetted opposition forces and employ their training and equipment acquired through the T&E program to enhance the efforts of these larger units already in the fight against ISIL.

The contributions of the NSF will be additive to those already being made in Syria by tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and other anti-ISIL forces, who have re-secured more than 17,000 sq. km. of territory previously held by ISIL, along with critical border crossing points between Syria and Turkey. While the NSF do not operate under the command and control of the Coalition, we will continue to support and enable them as part of the ongoing campaign to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL.

"Sept.21: Additional new Syrian forces deployed to Syria," [CENTCOM](#), 21 Sep 2015. See also [Associated Press](#).

These 70 or 75 rebels are the second batch of U.S.-trained rebels. The first batch was decimated at the end of July, as described in the following [section](#) of this essay.

On 23 September, the [Pentagon](#) issued an unusual press release condemning false reports in the news media about U.S.-trained rebels who allegedly "turned over weapons" to Nusra Front. But two days later, the U.S. Military admitted the reports were true.

On Friday night at 19:00 EDT, 25 September 2015, CENTCOM admitted that the second batch of U.S.-trained rebels in Syria on 21-22 Sep gave Nusra Front six trucks and some ammunition, in exchange for Nusra Front giving the rebels safe passage through Nusra territory. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#); [McClatchy](#).

The CENTCOM press release says:

U.S. Central Command was notified at approximately 1 p.m. today that a commander of a New Syrian Forces element operating in Syria surrendered some of his unit's Coalition-issued equipment to a suspected Al Nusra Front intermediary purportedly in exchange for safe passage within their operating area.

"Today the NSF unit contacted Coalition representatives and informed us that on Sept. 21-22 they gave six pick-up trucks and a portion of their ammunition to a suspected Al Nusra Front intermediary, which equates to roughly 25 percent of their issued equipment," said Col. Patrick Ryder, U.S. Central Command spokesperson. "If accurate, the report of NSF members providing equipment to Al Nusra Front is very concerning and a violation of Syria train and equip program guidelines."

"Sept. 25: Reports of New Syrian Force Equipment Being Provided to Al Nusra Front," [CENTCOM](#); 25 Sep 2015.

My previous essays chronicle theft of munitions and supplies by jihadists, Nusra, or ISIL:

- On 6 or 7 Dec 2013, the Islamic Front stole U.S.-supplied material from a warehouse controlled by the Free Syrian Army. That theft caused the U.S. Government to suspend aid to the Free Syrian Army until 27 Jan 2014.
- On 28 August 2014, Nusra Front attacked U.N. observers in the Golan Heights, who were enforcing the Syria/Israel peace treaty of 1974. Nusra Front stole weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and uniforms from the U.N. observers.
- And in Iraq, the fleeing Iraqi army abandoned huge amounts of munitions, weapons, and vehicles for ISIL to steal, in Mosul in June 2014, and again in Ramadi in May 2015. Much of the U.S.-supplied equipment that was stolen in Mosul was transported by ISIL to Syria.

What is the point of carefully vetting rebels for the U.S. train-and-equip program, when those rebels *give* U.S.-supplied equipment to the enemy?

As cited above, on 23 September, the U.S. Military condemned false reports of rebels giving weapons to Nusra. But two days later the U.S. Military admitted the reports were true. Clearly, the U.S. Military is clueless about what is actually occurring with U.S.-trained rebels in Syria. This is partly a problem with the design of the U.S. train-and-equip program, and partly a problem with rebels who fail to communicate accurately and truthfully with the U.S.

Military.

One can also question the appropriateness of the U.S. train-and-equip program given the realities in Syria. The U.S.-trained rebels may not have had a meaningful choice, given the numerical superiority of Nusra Front and given the fact that Nusra controlled land through which the rebels needed to travel. Remember that Nusra attacked and captured some of the first batch of U.S.-trained rebels at the end of July 2015, and most of the remaining rebels scattered.

On 28 Sep, the Associated Press reports more details in the gift from U.S.-trained rebels to Nusra Front. In particular, the commander who decided to give the six trucks and ammunition to Nusra was *not* trained by the U.S. Military

U.S. officials were unaware of the problem for several days [after the transfer on 21-22 Sep], even as media reports began to surface about the possible transfer of equipment to the militants. The commander didn't tell the U.S. what had happened until five days after he was initially contacted by the Nusra Front.

The gaps in time raise questions about why the commander didn't simply report the threat to the U.S. or coalition leaders and why the newly trained members of the unit weren't prepared to fight the militants rather than give up the equipment.

Lolita C. Baldor, "Latest Syrian training problem: Rebel who surrendered trucks," [Associated Press](#), 13:05 EDT, 28 Sep 2015.

On 29 September, the Pentagon announced it had suspended accepting new recruits into its Syrian train-and-equip program, while the Pentagon "reviews" the program. [Reuters](#).

First Batch of U.S.-trained Rebels Decimated

My essay for [August 2015](#) explained in detail:

- On 12 July 2015, the first group of U.S.-trained rebels — 54 of them — arrived in Syria.
- During 31 July to 2 August 2015, the U.S.-trained rebels were dissipated:
 - at least one rebel was killed by Nusra Front,
 - between 5 and 13 rebels were captured by Nusra Front (but 7 were released on 16 Aug),
 - approximately 18 rebels returned to Turkey, and
 - approximately 10 rebels are missing and their location is unknown to the U.S. Military.

According to *McClatchy* newspapers on 7 August, approximately 8 U.S.-trained rebels were dead, and approximately 18 U.S.-trained rebels are continuing to fight in Syria. **After less than four weeks in Syria, only 33% of the U.S.-trained rebels were continuing to fight.**

The U.S. training program was stupidly designed. The stupidity was foreseen by

commentators quoted in my essays for [September 2014](#) and [October 2014](#). As explained in my essay for August 2015, Journalists exposed its ignominious failure, which the Pentagon continued to attempt to keep secret, until a U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee asked tough questions on 16 Sep 2015. Fortunately, anonymous government sources occasionally tell the truth to journalists, who exposed the colossal failure of the U.S. training program for Syria, which led to tough questions from Congress.

Military commentators have been saying for more than one year that airstrikes alone will *not* defeat ISIL. Adequate numbers of competent troops on the ground are needed to attack and hold territory.

1. After more than two years of training and equipping rebels in a clandestine CIA program began in the year 2012, the U.S. still does *not* have an adequate number of competent troops on the ground in Syria. As a result of this colossal failure of U.S. policy, and waste of billions of dollars of U.S. taxpayers' money, ISIL continues to capture more cities in Syria (e.g., Palmyra on 20 May 2015 and Qaryatain on 6 Aug 2015).
2. The U.S. Congress approved the training and equipping of Syrian rebels on 18 Sep 2014. That program graduated its first batch — a piddling 54 rebels — in mid-July 2015. That first batch was quickly dissipated in Syria, exposing the ignominious failure of the training program. In September 2014, the *intent* of the U.S. Military was to train approximately 5000 rebels by the end of 2015, a goal that was 95% delusion and approximately 5% reality.

On 7 September, *The New York Times* announced that the U.S. would "significantly revamp" the U.S. program to train Syrian rebels. However, the Pentagon offered no details about changes. *The Times* reports: "The classified options now circulating at senior levels of the Pentagon include enlarging the size of the groups of trained rebels sent back into Syria, shifting the location of the deployments to ensure local support, and improving intelligence provided to the fighters. No decisions have been made on specific proposals, according to four senior Defense Department and Obama administration officials ... who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss confidential planning." [NY Times](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Pentagon](#) (uninformative); [Associated Press](#).

On 16 September, NBC News issued an early report of testimony before the U.S. Senate's Armed Services Committee:

A top U.S. military commander for operations in the Middle East acknowledged on Wednesday [16 Sep] that there are only four or five fighters left from the first group of 54 Syrian fighters that had been trained by the U.S. as part of a \$500 million program.

What's more, there are only 100-120 fighters in three more classes currently being trained, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday [16 Sep].

"Small Number of U.S.-Trained Syrian Rebels Still Fighting," [NBC News](#), 11:52 EDT, 16 Sep 2015.

About four hours later, the Associated Press issued a more comprehensive report:

No more than five U.S.-trained Syrian rebels are fighting the Islamic State, astoundingly short of the envisioned 5,000, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East told angry lawmakers on Wednesday [16 Sep]. They branded the training program "a total failure."

After the first 54 fighters were sent in to fight in July, a Syrian affiliate of al-Qaida attacked the group, killing several and taking others hostage while many fled. Asked how many remain, Gen. Lloyd Austin told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "It's a small number. ... We're talking four or five."

....

"We have to acknowledge this is a total failure," Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., said about the training. "I wish it weren't so, but that's the fact."

Austin told committee members that the U.S. was looking at better ways to deploy the Syrian forces, but he admitted the U.S. was not even close to reaching its goal of training 5,000-plus in the near term. He predicted it would take years to defeat IS and to restore stability in Iraq and Syria.

Deb Riechmann & Lolita C. Baldor, "US general: Only handful of Syrian fighters remain in battle," [Associated Press](#), 16:09 EDT, 16 Sep 2015.

Reuters summarized the same Senate hearing:

Only four or five U.S.-trained Syrian rebels are still fighting in Syria, a top U.S. general told Congress on Wednesday, a stark admission of setbacks to a fledgling military program that critics have already pronounced a failure.

The U.S. military began training in May for up to 5,400 fighters a year, in what was seen as a test of President Barack Obama's strategy of having local partners combat Islamic State militants and keep U.S. troops off the front lines.

But the program was troubled from the start, with some of the first class of less than 60 fighters coming under attack from al Qaeda's Syria wing, Nusra Front, in their battlefield debut. Some were captured and killed while others scattered.

U.S. officials, speaking to Reuters on condition of anonymity, acknowledged that a review is underway that could result in scaling back and reenvisioning the program.

U.S. General Lloyd Austin, the head of the U.S. military's Central Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that at the current, slower-than-expected pace, the initial training targets were unrealistic.

Asked how many fighters were still in Syria, Austin said: "It's a small number. The ones that are in the fight ... we're talking four or five."

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Christine Wormuth told the committee that only 100 to 120 Syrian fighters were in training.

Phil Stewart, "Only handful of U.S.-trained Syrian rebels still fighting — general," [Reuters](#), 17:09 EDT, 16 Sep 2015.

My comment is that the U.S. Military would now like to reinterpret its goal to be to train approximately 5,000 rebels in the first year, starting from when the training program actually began in May 2015. But this is a slight of hand, because the training program was initially intended to begin in late December 2014. (See my essay for [November 2014](#).) So the first of several failures was the late start to the program. The second failure was the piddling number of trainees. And the third failure was the quick dissipation of the trained rebels in Syria, who have now been literally decimated: reduced from 54 to 5. And it is not going to improve soon, as a maximum of 120 rebels are currently in training.

Where the U.S. Military really went wrong was to insist that the U.S.-trained rebels *only* fight against ISIL. That was unrealistic, because the rebels were recruited from the Free Syrian Army, which was created in 2011 to fight against Assad.

Aside from that one unrealistic restriction, the U.S. is *not* responsible for the failure of the Syrian rebels to deliver recruits who could survive the U.S. vetting process. Further, the way the U.S.-trained rebels in Syria fled and disappeared at the beginning of August 2015 seems similar to the way the Iraqi army fled from Mosul in June 2014 and fled from Ramadi in May 2015 — a lack of will to fight.

On 21 September, CENTCOM reported the current disposition of the first batch of U.S.-trained fighters in Syria. The Associated Press said:

In July, shortly after the first 54 U.S.-trained fighters arrived, Syria's affiliate of al-Qaida known as the Nusra Front, or Jabhat Al-Nusra, attacked them, killing several and taking others hostage[,] while many fighters fled. [U.S. Central Command spokesman Air Force Col. Patrick] Ryder said that those rebels largely disbanded — of the 54,

- one was killed;
- one is being held captive;
- nine are back in the fight;
- 11 are available but not in Syria;
- 14 returned to Syria but quit the U.S. program and
- 18 are unaccounted for.

....

In addition to changing the role of the U.S.-trained rebels, the Pentagon would scale back their numbers from the original target of 5,400 per year to a much smaller total, perhaps 500, the U.S. officials have said.

Sarah El Deeb, "US military reports 75 US-trained rebels return to Syria," [Associated Press](#), 20:32 EDT, 21 Sep 2015. (Bulleted list added by Standler.)

My comment is note that 1/3 of the first batch of U.S.-trained rebels are still "unaccounted for", about 50 days after they were attacked. Another 14 U.S.-trained rebels "quit the U.S. program". Those who disappeared or quit account for about 60% of the first batch of U.S.-trained rebels. CENTCOM admits the first batch of U.S.-trained rebels "largely disbanded". This is not just a failure, but an ignominious failure.

We Need to Support the Kurds in Syria

My comment is that instead of this expensive, slow, and piddling (intended only 5000/year) program to train and equip Syrian rebels, what we *really ought* to do is to train and equip the Kurds in Syria. Back in January 2015, after a heroic four-month battle, the Kurds expelled ISIL from Kobani. On 16 June 2015, the Syrian Kurds liberated Tal Abyad from ISIL. Clearly, the Kurds have the will to fight against ISIL, and the Syrian Kurds have twice defeated ISIL in major battles.

While it is true that the Kurds in Syria want to fight ISIL only in Kurdish territory in northern Syria, the Kurds could perform the vital task of sealing the border between Turkey and Syria, and stopping the flow of foreign munitions and supplies to ISIL, Nusra Front, and other insurgents. On the other hand, Erdogan would have his knickers in a twist if the Kurds controlled *all* of the land contiguous to Turkey's southern border. Erdogan is already nervous that the Syrian Kurds control northern Syria east of the Euphrates river and Iraqi Kurds control most of northern Iraq.

On 7 August 2015, the [McClatchy](#) newspapers reported that the U.S. Government is now realizing that supporting the Syrian Kurds could be an alternative to the unrealistic plan to train-and-equip 15,000 moderate Syrian rebels. James Rosen, writing in *McClatchy*, said: "When the Obama administration first announced the so-called train and equip program, it said it wanted to train and field 5,000 Syrians in the first year. That figure is now considered unrealistic." On the other hand, the Syrian Kurdish militia (YPG) "number between 17,000 and 20,000 fighters and require little U.S. training."

On 22 September 2015, David Ignatius, writing in *The Washington Post*, criticized Obama for "dithering" and delaying sending munitions to the 25,000 fighters among the Syrian Kurds (YPG) and the 5,000 fighters in their Sunni Arab allies. Such munitions would enable an assault on the ISIL capital of Raqqa. [Washington Post](#).

Turkey begins to fight against ISIL

My essay for [July 2015](#) chronicled the announcement around 23 July that Turkey had given the U.S. permission to use the Incirlik Air Base for airstrikes in Syria against ISIL. Turkey also wants to create a "safe zone" inside Syria, parallel to the Turkish border, that is free of ISIL terrorists.

My essay for [August 2015](#) chronicles the continuing frustrations and progress with Turkey,

including the first Turkish airstrike in Syria under the U.S.-led Coalition on 28 August.

September 2015

The Turkish news media reported on 29 August the first Turkish airstrike as part of the U.S.-led Coalition against ISIL. Then there was silence in Turkey about more airstrikes against ISIL. Instead, there were three hot topics:

1. a flood of *more* than 10,000 migrants/week from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan into Eastern Europe, beginning sometime around 25 August.
2. efforts of the Turkish government to censor journalists who were critical of president Erdogan's AK Party (e.g., criminally charging journalists with "insulting the president"), beginning 31 August. See, e.g., [Today's Zaman](#), 31 Aug; [Today's Zaman](#), 4 Sep; [BGN News](#), 5 Sep; [Today's Zaman](#), 20 Sep.
3. the Turkish military continued to clobber the PKK, in a civil war resumed by Erdogan on 24 July 2015.

This lack of coverage in Turkish newsmedia about the fight against ISIL suggests that Turkey is currently *not* contributing to the fight against ISIL. And that lack of effort by Turkey makes me wonder about the commitment of the Turkish government to the fight against ISIL.

Overreaction by Turkey

Because the subjects of this essay are the use of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq, futile peace negotiations in the Syrian civil war, the war against ISIL, and the dysfunctional Iraqi government, I am *not* chronicling every assault against the PKK by the Turkish government. However, my essays for [July 2015](#) and [August 2015](#) mention — with citations to news sources — some of the more significant assaults against the PKK, because these assaults may adversely affect cooperation from the Kurds, and because these assaults tarnish the reputation of the USA, which is an ally of Turkey.

On 8 September, 230 soldiers of the Turkish army invaded northern Iraq, to attack PKK bases in Iraq. *Hurriyet* says "The soldiers stayed inside northern Iraq for a couple of hours," [Anadolu Agency](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Today's Zaman](#); [Associated Press](#). The government of Iraq waited until 10 September to publicly object to this invasion by Turkey, which the Iraqi foreign ministry called "a clear violation of Iraqi sovereignty". [TasnimNews](#) in Iran; [All Iraq News](#), 22:33 GMT, 10 Sep.

On 13 September, the Iraqi foreign minister asked the Turkish government to coordinate with the Iraqi government on the Turkish fight against the PKK in Iraq. [Al-Arabiya](#). My comment is that, under this proposal, Turkey can continue to slaughter Kurds and Iraq can have the sovereignty of its nation respected.

On 19 September, it was reported that the Turkish air force again bombed PKK camps in northern Iraq, this time killing at least 55 people. [Reuters](#); [Anadolu Agency](#).

Turkey to Create "Safe Zone" in Syria

On 25 July 2015, the Turkish foreign minister announced that the Turkish military would unilaterally create a "safe zone" in northern Syria that was free of ISIL fighters. Turkey alleges four advantages of such a safe zone:

1. Solve the Syrian refugee problem:
 - A. Relocate Syrian refugees currently in Turkey to the safe zone.
 - B. Future Syrian refugees would live in the safe zone, instead of entering Turkey.
2. Prevent Kurds from controlling the southern border of Turkey in the zone. The safe zone also prevents the Kurds in Syria from establishing an independent nation there.
3. The safe zone allegedly protects the Turks from attacks by ISIL.
4. Further, the safe zone would help seal the border and prevent insurgents and their supplies from entering Syria.

However, the creation of a safe zone in Syria by Turkey is a serious violation of the sovereignty of Syria. Such a safe zone could easily expand into an Assad-free zone, and bring Turkey — and the U.S.-led Coalition — into direct conflict with Assad, Hezbollah, and Iran.

My essays for [July 2015](#) and [August 2015](#) chronicle the statements by Turkey and the opposition to safe zones by the U.S. Government.

On 18 September, I searched for "zone" in the 11 transcripts of daily press briefings at the U.S. State Department during 1-18 September 2015. I found only two relevant mentions of "zone":

On 1 September the Deputy Spokesperson, Mark C. Toner, explained:

QUESTION: There are voices in Europe calling for sending troops from Europe and under the UN flag to Syria to create free zones or secure zones to protect the refugees. How do you — what do you think about that?

MR TONER: Well, we've been clear and we've talked about this, certainly, in the case of Turkey, who I might add — or which I might add is a country that has absorbed some 2 million Syrian refugees over the past several years. But we've been very clear: Our goal is not just to create a safe zone. We've actually avoided that terminology. What we want to do is drive ISIL out altogether and create — re-establish, frankly, political order and legitimate governments — good governance in place so that these refugees can ultimately return.

....

QUESTION: Why the U.S. refuses to create secure zones in Syria?

MR TONER: Again, because ultimately the goal here is not just to drive ISIL out of a set geographic location; we want to basically destroy them.

"Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept.](#), 1 Sep 2015.

On 18 September, there was the following terse exchange at the U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing:

QUESTION: News reports said today that the Administration is considering stopping the train and equip program and considering at the same time creating buffer zones or safe zones in Syria.

MR TONER: I don't have any announcements or any, frankly, any inkling on that. That's nothing I've heard.

"Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept.](#), 18 Sep 2015.

The "news reports" about a safe zone include an 18 Sep report by the Anadolu Agency that is quoted below.

The lack of mentions of the so-called "safe zone" inside Syria can only mean that it is *no* longer a hot topic between Turkey and the USA. Apparently, Turkey still intends to create a safe zone, and the U.S. Government still opposes any so-called "safe zone".

On the morning of 18 September, I searched Google News for the query *safe zone Turkey Syria* during 31 August to 17 September 2015. Here is the relevant part of one news article that I found:

On 4 September, Reuters reported:

Turkey attempted to convince the world to set up a safe zone inside Syria to stem the flow of refugees from the war-torn country, but nobody heard its voice, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said on Friday [4 Sep].

Tulay Karadeniz, "Turkish calls for Syria safe zone went unheard, Davutoglu says," [Reuters](#), 09:17 GMT, 4 Sep 2015.

My comment is that Turkey confuses listening with approval. Turkey's proposal was heard, and it was rejected for good reasons.

On 18 September, the Anadolu Agency reported that Turkey reiterated its proposal for creating safe zones in Syria:

"Turkey still thinks that areas must be created in some regions at least to make those people to feel safe," Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioglu told a joint press conference with his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier in the Turkish capital, Ankara.

....

In a separate press appearance Friday [18 Sep] in Ankara with Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn, Sinirlioglu said the EU wanted to cooperate with Turkey for the solution of the refugee crisis.

"We welcome this yet the first thing to do is to end the crisis in Syria. The elimination of this issue [the refugee crisis] is not possible unless the crisis and the civil war in Syria ends. There are people there that live under the oppression of a cruel regime and flee the country only to survive."

"We can keep these people in their country when we create a place for them to live under protection, a safe zone to be secure from the barrel bombs. As the international community and the EU we should work all together to make this happen."

Sinirlioglu also said Turkey hosts the highest number of refugees in the world. According to the UN, there are 1.9 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey alone as of Aug. 25.

"Turkey reiterates call for Syria safe zone," [Anadolu](#), 18 Sep 2015.

On 18 September, the deputy prime minister of Turkey said that Turkey had spent a total of US\$ 7.6 billion on care for the current total of 2.2 million refugees from Syria who are living in Turkey. [Hurriyet](#); [Daily Sabah](#). This refugee crisis is part of the motivation for Turkey to create a safe zone in Syria for refugees to live.

On 28 September, the prime minister of Turkey told a journalist from the *Daily Sabah*: "If the area between Jarablus Azez was emptied, we can build three cities with a capacity of 100,000 each" to house refugees from Syria. [Daily Sabah](#). Jarablus and Azez are two towns in northern Syria, inside Turkey's proposed safe zone. But to house the two million refugees currently in Turkey, twenty cities would be required, *not* three. Turkey building three (or twenty) cities inside Syria without the permission of the Syrian government would be a huge violation of the sovereignty of Syria.

Recognition that Assad is Not Winning the Civil War

Introduction

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.

September 2015

On 4 September, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, said Assad was ready to hold new parliamentary elections and participate in a transitional government. TASS reported:

The president [Putin] said the fight against terrorism should come in parallel with the political process in Syria and President Bashar Assad is ready for certain steps in this direction.

"We understand that political changes are needed. We carry out work and also with our partners in Syria itself," Putin told reporters.

"In general, there is understanding that combining efforts in the fight against terrorism should come in parallel with some political process in Syria itself," the president said.

Syria's president agrees with this "up to holding early parliamentary elections, establishing contacts with the so-called wise opposition and attracting them for governing," he said.

"We are not imposing anything, but we are ready to contribute to this intra-Syrian dialogue," Putin said.

"Putin: Early to speak of Russia's readiness for military participation in fight against IS," [TASS](#), 03:09 GMT, 4 Sep 2015.

RIA-Novosti reported:

A political solution to the Syrian crisis, which Russia has insisted on for a long while, seems to be prevailing over that of a military one, pursued by the US and its allies.

On Friday [4 Sep], President Putin stated that President Assad understands the need to search for political ways to settle the ongoing military crisis in Syria.

The Russian head of state stressed that fight against terrorism should proceed alongside a political process of bringing about peace in Syria itself. President Assad is ready for certain steps in this direction.

"The Syrian president agrees with that, all the way down to holding early parliamentary elections, establishing contacts with the so-called healthy opposition, and bringing them into the governing."

"But this is, first of all, an issue of internal Syrian development; we are not imposing anything, but are ready to facilitate this internal Syrian dialogue," he added.

Moscow has always insisted on a peaceful diplomatic solution to the ongoing military crisis in Syria.

Meanwhile, the US-led coalition keeps conducting air strikes against the Islamic State militants on Syrian territory, without any sign of success.

"Putin Says Assad Willing to Share Power With 'Healthy Opposition'," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:42 GMT, updated 23:20 GMT, 4 Sep 2015.

And Reuters reported:

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is ready to hold snap parliamentary elections and could share power with a "healthy" opposition.

....

Moscow has made clear it does not want to see Assad toppled and has seized on gains made by Islamic State in Syria and Iraq to urge his foreign foes, including the United States and Saudi Arabia, to work with Damascus to combat the common enemy.

"We really want to create some kind of an international coalition to fight terrorism and extremism," Putin told journalists on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, saying he had spoken to U.S. President Barack Obama on the matter.

"We are also working with our partners in Syria. In general, the understanding is that this uniting of efforts in fighting terrorism should go in parallel to some political process in Syria itself," Putin said.

"And the Syrian president agrees with that, all the way down to holding early elections, let's say, parliamentary ones, establishing contacts with the so-called healthy opposition, bringing them into governing," he said.

Moscow wants the U.S.-led coalition carrying out air strikes on Islamic State positions to coordinate with the Syrian and Iraqi armies and moderate anti-Assad rebel groups on the ground, as well as Kurdish forces.

Assad's enemies have refused to cooperate with Damascus, fearing that would help legitimise his rule in Syria, where the West and Gulf states say he is part of the problem, not the solution, and must go.

A flurry of recent high-level diplomatic contacts have so far failed to yield a breakthrough with the question over Assad being the main point of contention.

"If it's impossible today to organise joint work directly on the battlefield between all those countries interested in fighting terrorism, it's indispensable to at least establish some sort of coordination between them," Putin said.

Denis Dyomkin, "Russia says Syria's Assad ready to share power," [Reuters](#), 09:16 GMT, 4 Sep 2015.

See also, [Washington Post](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Arab News](#)(WashPost). The English-language newsmedia in Syria did *not* report this story on 4 September. It would be more credible if Assad — *not* Putin — made this public disclosure about Assad.

The last quoted paragraph of the Reuters article mentions "coordination", which seems to anticipate Russia's military intervention in Syria, a topic discussed [below](#).

On 8 September, Reuters reported that Austria's foreign minister said the fight against ISIL in Syria needs to be coordinated with Assad.

The West should involve Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the fight against Islamic State, Austria's foreign minister said on Tuesday [8 Sep], breaking with the view of most Western powers that say Assad is the source of the problem.

Sebastian Kurz's comments, during a state visit to Iran, reflect what some European diplomats have said privately for months, but they also expose a divide among Western countries on how to deal with Assad and the rise of hardline fighters

"We need a pragmatic common approach in this respect including the involvement of Assad in the fight against Islamic State terror," Kurz told reporters.

....

Spain's Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia Margallo on Monday [7 Sep] said negotiations with Assad were necessary to end the war. Some European officials privately advocate talking to his government, and Assad has said Western intelligence officials have visited Damascus.

Shadia Nasralla, "Austria says fight against Islamic State needs Syria's Assad," [Reuters](#), 15:44 GMT, 8 Sep 2015.

On 9 September, Reuters reported that the United Kingdom foreign minister "softened his tone" against Assad. This change might make it easier to negotiate peace in the Syrian civil war. However, the U.K. Government continues to oppose any long-term role for Assad in Syria.

Britain could accept Syrian President Bashar al-Assad staying in place for a transition period if it helped resolve the country's conflict, Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said on Wednesday [9 Sep], in what appeared to be a softening of tone on the Syrian leader.

....

Hammond told parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee that a political rather than military solution was needed and said Britain had made clear to Russia and Iran, Assad's principal international allies, that it would be prepared to discuss a plan which saw him stay on temporarily.

"If there is a sensible plan for transition that involves Assad remaining in some way

involved in the process for a period of time we will look at that, we will discuss it. We are not saying he must go on day one," he said, adding that the transition could be a period of months.

Asked about the comments, Prime Minister David Cameron's spokeswoman told reporters Britain had not changed its view that Assad should not be a part of Syria's long-term future.

....

Hammond rejected Russia's suggestion Syria could hold snap parliamentary elections which could see Assad share power.

"That is not an acceptable position. The international community cannot in my view facilitate and oversee a set of elections in which somebody guilty of crimes of the scale that Assad has committed is able to run for office," he said.

Kylie Maclellan & William James, "UK softens tone against Syria's Assad, moots transition period," [Reuters](#), 16:43 GMT, 9 Sep 2015.

On 12 September, the German Chancellor, Dr. Merkel, said Europe should work with both Russia and the USA to end the civil war in Syria. Reuters reported:

Germany and other western European powers need to work with Russia as well as the United States to solve the crisis in Syria, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Saturday [12 Sep].

....

[German] Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had a lengthy exchange about Syria on the sidelines of the [12 Sep] meeting [in Berlin], with both agreeing to support the U.N. Syrian envoy, Staffan de Mistura's plan to create a Syrian contact group.

Andreas Rinke, "Germany's Merkel sees need to cooperate with Russia on Syria," [Reuters](#), 22:57 GMT, 12 Sep 2015.

My comment is that it should be obvious that the Syrian civil war will be settled by negotiations between the Syrian opposition (e.g., moderate rebels, politicians) and Assad's government. This is what de Mistura is currently attempting to accomplish. The foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, USA, UK, France, ...) will need to be involved in any solution, so they stop their meddling in Syria's internal affairs. The neighbors of Syria (e.g., Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq) need to be involved in any solution, to return refugees and secure their borders. Additionally, both ISIL and Nusra Front will need to be defeated militarily — and by killing their ideology — because these Islamic terrorists will continue to fight for their goals, regardless of who leads the government of Syria. The government of Syria — regardless of who leads it — will need the assistance of foreign nations to exterminate ISIL and Nusra Front.

It is not clear that there exists a solution that will satisfy all of these groups. For example, Assad himself, Russia, and Iran all want to see Assad continue to rule Syria, while the USA,

Saudi Arabia, UK, and France are all adamant that Assad must *not* have any role in the future of Syria. It *should* be a matter for the people in Syria to determine their government and leader, instead of having foreign meddlers impose a government on Syria.

On the night of 13 September, Bloomberg News reported that Russia was willing to discuss making Assad an interim head of state.

Russia is sending signals to the U.S. and Saudi Arabia that it may allow Syria's embattled leader Bashar al-Assad to be eased out of power as it seeks to forge a united front against Islamic State and retain influence in the region, officials and Syrian opposition leaders said.

Officials from the three countries, as well as from the opposition, have been negotiating possible terms for sidelining Assad since at least June, when President Vladimir Putin hosted Saudi King Salman's son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed, they said. Saudi Arabia is Assad's main regional enemy, while Russia is his longtime ally. Since then, Russia's whirlwind diplomacy has brought key officials from across the region to Moscow for talks.

....

Like every other aspect of the war in Syria, though, Russia's policy isn't straightforward. U.S. and Russian officials say they're weighing a transition plan that would strip Assad of power while remaining interim head of state.

....

.... Big questions remain, the U.S. official stressed, including whether Putin really is prepared to see Assad marginalized and, if so, whether he can persuade him to go quietly.

U.S. intelligence agencies have concluded that Russia is set to start flying combat missions from a new air hub inside Syria, other American officials said. Putin may be betting that an increased military presence will either help Assad stay in power or give Russia more sway in influencing the outcome of the crisis if the Syrian leader is forced out.

....

Publicly, Russia remains far apart from the U.S. and its allies on Syria. Asked if Russia would accept Assad staying on in a purely ceremonial role, Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said that "only the Syrian people can decide the fate of Syria, not some outside countries."

....

"The contours of a deal should be ready by year-end," said Qadri Jamil, a Kurdish politician and former Syrian deputy premier who now lives in Moscow.

Henry Meyer & Donna Abu-Nasr, "Putin Said to Explore Sidelining Assad Even as He Arms Him," [Bloomberg](#), 21:00 GMT, 13 Sep 2015. Updated 11:09 GMT on 14 Sep. Copy at [Gulf News](#).

My comment on 14 September is that Bashar Assad has been president of Syria continually since the death of his father in the year 2000. Bashar's father was president of Syria during 1971-2000. Given that the Syrian legislature is weak, there are few people in Syria with experience in leadership of a nation. That fact makes it difficult to find an experienced replacement for Assad. (See my [second essay](#), written in Oct 2013, in the section titled: "Replacing Bashar Assad? absence of a strong alternative leader".)

However, since 28 Dec 2014, it has been clear that Assad is having difficulty convincing Syrians to join the army and fight against various insurgents. Syrians are now choosing to flee from Syria as refugees, instead of fight to maintain Assad's government. That fact alone argues that Syria urgently needs a better leader than Assad, although it is for the Syrian people to decide who is the "better" leader.

Moreover, Assad has allegedly engaged in a barbaric campaign of dropping chlorine and barrel bombs on civilians, for no military advantage. (I say "allegedly" because Assad's guilt has *not* been proven in a court.) The tactic of repeatedly attacking civilians is surely a war crime, regardless of who does it. It is for these reasons that Obama — joined by the governments of UK, France, ... — insists that Assad must have *no* role in the future of Syria. Further, many of the neighbors of Syria want to see Assad removed, because Assad is a Shiite and Syria, like most of its neighbors, is predominantly Sunni. All of this opposition to Assad makes it likely that Assad will sometime be forced from office.

I worry that any new government of Syria will be inexperienced and will be indecisive. Any hesitation or vacillation will be exploited by vicious Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL and Nusra Front). In particular, the new government of Syria will want to reconstitute the leadership of the Syrian army. The obvious choice will be to merge the Free Syrian Army with the official Syrian army — a decision that would be catastrophic for the army, because the Free Syrian Army has a long history of being fragmented, disorganized, and ineffective. As I said in a [review](#) that I wrote in June 2014, it is a bad idea to create a new government in the middle of a vicious civil war.

On 17 September, TASS quoted Russian Foreign Minister about why everyone should support Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorists.

"And certainly, especially in this case, when there are no reasons to evade cooperation with the Syrian leadership, which, first, counters this terrorist threat, and second, the Syrian president is the commander-in-chief of probably the most capable ground force fighting terrorism, to give up such an opportunity, ignore the capabilities of the Syrian army as a partner and ally in the fight against the Islamic State means to sacrifice the entire region's security to some geopolitical moods and calculations," Lavrov said.

"No reasons to evade cooperation with Syrian leadership — Russia FM," [TASS](#), 14:20 GMT, 17 Sep 2015.

The massive Russian military build-up in Syria during the first few weeks of September 2015

(see [below](#)) forced Obama and Kerry on 18 Sep to back away from their obsession with removing Assad, and instead focus on defeating ISIL.

On Saturday, 19 September, Kerry met with the U.K. foreign minister, Philip Hammond. Afterwards, they spoke to journalists.

QUESTION [by Lisa Holland of Sky News]: And Secretary of State, if I might ask you as well, if you find common ground with Russia in attacking the Islamic State, doesn't that mean that indirectly you are then propping up the regime of Bashar Assad?

[Question and response about the U.K. increasing its military role in Syria deleted here.]

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAMMOND: because of the Russian engagement, the situation in Syria is becoming more complicated, and I think we need to discuss this as part of a much bigger problem — the migration pressures, the humanitarian crisis in Syria, as well as the need to defeat ISIL.

SECRETARY KERRY: ISIL is increasingly being understood by every entity, every country in the world, to be a threat to everybody. And ISIL is. ISIL is plotting attacks today against the West. We know this. And there isn't a nation in the vicinity of Syria that isn't opposed to ISIL. So to the degree that Russia wants to focus its efforts against ISIL, we welcome that and we're prepared to try to find the ways to most rapidly and most effectively eliminate ISIL.

To do so is not to change one's position or attitude about what Assad has done to his own people, about the crimes that have committed in the region. But it is to underscore the need for all of us to find a way to get to that elusive political settlement that we've talked about now for a period of time but which has not yet materialized. There is an urgency not just to fighting ISIL; there is an urgency to renewing everybody's effort to find the compromise that could produce the political settlement necessary to bring peace and stability to a Syria that is kept whole and secular, unified, where all minorities are protected. That is our goal, and it is shared, by the way, by Russia, by every other country, to our knowledge, in the region. Therefore, we ought to be able to find the way forward, and that's our hope.

....

QUESTION: And also, Secretary Kerry, yesterday you said that Assad is not part of any long-term solution in Syria. That seems to suggest you envision some compromise in which he perhaps could stay on in the interim, perhaps similar to what the foreign secretary suggested a few weeks ago. Just what exactly do you have in mind? What kind of time limit would the U.S. accept?

[Question and response about refugees from Syria deleted here.]

SECRETARY KERRY: With respect to Assad and longevity, what I said is consistent with what I've always said about Syria that I think the last year and a half we have said that Assad has to go. But how long, what the modality is, that's a decision that has to

be made in the context of the Geneva process and negotiations. We've said for some period of time that it doesn't have to be on day one or month one or whatever. There is a process by which all the parties have to come together and reach an understanding of how this can best be achieved.

And I don't have the answer as to some specific timeframe. I just know that the people of Syria have already spoken with their feet. They're leaving Syria. They've made it clear through the barrel bombs that have killed innocent children and parents and kids in school, and dropped on hospitals, the pictures of people tortured, starved, with their bodies brutalized and proven 10,000 strong that this is a man who has committed war crimes. He has gassed his own people. Everybody in the world knows that. So what is the legitimacy with respect to the future? Obviously, in the end, it is up to the people of Syria to decide. And we have made our position very clear.

But we need to get to the negotiation. That's what we're looking for, and we hope Russia and any — Iran, other countries with influence, will help to bring about that, because that's what's preventing this crisis from ending. We're prepared to negotiate. Is Assad prepared to negotiate, really negotiate? Is Russia prepared to bring him to the table and actually find the solution to this violence? Those are the pregnant questions. And we've made it very clear we've been open. We've made it very clear that we're not being doctrinaire about the specific date or time. We're open. But right now, Assad has refused to have a serious discussion and Russia has refused to help bring him to the table in order to do that. So that's why we're where we are.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAMMOND: We're completely aligned on this issue. Assad has to go. He can't be part of Syria's long-term future. But the modality and the timing has to be part of a discussion about a political solution that allows us to move forward and to avert further humanitarian suffering.

"Remarks With British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond After Their Meeting," [State Dept](#), 19 Sep 2015.

On 21 September, France seemed to join the U.K. and USA in saying that Assad could remain as head of the Syrian government for some indefinite time. Reuters reports:

France will not demand Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's departure as a precondition for peace talks, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told *Le Figaro* in an interview [on 21 Sep].

"If we require, even before negotiations start, that Assad step down, we won't get far," Fabius was quoted as saying in a preview of the French daily's Tuesday [22 Sep] edition.

....

France believes a diplomatic resolution would require the establishment of a government of national unity including elements of Assad's administration "to avoid the kind of collapse seen in Iraq", Fabius also said in the interview.

Laurence Frost. "France softens stance on Assad departure — Figaro," [Reuters](#), 20:03 GMT,

21 Sep 2015.

On 22 September, David Petraeus — a now retired 4-star U.S. Army General who commanded U.S. Forces in both Iraq (2007-2008), CENTCOM, then Afghanistan (2010-2011) — testified before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, where he said:

We should not allow Russia to push us into coalition with Assad, which appears to be President Putin's intention. While we should not rush to oust Assad without an understanding of what will follow him, Assad cannot be part of the solution in Syria. He is, after all, the individual seen by Sunnis across the region as responsible for the death of some 250,000 Syrians.

"Notable & Quotable: David H. Petraeus", [WSJ](#), 23 Sep 2015.

I think General Petraeus is correct that we should not oust Assad before we know who will replace Assad. I urge we wait until *after* the Syrian civil war has been ended before changing leadership of Syria. And instead of foreign meddlers "ousting" Assad, the Syrian people should vote to chose their own leader. Finally, it is unfair to blame Assad for deaths caused by ISIL and Nusra Front, who are attempting to create a caliphate or emirate in Syria.

Finally, I observe that a good leader makes frequent public appearances and inspires his group. In contrast, since 2011, Assad seems to have cowered inside a bunker, rarely seen in public, and very rarely making speeches. So when Assad appeared in a mosque for prayers on Eid al-Adha (24 Sep 2015) — something that would be routine and unremarkable for most Muslims — Agence France-Presse reported "Syria's Assad makes rare public appearance for Eid prayers". [Al-Arabiya](#); [Gulf News](#). Assad's two previous public appearances seems to have been a speech on 26 July 2015 ([The Guardian](#)) and a visit to a mosque on 17 July 2015 ([Al-Arabiya](#)). Assad's previous public speech was in July 2014, *one year earlier*. [Syria Times](#); [Assad website](#).

During 28 September to 2 October 2015, the Syrian foreign minister — *not* Assad — attended the annual summit of world leaders at the United Nations in New York City. It was another missed opportunity for Assad to show some leadership.

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.

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

de Mistura begins Working Groups

In response to public marching orders from Ban, on 14 April 2015 Mistura proposed one-on-one talks between himself and both opposition groups in Syria and governments of nations involved in Syria. (See my essay for [April 2015](#).) Such talks began on 5 May 2015. (See my essays for [May 2015](#) and [June 2015](#).) Somehow these one-on-one talks were expected by the U.N. to revive the peace negotiations. But the peace negotiations were still in the distant future when Mistura's talks ended in July. My essay for [July 2015](#) explains that de Mistura will establish four or five Working Groups inside Syria to specify details of a political solution. During August 2015, there was no public announcements from de Mistura about these Working Groups.

On 22 September, there was a strange article in *Russia Today* that suggested that Assad's government might not participate in de Mistura's working groups. The article is a transcript of an interview with the Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Muallem.

RT: Let's talk about the new initiative put forward by UN special envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, who proposed creating four working groups, and about the questions the Syrian authorities asked him through you. We know from Syrian diplomatic sources that the special envoy did not answer these questions immediately, but he visited Syria a couple of days ago and provided you with the answers. We heard that he left empty-handed and wasn't happy with what he heard in Damascus. Is that true?

Walid Muallem: First of all, this isn't quite the way it was. We spent two hours discussing Mr. de Mistura's explanations, provided in reply to the questions we asked earlier about his initiative to set up four working groups of Syrian experts for the purpose of having a dialogue. He said their recommendations would not be binding. In case this exchange helps achieve something, its outcome can be used in preparation for the Geneva III conference. He called it "brainstorming." We told him that we'll consider this proposal taking into account his explanations and decide whether we are going to participate or not. I don't know why he might be frustrated. My impression was he was happy.

RT: Why did it take Syria a while to respond to this new proposal, especially since Syria has been quite cooperative lately and supported UN initiatives? Besides, your questions, or your review of the answers provided by Mr. de Mistura, may further delay a political settlement. Certain people question the Syrian government's willingness to engage in real efforts to achieve a political solution.

Walid Muallem: We don't want to walk into a dark tunnel. We want to see clearly where we're going. Obviously, fighting terrorism is the top priority today. This doesn't mean that we're not interested in political dialogue. But our priority today is to fight terrorism. We can have a dialogue, look for a political solution. But would we be able

to implement this solution in a situation where terrorists are gaining ground? It would be hard. What does an average Syrian want? Security. We have to ensure security first; we have to give the Syrian people what they want. So, I would say Mr. De Mistura was in no hurry himself. We didn't cause any delay. All we want is to make sure we are taking the right way, the way that won't make the situation worse.

"Don't want to walk into dark tunnel': Defeating terrorism must be top priority, Syrian FM tells RT," [Russia Today](#), 02:55 GMT, 22 Sep 2015.

Finally, on 22 September, de Mistura announced that the U.N. Secretary General had appointed Europeans to lead the four working groups:

1. **safety and protection**, chaired by Jan Egeland, head of the Norwegian Refugee Council
2. **political and legal**, chaired by Nicolas Michel, a lawyer from Switzerland
3. **military, security, and counterterrorism**, chaired by Volker Perthes, director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs
4. **continuity of public services and reconstruction**, chaired by Birgitta Holst Alani, a Swedish diplomat

[Reuters](#); [UN News](#); [Associated Press](#).

Although Reuters first reported this story at 06:30 EDT on 22 Sep, by 16:50 EDT on 22 Sep neither the Secretary General's website, his Spokesman's webpage, nor de Mistura's webpage in Geneva had any mention of these appointments. The most recent press release at de Mistura's webpage is dated 17 Sep, five days ago. My conclusion is that the U.N. should hire Reuters to operate its public information websites.

Are all four of these chairmen fluent in the Arabic language? While it would be desirable to have a native speaker of Arabic as chairman, most of the Middle East nations (except Iraq) are strongly anti-Assad, and that bias probably prohibits them from being a chairman.

There was no mention on 22 September of when the working groups would first meet. De Mistura first announced these working groups on 29 July, so progress has been glacially slow. It has taken 55 days to find chairmen for these four working groups. One might expect some urgency, given that people are dying at the rate of more than 4000/month in the Syrian civil war and there currently is an unprecedented flood of migrants from Syria to Europe.

[SANA](#) says the working groups will meet in Geneva. That location adds travel expense for the opposition delegates, but Geneva is safer than Damascus.

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 29 May, I searched Google News for reports of scheduling a third conference in Moscow. I 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.

On 24 July, [Reuters](#) reported the Syrian foreign minister "said the Syrian government welcomed the idea of more talks with members of the Syrian opposition hosted by Russia."

On 11 August, [TASS](#) reported that the Russian foreign ministry was preparing a third conference in Moscow, but no date was publicly mentioned.

Also on 11 August, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said: "We do not plan any broad meeting of the Syrian opposition. We held two meetings in February and April, and now we continue contacts on an individual basis." Lavrov incorrectly remembered the month of February, the first conference was on 26-29 January 2015.

It is not clear on 1 Sep 2015 whether there will be a third meeting on Syria in Moscow, as the TASS and RIA-Novosti articles on 11 August are contradictory and there have been no further news articles on this topic.

But by 16 September — more than five months after the previous Moscow conference — it was becoming increasingly apparent that, in the foreseeable future, there would be *no* conference in Moscow involving both the Syrian opposition and Assad's government.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2014, the European Union had put burdensome economic sanctions on Russia. So Russia may be enjoying some Schadenfreude as Russia watches Europe squirm under an invasion of tens of thousands of migrants/week from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. With that interpretation, Russia may have lost interest in negotiating an end to the Syrian civil war. Instead Russia will simply watch Europe wilt under a horde of perhaps a million migrants in the year 2015.

On 21 September, Russia announced that "the secretary general of the National Democratic Action Committee, Mahmoud Marai, as well as participants from other [Syrian] opposition groups will meet [on 22 Sep] with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov" in Moscow. [TASS](#), copy at: [RBTH](#). When I searched Google News at 10:30 EDT of 23 Sep, there were no reports of what occurred at that meeting. On 22 Sep, [SANA](#) reported the Russian Foreign Ministry claimed "substantive and objective discussion regarding the

situation in Syria took place during the meeting", which is uninformative and vague.

On 28 September, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said "a new round of intra-Syrian talks may be held in Moscow by the end of the year." [RIA-Novosti](#).

Syrian National Coalition fading?

In 2013 and continuing through mid-2014, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) was the political opposition to Assad's government. For example, the SNC represented the opposition at the U.N.-sponsored negotiations in Geneva, during January 2014 and February 2014. As another example, see the [statements](#) during 2013-2014 from the foreign ministers in the group of nations called the Friends of the Syrian People.

My essay for [August 2015](#) reported that recently there have been hints that the SNC was being ignored, and the opposition politicians inside Syria were gaining prominence in the peace process.

U.N. Reports

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 monthly Reports on the situation in Syria, beginning March 2014.

Beginning in June 2015, I discontinued my quotations from the Secretary General's monthly reports, because all parties in the Syrian civil war are continuing to ignore the Secretary General.

A list of all of the Secretary General's reports on Syria can be found at my [webpage](#), which has links to the original reports.

Beginning in October 2013, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued monthly reports on chemical weapons on Syria. My [webpage](#) has links to each of these reports.

As mentioned in my essay for [May 2015](#), the U.N. document delivery system has been nonfunctional since 22 April 2015. Fortunately, there are alternative sources, such as [ReliefWeb](#) and [Security Council Reports](#).

Debacle in Iraq

Death Toll in Iraq

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

Atrocities in Iraq

Introduction

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.
-

September 2015: Islamic Bombings

On 3 September, four bombs in Baghdad killed at least 8 people. One bomb in a town 50 km north of Baghdad killed 3 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 17 September, two ISIL suicide bombers wore explosive vests and detonated at different police checkpoints in Baghdad, killing at least 21 people. Rudaw says 24 dead. [Associated Press](#); [Rudaw](#); [All Iraq News](#).

On 20 September, a judge and his three bodyguards were killed as the judge departed from his home in Kirkuk. [Rudaw](#); [All Iraq News](#).

On 21 September, a car bomb at a vegetable market in Baghdad killed at least 11 people. Separately, a roadside bomb in Baghdad killed 3 people. [Associated Press](#); [All Iraq News](#).

18 Turks kidnapped in Baghdad

On 2 September at 03:00 Baghdad time, masked men in Iraqi army and police uniforms entered a construction site for a sports stadium in the Sadr City district of Baghdad, and kidnapped 18 Turkish citizens who were working on the construction project. The masked

gunmen specifically selected Turkish citizens, perhaps for ransom. [Hurriyet](#); [Anadolu Agency](#); [Rudaw](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [All Iraq News](#).

On 4 September, Iraqi security forces raided the house of a Shiite militiaman who the government believed was involved in the kidnappings. Criminal gangs of Shiites are known to perform contract killings, kidnappings, and extortion. Also, on 4 Sep, the Turkish prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, called Iraqi prime minister Abadi on the telephone about the kidnappings. [Reuters](#); [Hurriyet](#) (gangs); [Daily Sabah](#).

On 11 September, the kidnappers posted online video of the 18 hostages, together with the following demands by Shiite kidnappers:

1. "stopping the passage of militants from Turkey to Iraq,
2. "cutting the flow of 'stolen oil' from Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, and
3. "ordering the Army of Conquest [a Syrian insurgent group that includes Nusra Front] to lift the siege of Kefraya and al-Foua, Shi'ite Muslim villages in northwest Syria."

There is no deadline in the online demands. The three demands are quoted from [Reuters](#). See also: [Associated Press](#).

On 12 September, the senior Iraqi Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, said "We demand the release of the kidnapped men and the end of such practices, which harm the image of Islam". [All Iraq News](#); [Associated Press](#). It seems strange that Shiites need to be told that kidnapping is *wrong*. But the kidnappers ignored the Ayatollah. Also on 12 September, a well-known Shiite cleric in Baghdad, Muqtada al-Sadr, announced that the kidnapping was a "heinous crime". [Iraqi News](#).

On 16 September, two hostages were released in Basra, an Iraqi city about 450 km south of Baghdad. [Reuters](#); [Anadolu Agency](#); [Today's Zaman](#).

On 28 September, the Shiite kidnappers issued a video that promises to release the remaining 16 Turkish hostages. [Iraqi News](#); [Reuters](#); [Daily Sabah](#) in Turkey; But later on 28 Sep, the hostages had not yet been released. [Hurriyet](#).

On 30 September, the 16 Turkish hostages were finally released in on a road about 60 km south of Baghdad. Iraqi authorities took the hostages to the Turkish embassy in Baghdad. The president of Turkey sent his airplane to Baghdad to bring the hostages home to Turkey. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Anadolu](#); [Today's Zaman](#)(Reuters); [Hurriyet](#).

Deputy Justice Minister kidnapped in Baghdad

On 8 September, [All Iraq News](#) reported: "The Deputy Minister of Justice along with the Head of Investigation Department within the Ministry were kidnapped" while their automobile was driving through Baghdad. See also: [Iraqi News](#). The [Associated Press](#) reports the kidnapping occurred in a Shiite district of eastern Baghdad, but only mentions the kidnapping of the Deputy Minister, not the Head of Investigations. The AP reminds us: "kidnapping for ransom has been common in Iraq since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that

toppled Saddam Hussein." [Reuters](#) reports "The security sources said another official and two guards were also kidnapped, but a spokesman for Baghdad operations command later denied that." Agence France-Presse reported: "Kidnappings for political reasons or money are a persistent problem in Baghdad, with Shiite militias or their affiliates seen as the main culprits." [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

Another Kidnapping in Baghdad

On 14 September, [Iraqi News](#) reported that "Unidentified gunmen driving two black cars kidnapped last night [13 Sep] two government members, belonging to the Ministry of Water Resources, from one of the areas of Baghdad". The corpse of one kidnap victim was later found in Baghdad. My search of Google News on the morning of 17 Sep shows no other news reports of this kidnapping.

Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

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.

The English-language news websites in Iraq appear to either ignore or minimize these terrorist attacks. *All Iraq News* typically ignores terrorists attacks in Iraq, but when they do report an attack, they report only a small fraction of the actual deaths. *Iraqi News* rarely reports on the daily terrorists attacks in Iraq. I do not know the news coverage in the Arabic-language news media in Iraq, but the English-language news in Iraq is failing to truly inform readers.

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 29 June 2015, Abadi retired the chief of staff of the Iraqi army, General Zebari. The reason for the retirement was *not* publicly disclosed. Because there was no praise for Zebari's service, I assume that Abadi was dissatisfied with Zebari. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [All Iraq News](#); [BAS News](#); [Iraqi News](#).

There is another problem that is *not* mentioned by journalists. Abadi may be short on well-trained, experienced officers to lead the Iraqi army. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, *all* of the Sunni military officers in Saddam Hussein's army became unemployable by the new Iraqi government, under the U.S. "de-Baathification" policy. This ban led to those experienced army officers joining Sunni insurgent groups, and later joining Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which became ISIL. As a result, ISIL now appears to have better military leadership than the Iraqi army. See e.g., [Washington Post](#), 4 April 2015; [Reuters](#), 18 June 2015; [Associated Press](#), 8 Aug 2015; [Daily Star](#), 10 Aug 2015. Further, in Abadi's first year in office, as mentioned above, Abadi forced more than 336 Iraqi army officers into retirement. This may have removed some incompetent and/or corrupt officers appointed by Maliki, but it also depleted the army of experienced officers. So, after the U.S. purge in 2003 and after Abadi's purge, the Iraqi army may now have a shortage of well-trained, experienced officers.

Prosecution for Fall of Mosul

My essay for [August 2015](#) explained that on 17 Aug 2015, the Iraqi parliament quickly approved the Mosul Report, then referred the Report to the Judiciary, for investigation and criminal trial of 36 people. The Report recommends criminal prosecution of:

1. the former Iraqi prime minister (Nouri al-Maliki),
2. the former defense minister (Sadoun al-Dulaimi),
3. the former governor of Nineveh province (Atheel al-Nujaifi),
4. four top Iraqi army officers
 - A. chief of staff: Babakir Zebari,
 - B. assistant chief of staff: Obud Qanber,
 - C. ground forces commander: Ali Ghidan,
 - D. commander of Nineveh: Mahdi al-Gharrawi,
5. and 29 other people.

There has been no news from the Judiciary about the investigation and prosecution of these suspects. I am concerned that the Iraqi Judiciary will "forget" to investigate and prosecute those who ordered the Iraqi army to flee from Mosul in June 2014.

Prosecution for Rout at Ramadi

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 2015, 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 2015.

On 16 August 2015, Abadi ordered the Iraqi army commanders in Ramadi on 17 May to face court martial for abandoning their positions. [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). Also on 16 August, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Abadi approved an investigative report on the rout at Ramadi.

Since 16 August 2015, there has been no news about the prosecution of the Iraqi army commanders who ordered the army to flee from Ramadi.

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 since it was uncovered in December 2014.

Iraq is a Failed Nation

Introduction

During an existential crisis — the invasion of Iraq by ISIL — the Iraqi parliament held infrequent meetings, had small attendance when they met, and made glacially slow progress on solving Iraq's problems. This abysmal performance of parliament was chronicled in my essays for [July 2014](#) through [February 2015](#). The data for July through October 2014 are summarized in my [table](#).

My essay for [June 2015](#) mentions corruption in Iraq, and criticism of the Iraqi government by journalists. The Iraqi parliament — which has failed to end corruption in the Iraqi army, and failed to create a nonsectarian National Guard that integrates Sunni tribesmen and Shiite militias under the firm control of the federal government in Baghdad — was on vacation beginning 31 May until 1 July 2015, and on vacation again from 6 July to 25 July 2015.

My essay for [August 2015](#) mentions numerous reforms to the Iraqi government by Abadi on 11 Aug and 16 Aug.

September 2015: Financial Crisis & Junk Bonds

On 4 September, *McClatchy* newspapers reported that the Iraqi government was in a continuing financial crisis.

Iraq's ability to fight Islamic State extremists who control roughly a third of the country is hampered by a financial crisis that's left the Baghdad government operating "hand to mouth," Iraqi Ambassador Lukman Faily warned this week.

The inability to pay salaries on time to the soldiers and militiamen fighting the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, has hurt morale and hindered progress in operations to retake key hubs that were captured by the jihadists, Faily said in an interview Thursday [3 Sep]. And belt-tightening measures such as consolidating government ministries threaten to exacerbate ethnic and sectarian tensions by upsetting the delicate power-sharing quota system that's been in place since the U.S.-led occupation authority took charge following the invasion of 2003.

....

Faily, who belongs to the ruling Dawa Party, blamed the crisis chiefly on the plummeting price of oil — the government relies on exports for some 85 percent of revenue — though economists and foreign policy analysts say that decades of mismanagement and corruption also have contributed.

Faily acknowledged government fault, citing an overdependence on oil revenues and the slow pace of addressing graft such as the use of "ghost employees," workers who exist only on paper so that supervisors can pocket the salaries.

....

Ben Van Heuvelen, managing editor of Iraq Oil Report, which closely monitors the Iraqi oil sector, said a major cause of the crisis is that the previous administration of Nouri al Maliki "left zero financial buffer for the inevitable down cycle in commodity price." He said that Maliki's successor, Prime Minister Haider Abadi, has "made some good moves," including painful spending cuts and exploring revenues outside of oil, but that he stands little chance of yanking the country back from the brink anytime soon.

....

But the budget crisis means that paychecks are late — "three months behind, four months behind," Faily said — which, in turn, deals a blow to the morale of a fighting force that's already much maligned for its evaporation during the Islamic State offensive that took Mosul, the second-largest city in the country.

....

Faily said Iraq's finance minister is traveling to London and Washington next month in hopes of selling some \$6 billion in Iraqi bonds, and that the Iraqi Cabinet is scrambling to cut spending in other areas, downsizing diplomatic outposts and halting some investment projects. Iraq also received a credit rating for the first time and secured a loan agreement from the World Bank.

Hannah Allam, "Is Iraq too broke to fight ISIS?," [McClatchy](#), 4 Sep 2015.

Copy at [Sacramento Bee](#), [Stars&Stripes](#), and [Miami Herald](#). Plagiarized at [All Iraq News](#).

In the above-quoted article, Ambassador Faily mentions the sale of bonds by the Iraqi government. Only a reckless investor would purchase unsecured junk bonds issued by the Iraqi government. On 7 August, [Reuters](#) reported that "Fitch assigned Iraq a B- rating with a stable outlook, six notches below investment-grade, citing political risks and insecurity that are among the highest faced by any sovereign rated by the agency." See also [Bloomberg](#), 7 Aug 2015.

On 4 September, [Reuters](#) reported that "Credit agency Standard & Poor's assigned Iraq a sovereign rating six notches below investment grade on Thursday [3 Sep] S&P rated Iraq at B-, on a par with Egypt and above Greece."

It is very risky to have an economy that is heavily dependent on *one* commodity (i.e., oil) with a fluctuating price, but that is what the Iraqis have chosen to do. Any agriculture or manufacturing in Iraq produces minimal export income. That dependency on oil is bad enough, but — further — there is *no* reason to believe that Iraq will solve any of its other serious problems (e.g., corruption, incompetence, infestation by ISIL, sectarian bickering, etc.) before the bonds are due to be paid.

The embarrassingly low credit ratings assigned to the Iraqi government by both Fitch and Standard & Poor's is strong evidence that Iraq is a failed nation with very little rational hope of improvement. And that failed nation status is why the Iraqi army allowed ISIL to seize 1/3 of Iraq in 2014, and why the Iraqi army can not expel ISIL from Fallujah, Mosul, or Ramadi.

Draft National Guard Law

Currently, Iraq has numerous armed militias under the control of Shiite politicians or clerics, or under the control of Sunni tribes. Some of the Shiite militia are supplied and advised by Iran. The situation is a disorganized mess, and more appropriate for a medieval feudal society than a modern nation. Abadi has proposed creating an Iraqi National Guard to integrate all of these militias under the control of the Iraqi government in Baghdad. Abadi's proposal is controversial, in part because of the loss of power by various politicians, clerics, or tribal leaders who currently control a private army.

Finally, on 30 Aug 2015 the draft National Guard Law came before the Iraqi parliament for a vote. [All Iraq News](#). After some criticism of the draft law, parliament postponed voting on the draft. [All Iraq News](#). Apparently, there were *no* meetings of parliament from 31 Aug to 9 Sep. The draft was scheduled to be discussed again on 8 September, but was removed from parliament's agenda. [All Iraq News](#). And then the 8 Sep session of parliament was postponed until 9 Sep. [All Iraq News](#).

The draft National Guard Law was *not* considered by the Iraqi parliament during the first half of September 2015. On 16 September — in the midst of a continuing existential crisis — parliament adjourned until 29 Sep. [All Iraq News](#).

More Problems in Iraq

On 9 September, Abadi announced "he had dismissed 123 deputy ministers and general managers as part of a reform push aimed at reducing corruption and mismanagement". [Reuters](#). See official statement at [Abadi](#).

On 10 September 2015, the [Associated Press](#) the commander of the Defense Intelligence Agency said he believed that Kurdistan would break from Iraq and become an independent nation. He believes Syria will fracture into two or three nations. What is now known as Iraq and Syria was artificially created in the year 1916 by the Sykes-Picot agreement, between the British and French. My essay for [August 2015](#) mentions U.S. Army General Raymond Odierno suggested that partitioning Iraq "might be the only solution".

On 19 September, there were reports that more than 65 people had been infected with cholera in the town of Abu Ghraib district of Baghdad province. At least 4 people have died. Reuters says at least 6 dead. [Reuters](#); [Anadolu Agency](#); [Iraqi News](#); [Rudaw](#). Cholera is a disease of primitive nations that do not have chlorinated drinking water and do not have adequate sewage treatment plants. There was an epidemic of cholera in Iraq in the year 2007 that infected approximately 7000 people. Reuters also remarks: "[Iraq]'s water and sewerage systems are outdated and infrastructure development has been hindered by years of war and neglect." On 23 September, [Reuters](#) reports that the number of cholera cases had increased to 121. On 27 September, cholera cases were confirmed in Diwaniya province of Iraq. [All Iraq News](#).

On 20 September, [Reuters](#) reports "Some Iraqi soldiers are abandoning their posts and joining a wave of civilian migrants headed to Europe," Reuters also says: "The soldiers' departure highlights a pervasive sense of hopelessness among many Iraqis" Reuters mentions the soldiers disgust with inadequate resources, failure to send reinforcements, and officials "enriching themselves through graft." See also later version, at [Reuters](#), 21 Sep.

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

Beginning in August 2014, I have included this section in my essays. Initially, I commented on the series of atrocities by Islamic terrorists, who acted in the name of their interpretation of Islam, and besmirched the reputation of Islam. That was a public relations problem for Muslims. But then some military leaders and politicians developed the notion that Muslim

clerics needed to explain why so-called "Islamic terrorism" was unIslamic, to stop the flow of foreigners into Syria to fight for ISIL and Nusra Front, and to stop the financial support of terrorists. This exposure of the erroneous ideology of Islamic terrorism is a different kind of public relations problem from defending mainstream Islam.

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.) But beginning in September 2014, Muslim clerics stopped publicly denouncing terrorism. There needs to be a consistent and continuing condemnation of terrorism by Muslim clerics, in part to discourage young Muslims from joining Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

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

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.

My Proposal

There are genuine cultural differences between mainstream Islam and Christianity. For example, Saudi Arabia does *not* issue driver's licenses to women. Women in Afghanistan wear a burqa. The effort here should *not* be to impose orthodoxy and make mainstream Islam more like Christianity. Instead, the effort here should be for Muslim clerics and other Muslim opinion leaders to cite their holy book and other theological documents to show that it is forbidden for Muslims to:

- invade nations in an attempt to spread an interpretation of Islam on other Muslims

- invade nations in an attempt to spread Islam on non-Muslims
- kill civilians (i.e., noncombatants)
- kill unarmed military prisoners
- deny water, food, and/or medical supplies to besieged cities
- impose a tax (i.e., Jizya) on non-Muslims
- sell captured women as sex slaves

In other words, the focus should be on defeating Islamic terrorism (e.g., Al-Qaeda and ISIL), and *not* on attacking mainstream Islam.

On 8 May 2015, I suggested creating hundreds of small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere to hire Arabs to counter propaganda from ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

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.

Standler, [Syria & Iraq: May 2015](#), 1 June 2015. See end of the section on the Terror Attack in Garland, Texas.

A manager would recognize that there are economies of scale, by having *one* central office to handle payroll, benefits, etc. And I have no problem with consolidating payroll in one central office that serves all of the small companies.

A manager would also recognize cost savings by purchasing equipment and Internet access in large quantities in *one* central office, to provide *all* of the small companies. Whoa! I want managers in each small company to be able to use a credit card to *quickly* purchase whatever they need, without going through a central bureaucracy. There are security advantages when different companies use different computer operating systems, different webbrowsers, different antivirus and firewall software, and different Internet service providers. That way one computer virus, or one denial of service attack, will not affect all of the different companies.

I want the small companies to maximize creativity in attacking ISIL's message, and to maximize productivity. To do that, equipment costs would not be minimized.

I envision these small companies attacking ISIL and Al-Qaeda in four ways:

- 1. Collect and display truth about Islamic terrorism:**

Create and operate websites that

- A. explain why ISIL and Al-Qaeda are violating teachings of Islam,
- B. collect and display Fatwas against ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- C. list atrocities committed by ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- D. hire Muslim clerics to write blogs or essays about how terrorism is evil.

Each website to have versions for Arabic, French, and English languages.

2. **Social media:** Monitor social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and refute propaganda. Cite URLs of websites that display truth about Islamic terrorism.
3. Produce press releases that can be published by newspapers or reported by radio/television stations.
4. Use ridicule and parody to humiliate ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

I have seen calls for Internet Service Providers to shut down websites that espouse Islamic terrorism. (See, e.g., plan for Europol to shut down ISIL's social media accounts.

[Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); 22 June.) I am opposed to shutting down websites for three reasons:

1. First, if we shut down a website, the terrorists will move their webpages to a new location, making the shut-down efforts futile. The goal here is *not* to inconvenience Islamic terrorists, but to defeat Islamic terrorists. Shutting down websites only inconveniences the terrorists.
2. Second, shutting down websites that we do not approve is censorship. The terrorists will respond by saying Western Civilization can not win the debate in the marketplace of ideas, so Western Civilization simply censors unapproved messages.
3. Third, as Justice Brandeis famously said: "... the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence." *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 377 (1927) (concurring opinion).

In summary, Western Civilization *can* refute the arguments of Islamic terrorism. Winning the debate is the right way to defeat Islamic terrorism.

Need to Kill *Ideology* of Islamic Terrorism

The U.S. has killed several influential Islamic terrorists:

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).
- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.

- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).
- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz" and "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#).

However the deaths of bin Laden and al-Awlaki had little effect on Al-Qaeda, and it is expected that the deaths of the leaders in June 2015 will also have little effect on Islamic terrorism. [Washington Post](#); [Haaretz](#); [BBC](#); [Associated Press](#), 16 June 2015; [Associated Press](#), 2 July 2015.

Al-Qaeda continued after these deaths because Al-Qaeda is driven by an *idea* of Islamic extremism. If we want to stop Islamic terrorism, we need to kill its ideology, something that requires persuasion and propaganda, *neither* bombs *nor* bullets.

This lesson is not difficult to understand. The U.S. Government continued after the deaths of President Roosevelt in 1945 and President Kennedy in 1963. Successful organizations are capable of continuing under new leadership. Indeed, the U.S. Constitution, 22nd Amendment, limits a president to a maximum of two terms (8 years).

Mullah Omar was the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 1996. Omar was reclusive and not seen in public since 2001. On 29 July 2015, there were unconfirmed reports that Omar had died in a hospital in Karachi, Pakistan in April 2013. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 30 July 2015, the reports were confirmed and the Taliban appointed a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Express Tribune](#) in Pakistan; [Associated Press](#). This example shows us how unimportant a leader is to a terrorist organization. The Taliban functioned successfully with a dead leader for more than two years! Journalists report that Omar's death may make peace negotiations more difficult, because some Taliban want to continue fighting. But — regardless of who leads the Taliban — there will be some Taliban who want to continue fighting, in the hope for a total victory.

My point is that continually attacking the ideology of Islamic terrorism is more detrimental to a terrorist organization than the brief inconvenience of killing a terrorist leader.

Despite the essential importance of countering the ideology of Islamic terrorism, during the first year of the U.S. war against ISIL, the Sawab Center in the UAE was the only organization created and dedicated to countering ideology. (See my essay for [July 2015](#).)

September 2015

On 1 September 2015, the [Washington Post](#) reported that the U.S. Military and CIA had begun a campaign using drone aircraft to kill leaders of ISIL in Syria. The new campaign "reflects rising anxiety among U.S. counterterrorism officials about the danger the Islamic State poses, as well as frustration with the failure of conventional strikes to degrade the group's strength."

My comment is that the world is a better place with ISIL terrorists — of any rank — dead. However, killing a few leaders of ISIL will *not* cause ISIL to collapse. Killing leaders of ISIL is a temporary inconvenience to ISIL, *not* a death knell. (It is also possible that a new ISIL leader may be more competent or more vicious than the previous leader.) As explained above, to permanently end Islamic terrorism, we need to kill the *ideology* of Islamic terrorism.

ISIL is *not* defeated

Politicians love to give speeches claiming that the enemy is being defeated. In response to Obama's speech on 6 July 2015, I wrote a rebuttal that documents that ISIL is not only functional, but also ISIL has spread to other nations where it engages in terrorism. For example:

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but the Iraqis have been unable to begin the liberation of Mosul.
2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq, and the Iraqis have been unable to begin the liberation of Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.
5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at at Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.

8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt fired a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
- 16.

Let us not forget that ISIL captured huge amounts of weapons, ammunition, and vehicles when the Iraqi army fled from Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014, and again when the Iraqi army fled from Ramadi in May 2015. The U.S. taxpayer funded these equipments and supplies to the Iraqi army, but the equipment and supplies enabled ISIL to become more ferocious.

While ISIL has had effective fighters in Syria since mid-2013, the USA is *planning* on training and equipping 15,000 rebels in Syria by the end of the year 2018. By 26 Sep 2015, fewer than 130 rebels have completed their training.

In my essay for [June 2015](#), in the section titled "U.S. Propaganda", I was critical of citing body counts to show success in a military campaign. There I noted that "it may be that ISIL can recruit new fighters at a higher rate than ISIL fighters are being killed." During the Vietnam war in the 1960s, U.S. Government propaganda cited body counts to show we were winning the war against the communists. Now, U.S. Government propaganda cites the number of airstrikes to show we are winning the war against ISIL.

Beginning in August 2014, I stressed the need for Muslim clerics and Islamic opinion leaders to continually condemn Islamic terrorism, see the section [above](#). Beginning in my essay for

June 2015, I suggest that instead of focusing on killing leaders of Islamic terrorist organizations, we focus on killing their [ideology](#).

Cost of U.S. War Against ISIL

On 7 August, the Associated Press reported the cost of the war against ISIL:

... the Pentagon on Friday [7 Aug] released updated cost figures for the military operations against Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria. As of the end of July, the U.S. has spent \$3.5 billion, or nearly \$10 million per day[,] since operations began a year ago. The bulk of the costs are for Air Force operations, mainly airstrikes.

Lolita C. Baldor, "Attack on Syrian rebels raises questions about training," [Associated Press](#), 18:11 EDT, 7 Aug 2015.

Note that these numbers do *not* include the clandestine CIA program to train and equip rebels in Syria. On 12 June 2015, the [Washington Post](#) reported that the CIA program had cost about one billion dollars a year to support approximately 10,000 rebels.

September 2015: ISIL *not* defeated

On 26 September, *The New York Times* reported:

Nearly 30,000 foreign recruits have now poured into Syria, many to join the Islamic State, a doubling of volunteers in just the past 12 months and stark evidence that an international effort to tighten borders, share intelligence and enforce antiterrorism laws is not diminishing the ranks of new militant fighters.

....

... American intelligence analysts have been preparing a confidential assessment that concludes that nearly 30,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Iraq and Syria from more than 100 countries since 2011. A year ago, the same officials estimated that flow to be about 15,000 combatants from 80 countries, mostly to join the Islamic State.

....

Despite Pentagon reports that coalition strikes have killed about 10,000 Islamic State fighters, the group continues to replenish its ranks, drawing an average of about 1,000 fighters a month. The government several months ago last publicly assessed the flow at "more than 25,000," including at least 4,500 from the West. Given the region's porous borders, American officials emphasize that their figures are rough estimates not precise head counts, based on allies' reports on citizens' travel and other intelligence, which vary by country.

Eric Schmitt & Somini Sengupta, "Thousands Enter Syria to Join ISIS Despite Global Efforts," [NY Times](#), 26 Sep 2015

Note that sometime around 22 July 2015, Turkey agreed to seal their border with Syria. Prior to that date, it was easy for insurgents, including ISIL, to enter Syria via Turkey. That previously porous border between Turkey and Syria could account for many of the foreign

fighters who entered Syria during the past year.

Daily News About Iraq & Syria

ISIL kidnaps Christians

Assyrians on 23 February 2015

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](#).

On 27 May, ISIL continues to hold 210 Assyrian Christians, as cited in my essay for [May 2015](#).

On 17 June, the Assyrian International News Agency ([AINA](#)) reported that one hostage had been released by ISIL, but 227 hostages remain in captivity by ISIL.

On 7 August, the [Associated Press](#) reports that "since [Feb 2015], only a few [kidnapped Assyrian Christians] have been released and the fate of the others remains unknown."

On 11 August, ISIL released approximately 22 Assyrian Christians who had been held for more than five months. The Assyrian International News Agency (AINA) says 205 hostages remain in ISIL captivity, while *Al-Arabiya* says 187 hostages remain. [AINA](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Qaryatain on 7 August 2015

On 6 August, ISIL captured Qaryatain in the Homs Province of Syria, after a long battle with Assad's army. [SOHR](#).

On 7 August, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that ISIL had kidnapped 230 people from Qaryatain, "including dozens of Christians". In addition, SOHR says that "hundreds" of people are missing. Agence France-Presse reported the head of SOHR "said those abducted were wanted by ISIS for 'collaborating with the regime' ". My essay for [August 2015](#) cites 8 sources.

On 20 August, [SOHR](#) reported that ISIL had released 48 hostages and transported 110 hostages to "to farms near the city of al-Raqqah". ISIL kidnapped 230 hostages on 7 Aug,

the fate of the remaining 72 hostages is unknown.

On 4 September, ISIL released 15 Christians after they paid the jizya. [AINA](#).

Conclusion About Hostages

It may be necessary to maintain silence about the remaining 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.

Fighting Continues at Baiji

Introduction

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.

My essays for [May 2015](#), [June 2015](#), [July 2015](#), and [August 2015](#), mention continuing battles for the refinery and the town of Baiji.

Iraqi leaders have continually boasted that victory has been achieved in Baiji, or that the area will soon be liberated from ISIL. The Truth is that ISIL has a tenacious grip on both the oil refinery and the town of Baiji, and any so-called "victory" by Iraq is only temporary.

September 2015: Baiji

On 4 September, the chief of staff, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve, characterized the situation at Baiji as "a very contested fight." [Pentagon](#).

On 7 September, the Iraqi defense minister visited Baiji, when an ISIL sniper shot at the convoy, wounding one of the minister's bodyguards. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#);

All Iraq News.

On 16 September *Rudaw* reported:

“Several factors are behind the lack of offensives by military forces. Above all it is the Iraqi government who did not give enough military support to the troops,” Muhammad Mahmud, Baiji’s mayor, told *Rudaw* on Wednesday [16 Sep].

“Another reason that made the operation slow is the importance of Baiji as a strategic place ISIS is fighting for at any cost,” he added.

....

The government has claimed victory in Baiji several times in the last year, but ISIS still controls parts of the city. ISIS suicide attacks have halted the advances of Iraqi forces, according to some reports.

"Baiji mayor blames gov't for Iraqi military failure," [Rudaw](#) 10:00 GMT, 16 Sep 2015.

On 24 September, Reuters reported that the "deadlock" in Baiji had indefinitely postponed the liberation of Mosul.

The Iraqi army's failure to recapture the country's largest oil refinery from Islamic State after 15 months of fighting is calling into question the government's plans to retake the northern city of Mosul from the jihadists.

Iraq's military has been trying to build momentum at the Baiji refinery and in Anbar province in the west before attempting to seize Mosul, the biggest prize in the war against the ultra-hardline Sunni group.

Officials say the army should secure gains in those areas before setting its sights on Mosul, the largest city in the north. Advances in Anbar's vast desert terrain since the provincial capital Ramadi fell in May have progressed fitfully.

....

Baiji, 190 km (120 miles) north of Baghdad, has repeatedly changed hands since it was captured by the militants in a lightning advance through Sunni Muslim provinces last year.

Government forces and their Shi'ite militia allies, backed by U.S.-led air strikes, are facing Islamic State snipers, suicide bombers and roadside explosives in the area.

....

A second U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, described the situation as static, with Iraqi security forces controlling about 20 percent of both the refinery and the town and the rest of the area either contested or under Islamic State control.

Reuters could not independently verify those estimates.

Stephen Kalin & Phil Stewart, "Deadlock in battle for Iraq refinery casts doubts on Mosul campaign," [Reuters](#), 18:26 GMT, 24 Sep 2015.

Iraqi Army Intends to Liberate Anbar Province

The previous history is chronicled in my essays for [April 2015](#), [May 2015](#), [June 2015](#), [July 2015](#), and [August 2015](#).

The liberation of Anbar Province from ISIL would sever ISIL's supply lines between Syria and Iraq, and make it easier to defeat ISIL in Iraq. That is one reason why the Iraqi government decided to attempt to liberate Anbar from ISIL.

September 2015: Anbar Province

It has become apparent that the liberation of Anbar Province — with a huge geographical area and a well-entrenched ISIL — is beyond the capability of the Iraqi security forces and Shiite militias. The inability to liberate Anbar Province has serious implications for the liberation of two major cities in Anbar: Ramadi and Fallujah. If either of these cities were liberated, then ISIL would simply counter-attack from the surrounding countryside. So Anbar, together with its cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, appears to remain under ISIL control for the foreseeable future.

Iraq postpones liberation of Ramadi

On 17 May 2015 the Iraqi army fled from Ramadi. Worse, the fleeing army abandoned large quantities of weapons, ammunition, equipment, and vehicles — which was a gift to ISIL.

As chronicled in my essay for [May 2015](#), on 26 May the Shiite militias and Iraqi army began an attempt to retake Ramadi from ISIL. However, the liberation of Ramadi quickly stalled. My essay for [June 2015](#) explains that, sometime around 5 June 2015, the liberation of Ramadi was indefinitely postponed. The reasons for the postponement were sparingly released, and are not entirely convincing to me. My essays for [July 2015](#) and [August 2015](#) describe minor progress in the vicinity of Ramadi.

There have been multiples promises by the Iraqi government of a quick liberation of Ramadi, each of which was a false promise:

1. On 25 May 2015, the Iraqi prime minister, Abadi, promised to liberate Ramadi within a few days, but which did *not* happen. (See 5 citations in my essay for [May 2015](#).)
2. On 7 June 2015, "Anbar Provincial Council confirmed that military operation to liberate Ramadi city from the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant terrorists will start soon." [All Iraq News](#).
3. On 27 June 2015, "Iraqi Prime minister Haider al-Abadi said on Saturday [27 June] the

next days will witness an increase in the campaigns to liberate the ISIL held-cities." [All Iraq News](#). Presumably, Abadi is referring to both Ramadi and Mosul.

4. On 14 July 2015, [Iraqi News](#) reported that Abadi said on 13 July: "The heroes of our armed forces, police, al-Hashed al-Shaabi volunteers and tribal fighters will announce the news of victory of Anbar liberation soon, God willing."
5. On 22 August, the Iraqi defense minister promised that "victory is very close in Ramadi." [All Iraq News](#).
6. On 31 August, the deputy president of Anbar Provincial Council declared: "The liberation of Ramadi City has become very close." [Iraqi News](#).

The four-month delay in liberating Ramadi has allowed ISIL more time to entrench in Ramadi, including plant mines, install roadside bombs, and booby trap buildings — which will make the liberation of Ramadi more difficult.

September 2015: Ramadi

As explained above, during May-August 2015, there were multiple promises of a quick liberation of Ramadi. Beginning 28 May, there were repeated reports that the Iraqi army had surrounded ISIL in Ramadi. But then nothing happened. There were inconsistent reports of whether Shiite militias would be used to liberate Ramadi.

On 31 August, *The National* in Abu Dhabi, UAE reported:

Iraqi government forces and allied militia are struggling to make headway almost two months into a campaign to retake the key cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, casting further doubt on their ability to rid the country of ISIL.

....

However, the slow progress gives ISIL time to strengthen its defences, and once more exposes the weaknesses of the military and the Shiite militia units that have taken a big role in fighting the Sunni extremist group.

....

"At best, for the foreseeable future I only see a reversion to the prior status quo where neighbourhoods of Ramadi are repeatedly contested, and the same scenario for Fallujah if parts of it can be retaken at all," said Aymenn Al Tamimi, a fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Forum think tank.

Florian Neuhof, "Can Iraqi forces drive ISIL out of Anbar?" [The National](#), 31 Aug 2015.

There were few explanations by journalists for the failure to liberate Ramadi. Then, on 6 September, *The Washington Post* explained:

U.S.-backed Iraqi forces are struggling to make headway in their battle to retake the western city of Ramadi, highlighting shortcomings in Washington's strategy to counter

Islamic State militants.

Three months after the city's fall to the Sunni extremist group, Iraqi forces have not yet surrounded the city 80 miles west of Baghdad, commanders say, the first stated aim of the counteroffensive.

The stuttering pace of the operation is likely to dent the image of the United States in Iraq, even as it spends \$1.6 billion on training and equipping Iraqi forces.

The operation to retake Ramadi is being led by U.S.-backed forces, with Iraq's Shiite militias largely excluded amid concerns about stoking sectarian tension in the Sunni majority province of Anbar.

....

[When asked by journalists why the liberation of Ramadi has stalled, Maj. Gen. Qasim al-Mohammadi, the head of Anbar Operations Command, blamed a lack of U.S. airstrikes in and near Ramadi. This is nonsense, as daily press releases from the U.S. Central Command show airstrikes nearly every day in or near Ramadi, beginning 12 April 2015 (except 5-14 June, when the liberation of Ramadi had apparently stalled).]

A U.S. military official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss an Iraqi-led operation, said the effort to expel Islamic State fighters from Ramadi had been slowed by a number of factors, including severe heat in recent weeks and the extensive fortifications and booby traps that militants have laid around the city.

....

[A general with the Iraqi security forces said] "The forces moved forward about a month and a half ago, and then nothing." Like other commanders, he spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the failings of the operation. "There is no plan, and there is no leadership."

He disagreed with the Anbar army chief's assessment that a lack of U.S. strikes was to blame.

"The coalition is there, and if there was a battle, they'd assist, but there's no operation for them to assist with," he said.

....

However, some commanders doubted that an assault on the city could be launched at all, given the current makeup of ground forces. [9] "It's possible, but with the current situation, the current plan, it's not," said the general with the Iraqi security forces. "Whatever the case, it's going to take a long, long time."

Loveday Morris, "The battle to retake Ramadi is going nowhere," [Washington Post](#), 20:38 EDT, 6 Sep 2015.

My comments: Since the beginning of airstrikes in August 2014, military commentators have been very clear that airstrikes alone will *not* defeat the Islamic terrorists. An adequate number of competent troops on the ground is also *required* to defeat ISIL. The absence of adequate numbers of competent troops on the ground in both Iraq and Syria is a glaring defect in Obama's plan to defeat ISIL. Further — despite lots of boastful propaganda — apparently both the Iraqi army and the Shiite militias lack the will to fight.

The number of Iraqi soldiers has declined through desertions, casualties, and retirements. However, Abadi has directed the Iraqi army to simultaneously liberate Baiji, Fallujah, Mosul, and Ramadi — as well as to defend Baghdad from ISIL. It is increasingly clear that the small Iraqi army is simply inadequate to do all of these assigned tasks simultaneously. Trying to do too much with limited resources is a proven recipe for failure, and that may explain what we are seeing in Iraq today.

And under Maliki, the Iraqi army trained to operate checkpoints, instead of fight wars. (See the section of my essay for [May 2015](#) titled "Blame for the Rout in Ramadi".)

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the liberation of Ramadi is beyond the capability of the current Iraqi army and Shiite militias.

On 26 September, the Associated Press reported on the stalemate in Iraq and particularly the stalemate in Ramadi:

A summer of stalemate in the effort to reclaim the Iraqi provincial capital of Ramadi, despite U.S.-backed Iraqi troops vastly outnumbering Islamic State fighters, calls into question not only Iraq's ability to win a test of wills over key territory but also the future direction of Washington's approach to defeating the extremist group.

The Ramadi standoff, with no immediate prospect of an Iraqi assault on the city, drags on

....

A Ramadi counteroffensive, announced in July, was supposed to mark a turning point for Iraqi troops, who have proved to be no match for the determined IS fighters. Instead it has sputtered, slowed by sectarian squabbles, debilitating summer heat and the extremists' use of improvised bombs to create what amounts to a minefield around Ramadi.

Over the past two months, the Iraqi government has added about 3,000 U.S.-trained Iraqi troops to the Ramadi operation, representing one-third of the total, U.S. officials say. U.S. officers in Iraq are working directly with Iraqi commanders to plan and executive the counteroffensive, but the Iraqis appear not to be in a hurry.

Instead of assaulting IS inside Ramadi, the Iraqis have struggled with a weekslong effort to isolate the city by cutting off IS routes for resupply and reinforcement. That has been stymied by disputes between Iraqi federal police and Popular Mobilization Forces, the Iranian-backed Shiite militias considered the most effective fighting force

on the ground.

....

.... As in Ramadi, the overall U.S.-led campaign against IS is stalemated, U.S. intelligence agencies believe.

....

David E. Johnson, a retired Army colonel and senior historian at the RAND Corp., believes the trouble runs deeper than just giving the Iraqi army more time to absorb U.S. training. [9] "My view is that they're just not capable of doing what it's going to take" to recapture Ramadi, let alone succeed in the bigger challenge of retaking Mosul, Johnson said.

Robert Burns, "Iraq's stalemate in Ramadi raises doubts about US strategy," [Associated Press](#), 11:42 EDT, 26 Sep 2015.

My comment is that U.S. military commentators have been saying for more than one year that airstrikes alone will *not* defeat ISIL. Competent ground forces are also required to defeat ISIL. The big flaw in Obama's so-called strategy is that he has an inadequate number of competent ground forces in both Syria and Iraq. Obama's plan to train rebels in Syria is an ignominious failure, and Obama's plan to retrain the Iraqi army is progressing very slowly.

An assault on ISIL inside Ramadi would be a bloodbath, with entrenched ISIL having an advantage. Besieging Ramadi *may* be a smarter move by the Iraqi army, but slower than an assault. I say *may* because both (1) there are civilians in Ramadi who are being starved and (2) delay gives ISIL time to plant more land mines, more roadside bombs, and install more booby traps in buildings.

As I mentioned above, Iraqi politicians have repeatedly promised a quick liberation of Ramadi. Those promises have been exposed as false. And those false promises have led to greatly diminished confidence in the Iraqi army and Shiite militias. That adds to what Secretary Carter said on 24 May 2015: the Iraqi army "showed no will to fight."

Iraq attempts to liberate Fallujah

On 12 June 2015, the Iraqis decided to liberate Fallujah, *before* liberating Ramadi. My essay for [June 2015](#) notes that there was no explanation of *why* liberating Fallujah would cause ISIL to flee from Ramadi.

The *All Iraq News* website in July 2015 had 17 reports of alleged progress in the liberation of Fallujah. In August 2015 there were 6 reports of alleged progress in the liberation of Fallujah. But in September 2015, there were only 4 reports. The progress reports became sparse after 12 August 2015. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the liberation of Fallujah is beyond the capability of the current Iraqi army and Shiite militias.

Abadi's megalomania: Liberate Mosul too!

Introduction

On 1 June, before he departed from Baghdad to Paris, Abadi announced:

“We have started mobilization operations in Mosul to besiege the enemy from everywhere and everywhere,” vowing to “expel them from every inch of ground in Iraq,” Abadi added.

Abdelhak Mamoun, "Abadi announces the start of mobilization operations to liberate Mosul," [Iraqi News](#), 2 June 2015.

At the press conference after the meeting in Paris, Abadi said:

Our forces are now moving towards Nineveh, and the Nineveh operation has already started. We have now a new military commander, and our inclusive Iraqi Government wishes to go ahead.

Press Conference Transcript, [State Department](#), 2 June 2015.

Nineveh is across the river from Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq. Mosul has been controlled by ISIL since 10 June 2014, and is now heavily fortified to resist a future Iraqi invasion.

On 17 May 2015, the Iraqi army proved itself unable to hold Ramadi against a small number of ISIL attackers. (See my essay for [May 2015](#).) Currently, the Iraqi army is fighting major battles in Salahuddin Province (e.g., Baiji), as well as attempting to liberate Anbar Province, including liberating Ramadi and Fallujah. Part of the Iraqi army must remain in Baghdad to defend the capital city against possible attack. One wonders where Abadi will find an adequate number of competent soldiers to fight in Salahuddin and Anbar provinces, defend Baghdad, *and* invade Mosul. That is why the title of this section on Mosul accuses Abadi of megalomania.

On 12 June 2015, [Al-Arabiya](#) reported Iraqi General Najim al-Jubouri said "the operation to liberate Mosul from Islamic State of Iraq and Syria fighters has started with airstrikes targeting the militants".

During July and August 2015, the U.S.-led Coalition continued airstrikes in and near Mosul, but there was no reported military action on the ground.

On 27 August 2015, *The Washington Post* tersely reported that "talk of a counteroffensive for Mosul has long dissipated." [Washington Post](#).

September 2015: Mosul

On 2 September the Iraqi army began a center to execute the plan for the liberation of Mosul with Kurdish peshmerga fighters. [All Iraq News](#); [CENTCOM](#); [BAS News](#).

On 12 September, a member of the Iraqi parliament publicly announced that the liberation of Mosul would begin "within two months" (i.e., before mid-November 2015). But he also said "any Mosul operation depends on successfully liberating Anbar Province first." [BAS News](#). As explained above, [Anbar](#) will *not* be liberated in the foreseeable future.

On 13 September, [Al-Arabiya](#) reported its interview with the U.S. envoy to the Coalition against ISIS, John Allen. ([transcript](#)) [Iraqi News](#) reports that Allen said during that interview that Mosul would be liberated from ISIL within "months".

On 24 September, [Reuters](#) reported that the "deadlock" in the battle for Baiji "is calling into question the government's plans to retake the northern city of Mosul from the jihadists."

31 Aug 2015: Russian Military Intervention in Syria

On 31 Aug 2015, *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper in Tel Aviv reported:

Russian fighter pilots are expected to begin arriving in Syria in the coming days, and will fly their Russian air force fighter jets and attack helicopters against ISIS and rebel-aligned targets within the failing state.

According to Western diplomats, a Russian expeditionary force has already arrived in Syria and set up camp in an Assad-controlled airbase. The base is said to be in area surrounding Damascus, and will serve, for all intents and purposes, as a Russian forward operating base.

In the coming weeks thousands of Russian military personnel are set to touch down in Syria, including advisors, instructors, logistics personnel, technical personnel, members of the aerial protection division, and the pilots who will operate the aircraft.

....

Western diplomatic sources recently reported that a series of negotiations had been held between the Russians and the Iranians, mainly focusing on ISIS and the threat it poses to the Assad regime. The infamous Iranian Quds Force commander Major General Qasem Soleimani recently visited Moscow in the framework of these talks. As a result the Russians and the Iranians reached a strategic decision: Make any effort necessary to preserve Assad's seat of power, so that Syria may act as a barrier, and prevent the spread of ISIS and Islamist backed militias into the former Soviet Islamic republics.

....

Western diplomatic sources have emphasized that the Obama administration is fully aware of the Russian intent to intervene directly in Syria, but has yet to issue any reaction.

Alex Fishman, "Russian jets in Syrian skies," [Ynet](#), 31 Aug 2015.

On 1 Sep, [Russia Today](#) denied that Russia's air force would intervene in Syria: "No Russian jets were deployed to Syria in order to launch attacks against Islamic State militants (IS, formerly ISIS, ISIL) and Syrian rebels, a military source told RT, dismissing reports in Israeli media."

On 4 September, the Russian news agency, TASS, reported that Russian participation in attacks on ISIL is not yet part of the Russian agenda.

It is [too] early to speak about the possibility of Russia's participation in military operations against the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said.

"We consider various possibilities, but now what you have mentioned [participation in military operations] is not yet on our agenda," Putin told reporters at the Eastern Economic Forum.

"We will hold consultations with our Syrian friends and the countries of the region," he said.

"Speaking that we are ready to do it today is premature, but we are providing Syria with a rather serious support and equipment and training forces with armament," Putin stressed.

.... [Putin] reminded that the US is carrying out its airstrikes on the IS targets now, but this has not produced any tangible result so far.

....

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Wednesday [2 Sep] rejected media reports about possible participation of Russian Armed Forces in airstrikes against the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group. "You should not believe these media reports," Peskov told journalists.

"Putin: Early to speak of Russia's readiness for military participation in fight against IS," [TASS](#), 03:09 GMT, 4 Sep 2015.

On 4 September, Agence France-Presse reported it was premature for Russia to fly military missions against ISIL.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday it was premature to talk about Russia taking part in military operations against ISIS, as the U.S. said it was checking reports of Russian troops in Syria.

Asked whether Russia could take part in operations against ISIS, Putin said: "We are looking at various options but so far what you are talking about is not on the agenda."

"To say we're ready to do this today — so far it's premature to talk about this. But we are already giving Syria quite serious help with equipment and training soldiers, with our weapons," RIA Novosti state news agency quoted Putin as saying.

"Putin: Premature to talk about Russian military action against ISIS," [Al-Arabiya](#), 08:33 GMT, 4 Sep 2015.

On 4 September, *The Telegraph* reported that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, said that Russia continues to provide military equipment to Syria, but Russia has *not* provided "direct military intervention", although such intervention was possible in the future.

Russia is providing "serious" training and logistical support to the Syrian army, Vladimir Putin has said, in the first public confirmation of the depth of Russia's involvement in Syria's civil war.

Commenting on reports that Russian combat troops have been deployed to Syria, the Russian president said discussion of direct military intervention is "so far premature," but did not rule out that such a step could be taken in future.

"To say we're ready to do this today — so far it's premature to talk about this. But we are already giving Syria quite serious help with equipment and training soldiers, with our weapons," the state-owned RIA Novosti news agency quoted Mr Putin as saying when asked about Russian intervention in Syria during an economic forum in Vladivostok.

"We really want to create some kind of an international coalition to fight terrorism and extremism," Mr Putin said.

Roland Oliphant & Louisa Loveluck, "Vladimir Putin confirms Russian military involvement in Syria's civil war," [The Telegraph](#), 19:19 GMT, 4 Sep 2015.

But *The New York Times* claims that Russia has sent an advance team to Syria to prepare for an expanded military role in Syria.

Russia has sent a military advance team to Syria and is taking other steps the United States fears may signal that President Vladimir V. Putin is planning to vastly expand his military support for President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, administration officials said Friday [4 Sep].

The Russian moves, including the recent transport of prefabricated housing units for hundreds of people to a Syrian airfield and the delivery of a portable air traffic control station there, are another complicating factor in Secretary of State John Kerry's repeated efforts to enlist Mr. Putin's support for a diplomatic solution to the bloody conflict in Syria.

The Russians have also filed military overflight requests with neighboring countries through September.

American officials acknowledge that they are not certain of Russia's intentions, but some say the temporary housing suggests that Russia could deploy as many as 1,000 advisers or other military personnel to the airfield near the Assad family's ancestral home. The airfield serves Latakia, Syria's principal port city.

....

Another possibility is that Russia is taking these steps to secure its own interests in the

event that the Assad government collapses, reaches a power-sharing agreement with the opposition or is replaced. By expanding its military influence in Syria, Russia might be in a stronger position to shape the political outcome as the Assad government's military position weakens by encouraging it to share power with opposition members Moscow supports.

Michael R. Gordon & Eric Schmitt, "Russian Moves in Syria Pose Concerns for U.S.," [NY Times](#), 4 Sep 2015.

The situation was so bad that the U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, spent Saturday morning of the beginning of Labor Day weekend calling Lavrov on the telephone. Here is the entire State Department press release:

The Secretary called Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov this morning [5 Sep] to discuss Syria, including U.S. concerns about reports suggesting an imminent enhanced Russian military build-up there. The Secretary made clear that if such reports were accurate, these actions could further escalate the conflict, lead to greater loss of innocent life, increase refugee flows and risk confrontation with the anti-ISIL Coalition operating in Syria.

The two agreed that discussions on the Syrian conflict would continue in New York later this month.

"Readout of Secretary Kerry's Call With Foreign Minister Lavrov," [U.S. State Dept](#), 5 Sep 2015.

There are two sides to this story. Here is the entire RIA-Novosti report about the conversation:

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed the situation in Syria and fight against the Islamic State (ISIL) militant group in a phone conversation with US Secretary of State John Kerry, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Saturday [5 Sep].

The conversation was initiated by the US side.

"During the talk various aspects of the Syrian situation, challenges related to the fight against ISIS [Islamic State] and other terrorist groups, as well as cooperation to support the United Nations efforts aimed at establishing political process in Syria in accordance with the Geneva communique dated June 30, 2012, were discussed," the statement [from the Russian Foreign Ministry] said.

It added that Lavrov and Kerry agreed to continue close contacts in relation to the Syrian crisis settlement.

"Lavrov, Kerry Discuss Fight Against ISIL, Syrian Crisis," [RIA-Novosti](#), updated 15:18 GMT, 5 Sep 2015.

And here is the entire TASS report about the Kerry-Lavrov conversation:

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had a telephone conversation on Saturday initiated by the U.S. side, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Saturday [5 Sep].

The two men discussed various aspects of the Syrian crisis and goals of the fight against the Islamic State and other terrorist groups along with interaction backing up UN efforts aimed at promoting a political process in Syria in line with provisions of the Geneva communique of June 30, 2012, the ministry said.

Lavrov and Kerry agreed to maintain close contacts on the Syrian settlement. "Lavrov, Kerry discuss Syria by phone," [TASS](#), 15:55 GMT, 5 Sep 2015.

Also see the following reports of the alleged Russian military intervention in Syria:

- W.J. Hennigan & Brian Bennett, "Russia may be escalating military role in Syria," [Los Angeles Times](#), 01:26 GMT, 5 Sep 2015. ("U.S. intelligence has captured evidence of a significant escalation of Russia's military engagement in Syria's civil war, including satellite images of an apparent Russian base for staging troops and heavy equipment under construction near the international airport in Latakia".)
- Rob Crilly, "Russia 'is building military base in Syria'," [The Telegraph](#), 21:53 GMT, 5 Sep 2015.
- Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Warns Russia Over Military Support for Assad," [NY Times](#), 5 Sep 2015. ("... the State Department said in an unusually blunt statement.")
- Ian Black, "Russia remains ally but won't confirm military advance, Syrian officials say," [The Guardian](#), 16:26 GMT, 6 Sep 2015. ("Syrian officials have refused to confirm reports of an enhanced Russian military build-up in the country,")

My comments on 7 Sep: As Assad is teetering, it is increasingly plausible that Russia would invest more military assets in defeating ISIL and Nusra Front in Syria, to avoid these Islamic terrorists from controlling most of Syria. Islamic terrorists in Syria can threaten Russia in two ways: (1) sending terrorists to attack Russia and (2) denying Russia the use of the port in Tartous in Syria.

Because the U.S.-led Coalition refuses to coordinate with Assad or Russia, there is danger of accidental engagements between the Coalition and other aircraft flying over Syria. Such risks are unnecessary, because the Coalition, Assad, and Russia all share the same goal of wanting to defeat Islamic terrorism in Syria.

Note the 31 August report in *Yedioth Ahronoth* said the Russian airbase would be near Damascus, while the 4 September report in *The New York Times* says near Latakia. Damascus is the capital of Syria. Latakia is in Assad's homeland and presumedly where he would make his final stand. The two cities are 230 km apart, a short flight in modern jet aircraft.

The final paragraph quoted above from *The New York Times* gives an ominous portrayal of the Russian intentions in Syria. The *Times* mentions Russia is "expanding its military influence". Kerry told Lavrov that Russia's actions "actions could further escalate the conflict". But in September 2014, the U.S. Government escalated the conflict by beginning airstrikes in Syria with *no* permission from the Syrian government, a gross and continuing

violation of Syria's sovereignty. And during August 2015, the U.S. Government expanded its military influence by sending aircraft and personnel to the Incirlik airbase in Turkey. On the other hand, Russia is presumed invited by the Syrian government. So the U.S. Government is in a poor position to complain about escalation by Russia. It is possible that the Russians might do something effective to exterminate ISIL and Nusra Front in Syria, although I still believe that the war against Islamic terrorism will be won by killing their ideology.

Since late 2013, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has repeatedly called on *all* nations to stop sending munitions to Syria. Diplomats and humanitarians have condemned the so-called proxy war in Syria in which foreign nations send munitions to continue the Syrian civil war. Famously, Russia and Iran continue to send munitions to Assad's government. Saudi Arabia and Qatar, amongst many other Arab nations, have sent munitions to the insurgents fighting against Assad. And the U.S. Government has sent munitions to moderate rebels in Syria, in both (1) a clandestine CIA program begun in late-2012 and (2) public aid to rebels. Initially, the U.S. aid to rebels was focused on defeating Assad, but after Sep 2014 the U.S. shifted focus to defeating ISIL. It is important to realize that the U.S. Government is actively meddling in the Syrian civil war, while inconsistently criticizing Russia and Iran for meddling in the Syrian civil war. Further, the U.S. Government has arrogantly declared that Assad has lost his legitimacy to lead Syria (see my [document](#)), thereby meddling in the internal affairs of Syria.

I can envision diplomats and politicians dickering about whether Russia should join the U.S.-led Coalition, or whether the U.S. and its allies should join with Assad and Russia in fighting against Islamic terrorists. An easy way out of this unproductive discussion is to have U.S. and Russian military officers coordinate airstrikes, because neither military wants to see unnecessary deaths of their personnel from accidental and avoidable confrontations. But it is unlikely that politicians would delegate that authority to military officers.

On the morning of 9 September 2015, Kerry called Lavrov again — the previous call was on 5 September — and the U.S. State Department Spokesperson said:

So [Kerry] did discuss — he did talk to Foreign Minister Lavrov this morning. [Kerry] reiterated our concern about these reports of Russian military activities — or buildup, if you will — in Syria and made very clear our view that if true and if borne out, those reports would be — could lead to greater violence and more — even more instability in Syria and were not helpful at all to what we're — what eventually the international community should be trying to achieve inside Syria.

John Kirby, Daily Press Briefing, [State](#), 9 Sep 2015.

On the night of 9 September 2015, Reuters reported:

Russian forces have begun participating in military operations in Syria in support of government troops, three Lebanese sources familiar with the political and military situation there said on Wednesday [9 Sep].

The sources, speaking to Reuters on condition they not be identified, gave the most forthright account yet from the region of what the United States fears is a deepening Russian military role in Syria's civil war, though one of the Lebanese sources said the number of Russians involved so far was small.

U.S. officials said Russia sent two tank landing ships and additional cargo aircraft to Syria in the past day or so and deployed a small number of naval infantry forces.

The U.S. officials, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said the intent of Russia's military moves in Syria was unclear. One suggested the focus may be on preparing an airfield near the port city of Latakia, a stronghold of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

U.S. officials have not ruled out the possibility that Russia may want to use the airfield for air combat missions.

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But Russia has declined to comment on the scale and scope of its military presence. Damascus denied Russians were involved in combat, but a Syrian official said the presence of experts had increased in the past year.

Gabriela Baczynska, Tom Perry, Laila Bassam, & Phil Stewart, "EXCLUSIVE-WRAPUP 5-Russian troops join combat in Syria — sources," [Reuters](#), 21:15 GMT, 9 Sep 2015.

On the afternoon of 10 September, *The Jerusalem Post* reported:

An Iranian Islamic Republican Guards Corps (IRGC) force, comprised of hundreds of soldiers, has recently entered Syria to assist the embattled Assad regime, a senior [Israeli] security source said on Thursday [10 Sep].

Additionally, in a coordinated Iranian-Russian maneuver, Russian logistics military forces have begun arriving in the coastal region of Syria in recent days, to begin setting up Russian fighter jet and combat helicopter strike assets.

....

According to Israeli assessments, the Assad regime currently controls 25 to 30 percent at most of Syria, consisting of Damascus and the Syrian coastline, where the regime's minority Allawite support base is centered.

The source described a meeting last month between Quds Force commander Qassam Suleimani and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow as an event preceding the Russian-Iranian military initiative to rescue Assad.

Yaakov Lappin, "Russia, Iran sending military forces to save Assad's regime'," [JPost](#), 14:00 GMT, 10 Sep 2015.

Yedioth Ahronoth in Tel Aviv, Israel reported the same news as *The Jerusalem Post*, above: Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's elite Quds Force, has sent hundreds of ground soldiers into Syria in the past few days apparently in cooperation with Russia's President Vladimir Putin, said a senior Israeli security official Thursday [10 Sep].

Russia has also recently [deployed](#) military assets into Syria and according to the Israeli

source, has teamed up with Iran in an unprecedented attempt to protect the embattled regime of Bashar Assad from falling to rebel groups including the Islamic State.

....

Israeli security leaders assess that Assad currently controls just 25-30 percent of Syria, mainly around the country's shoreline where critical supplies are shipped into ports.

"It's hard to forecast whether Russia's presence will decide the fate of Syria, but it will lengthen the fighting and bloodletting for at least another year because ISIS won't give up," said the Israeli source.

Yoav Zitun, "Iranian troops join Russians in Syria fighting," [Ynet](#), 15:04 GMT, 10 Sep 2015.

At 19:34 GMT on 10 September, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon had briefed journalists. The AP reported that the Russians in Syria have "the main goal of setting up an air base near the coastal town of Latakia that could be used to stage strikes on Islamic State fighters." The AP also quoted Lavrov: "It's a colossal mistake that the coalition created by the United States envisaged no cooperation with the Syrian government."

On Friday morning, 11 September, the Associated Press reported:

Earlier Friday [11 Sep], Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called on world powers to join his country in that pursuit, arguing that Syria's army is the most efficient force to fight the extremist network.

"You cannot defeat Islamic State with air strikes only," Lavrov said, a dig at Obama's strategy. "It's necessary to cooperate with ground troops and the Syrian army is the most efficient and powerful ground force to fight the IS."

Julie Pace & Nataliya Vasilyeva, "Obama warns Russia against helping arm Syrian government," [Associated Press](#), 20:45 GMT, 11 Sep 2015.

On 11 Sep, Reuters reported that Russia is sending advanced anti-aircraft missiles to Syria. This is strange, because Russia claims to be fighting only against ISIL, but ISIL has *no* aircraft.

Moscow is sending an advanced anti-aircraft missile system to Syria, two Western officials and a Russian source said, as part of what the West believes is stepped-up military support for embattled President Bashar al-Assad.

The Western officials said the SA-22 system would be operated by Russian troops, rather than Syrians. The system was on its way to Syria but had not yet arrived.

....

Speaking at a news conference in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia was sending military equipment to Syria to help the Assad government combat Islamic State fighters, and had sent experts to help train the Syrian army to use it.

However, the dispatch of advanced anti-aircraft missiles would appear to undermine that justification, since neither Islamic State nor any other Syrian rebel group possesses any aircraft.

Dan Williams, "Russia sending advanced air defences to Syria — sources," [Reuters](#), 21:12 GMT, 11 Sep 2015.

My comment on the Russian anti-aircraft missiles is that the Russians are apparently concerned that the U.S.-led Coalition may have airstrikes against the Russian military base(s) in Syria. I hope the U.S. Military is smart enough to avoid attacking the Russians.

On 11 September, Reuters reported the Russian government was calling for communication with the U.S.-led Coalition, to prevent "unintended incidents":

Russia called on Friday [11 Sep] for military-to-military cooperation with the United States to avert "unintended incidents" as it stages navy exercises off the coast of Syria, where U.S. officials believe Moscow is building up forces to protect President Bashar al-Assad.

The United States is using Syrian air space to lead a campaign of air strikes against Islamic State, and a greater Russian presence raises the prospect of the Cold War superpower foes encountering each other on the battlefield.

Both Moscow and Washington say their enemy is Islamic State, whose Islamist fighters control large parts of Syria and Iraq. But Russia supports the government of Assad in Syria, while the United States says his presence makes the situation worse.

....

U.S. officials in Washington also said they believed about 200 Russian naval infantry forces were now stationed at an airfield near the Syrian city of Latakia, an Assad stronghold, and that the number had increased in recent days.

....

Lavrov blamed Washington for cutting off direct military-to-military communication between Russia and NATO after the crisis in Ukraine last year. Such contacts were "important for the avoidance of undesired, unintended incidents", Lavrov said.

Christian Lowe & Julia Edwards, "Russia to U.S.: talk to us on Syria or risk 'unintended incidents'," [Reuters](#), 22:40 GMT, 11 Sep 2015.

My comments on 12 Sep: Lavrov is absolutely correct that ISIL can *not* be defeated with airstrikes alone. U.S. military commentators have been saying this for the past year. And after thousands of airstrikes, ISIL is still functional and continuing to capture territory, as explained [above](#). Moreover, neither the Iraqi army (except in Tikrit) nor the Syria army have been able to recapture cities from ISIL, although Kurdish fighters have a record of liberating towns from ISIL.

In 2013 and 2014, Assad's army *was* the best choice for fighting against ISIL in Syria.

However, since December 2014, manpower shortages in Assad's army have seriously weakened the effectiveness of Assad's army.

My [review](#) on why the Geneva2 negotiations failed quotes some of my essays back to October 2013, in which I argued that Assad is preferable to either Al-Qaeda or ISIL. My essay also cites Ryan Crocker, former U.S. Ambassador to Syria (and five other nations), who said on 21 Dec 2013 that Assad was the "least-worst option" in Syria. However, Obama's continuing obsession with deposing Assad has prevented the U.S. Government from cooperating with Assad in the fight against Al-Qaeda and ISIL in Syria. As a result of Obama's obsession with deposing Assad, and Obama's lack of an effective plan to defeat ISIL, we are in the current mess.

Russia seems genuinely concerned — and with good reason — that if ISIL flourishes in Syria, then ISIL will send terrorists to Chechnya and other Islamic provinces in Russia. Further, Russia wants to continue using the port at Tartous, Syria. Russia *may* have additional desires:

- to either lead, or be heavily involved in, diplomatic negotiations to end the civil war in Syria. (e.g., negotiations in Moscow, see [above](#)).
- to demonstrate its military hardware in Syria, to boost sales of Russian military equipment to wealthy nations in the Gulf.
- to resist U.S. influence in Syria and Iraq.
- a "secret agreement" in late July 2015 between Russian president Putin and General Soleimani of the Iranian Quds Force.

Finally, I comment that Kerry and Obama have their knickers in a twist about the expansion of the Russian military presence in Syria. But, as I said above, the USA is *not* in a good position to complain about Russia, given that the USA has expanded its aid to Syrian rebels and expanded its airstrikes in Syria. Further, Russia has been invited by the lawful government of Syria, while the USA continues to violate the sovereignty of Syria.

On 13 September 2015, the Associated Press reported Russia is expanding the airport at Latakia, Syria.

Russia, a longtime backer of Syria's government, denies it's trying to bolster Assad and says its increased military activity is part of the international effort to defeat the Islamic State group which has wreaked havoc in Syria and Iraq. On Sunday [13 Sep], the Russian foreign minister called for the international community to include the Syrian government in efforts to fight IS.

....

A former Lebanese general with knowledge of the Syrian military told The Associated Press last week that there are plans to build a military base in the coastal town of Jableh, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) south of Latakia city, where the airport currently under development is located. Israeli officials also say the aim appears to be a military base.

The airport, known by its old name Hemeimeem, already houses a military base and has come under shelling from advancing militants in the countryside.

After the Damascus airport, it's the most important functioning government-controlled airport in Syria. Officially named the Basel al-Assad International airport, after the president's brother who died in a car accident in 1994, it has one terminal, according to the Syrian Civil Aviation Authority website. The tarmac is currently 2,800 meters (3,000 yards) long and 45 meters (49 yards) wide.

Sarah El Deeb, "Syria group: Russia expanding major Syrian airport," [Associated Press](#), 19:37 GMT, 13 Sep 2015.

On 14 September, the Pentagon confirmed much of what anonymous U.S. Government officials had been telling journalists about the Russian increase in Syria. The Associated Press reported:

Russia is in the midst of a steady military buildup at a Syrian airport, indicating Moscow intends to create an air operations base there, although no fighter jets or helicopters have arrived yet, the Pentagon said Monday [14 Sep].

....

"We have seen indications in recent days that Russia has moved people and things into the area around Latakia and the air base there that suggests that it intends to establish some sort of a forward air operating base," [a Pentagon spokesman, Navy Capt. Jeff] Davis said.

Robert Burns, "Pentagon: Russians apparently setting up air base in Syria," [Associated Press](#); 18:57 GMT, 14 Sep 2015.

Reuters reported that Russia had delivered tanks to the airport near Latakia:

Russia has positioned about a half dozen tanks at an airfield at the center of a military buildup in Syria, two U.S. officials said on Monday, adding that the intentions of Moscow's latest deployment of heavy military equipment were unclear.

....

One of the U.S. officials, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, said seven Russian T-90 tanks had been observed at the airfield near Latakia, an Assad stronghold.

The two U.S. officials said Russia had also stationed artillery that appeared to be arrayed defensively to protect Russian personnel stationed there.

....

So far, Russia has not sent combat aircraft or helicopter gunships to the airfield, the Pentagon said.

Phil Stewart, "Russia positioning tanks at Syria airfield: U.S. officials," [Reuters](#), 22:32 GMT, 14 Sep 2015.

On 14 September, the Associated Press bureau in Beirut, Lebanon provided their analysis of what was happening with Russia in Syria.

In ramping up its military involvement in Syria's civil war, Russia appears to be betting that the West, horrified by the Islamic State group's spread and an escalating migrants crisis, may be willing to quietly tolerate President Bashar Assad for a while, perhaps as part of a transition.

The logic is that prioritizing the fight with the jihadis means accepting Assad as the less bad option despite his own brutal acts, and might produce a more effective and coordinated fight in the air and on the ground.

....

A longtime backer of Syria's government, Moscow has recently increased its military activity in Syria, sending military advisers, technicians and security guards with the main goal of setting up an air base near the coastal town of Latakia, a stronghold of the Syrian president. There are reports that the Russians had flown in troops and modular housing units. And Israel's defense minister, Moshe Yaalon, says he expects Russians to be fighting alongside Assad's troops.

....

Syrian opposition member Badr Jamous warned that rebels will regard any foreign fighters deployed on the side of the government as a legitimate target.

Bassem Mroue & Zeina Karam, "Analysis: Russia gambles in Syria, ramping up involvement," [Associated Press](#); 19:52 GMT, 14 Sep 2015.

On 15 September, at a meeting of foreign ministers of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Putin said:

"Obviously, it will be impossible to drive the terrorists out of this country [Syria] and the region as a whole without the active involvement of the Syrian authorities and the military, without the Syrian army's involvement on this territory in the fight against Islamic State, as the military say."

Interfax, "Putin seeks consolidation of Assad and opposition efforts to combat terror in Syria," [Russia Behind the Headlines](#), 11:10 GMT, 15 Sep.

On 15 September, Kerry made a third telephone call to Lavrov in 10 days — the previous calls were on 5 and 9 Sep — in which Kerry attempted to obtain clarification of the Russian intent in Syria, and Kerry warned Russia not to support Assad. The entire U.S. State Department press release said:

Secretary of State Kerry spoke earlier today [15 Sep] with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov about the ongoing conflict in Syria.

Secretary Kerry made clear that Russia's continued support for President Assad risks exacerbating and extending the conflict, and undermining our shared goal of fighting extremism if we do not also remain focused on finding a solution to the conflict in

Syria via a genuine political transition.

Secretary Kerry also reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to fight ISIL with a Coalition of more than 60 countries, of which Assad could never be a credible member, and emphasized the U.S. would welcome a constructive Russian role in counter-ISIL efforts. The Secretary stressed that there is no military solution to the overall conflict in Syria, which can only be resolved by a political transition away from Assad.

U.S. State Department, "Readout of Secretary Kerry's Call With Foreign Minister Lavrov," [Readout](#), 15 Sep 2015.

Also see an earlier U.S. State Department [Press Briefing](#); and [Associated Press](#), 21:11 EDT, 15 Sep; [Reuters](#), 18:33 EDT.

My comment is that Putin/Lavrov/Assad propaganda is that Syrian refugees are fleeing from ISIL terrorism, while Obama/Kerry propaganda is that Syrian refugees are fleeing from barrel bombs and other war crimes committed by Assad's army. The Truth is that Syria is a bad place to live for the past few years and continuing for the foreseeable future, and there are *many* reasons why Syria is a bad place to live.

Further, Obama refuses to cooperate with Assad, because of Obama's obsession with removing Assad from power. Additionally, Obama refuses to cooperate in Syria with either Russia or Iran, because those nations support Assad. Obama's policy prevents a united attack against ISIL and other Islamic terrorists in Syria. Additionally, Obama's policy presents an unnecessary danger to U.S. Military personnel, because of lack of coordination with Assad's military and its allies (e.g., Russia, Iran).

It is truly distressing, given the immense importance of defeating Islamic terrorism, that Obama is locked in a petty dispute with Russia over the future of Assad in Syria. Assad's future *should* be a matter for the Syrian people to decide.

During a press conference on 16 September, Kerry told journalists:

QUESTION [by Elise Labott of CNN]: Thank you. Secretary Kerry, I'd like to follow up on your comments about your discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov and that the Russians — you want to work with the Russians on a political transition. We've seen in recent days there are 6 Russian tanks, 36 armored personnel carriers, other equipment which can be constituted as a lethal, mobile armored force that does suggest that the Russians are gearing up for some kind of military action. So clearly, their actions on the ground belie their comments that they are working towards a political solution.

I'm wondering what it says about the relationship with Russia that in three phone calls, you still can't get a straight answer from the foreign minister about what the Russians' intention are on the ground. And how do you intend to get the Russians to voice their intentions?

....

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you. Well, Elise, I think the foundation of your question, actually, is incorrect. I don't know where you got the idea that I didn't get a

straight answer. I never suggested that and I didn't say that. I've had three conversations and I've had a number of very direct answers. The question is are the actions of the Russians going forward going to keep faith with those answers, and is there a process in place —

QUESTION: But I didn't hear a straight answer, though.

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, no. Well, it depends what you mean by "straight answer." A straight answer is they say specifically that they are focused on ISIL and that they're going in to do that. Now, obviously, there are serious questions about that. I'm not taking that at face value, because we look at the type of airplanes or the type of munitions and so forth, and it obviously raises much more serious questions about what is happening. But the Russians proposed in the conversation I had today and the last conversation specifically that we have military-to-military conversation and meeting in order to discuss the issue of precisely what will be done to de-conflict with respect to any potential risks that might be run, and to have a complete and clear understanding as to the road ahead and what the intentions are.

So words will not answer all of the questions here; it's actions and it's what will be determined going forward in very specific ways, but you have to have a conversation in order to be able to do that. And it is vital to avoid misunderstandings, miscalculations, not to put ourselves in a predicament where we're supposing something and the supposition is wrong. So I think you have to in this kind of situation make sure that you're dealing with reality, and that's only going to happen through the kinds of discussions that have been proposed.

So we are currently evaluating. The White House, the Defense Department, the State Department are discussing the next steps in order to determine the best way forward in order to have a clarity about this road ahead.

It is also true that if Russia is only focused on ISIL and if there is a capacity for cooperation, as I discussed a moment ago, that there still is a way forward to try to get to a political negotiation and outcome. And in the conduct of great nations, particularly nations with enormous power, it is important to make sure you thoroughly explore those possibilities and don't come to a rash conclusion that's based on erroneous judgment.

"Press Availability With South African Foreign Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane," [State Dept](#), 16 Sep 2016.

On 16 September 2015, the Associated Press summarized:

The Obama administration is weighing an offer from Russia to have military-to-military talks and meetings on the situation in Syria amid increasing U.S. concern and uncertainty about Russia's military buildup there, Secretary of State John Kerry said Wednesday [16 Sep].

Kerry said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had proposed the consultation in a phone call on Tuesday [15 Sep] and that the White House, Pentagon and State

Department were considering it. Kerry suggested that he favored such an idea, noting that the United States wants a clear picture of what Russia's intentions are in Syria following a recent military buildup there.

Matthew Lee, "Kerry: US weighs Russia offer of military talks on Syria," [Associated Press](#), 14:35 EDT, 16 Sep 2015.

At the White House press briefing on 16 September, there was a brief mention of proposed military-to-military communications between Russia and the USA about airstrikes in Syria.

QUESTION: Let me stick with Syria, and Secretary of State Kerry's discussion of having spoken to the Russians and the suggestion that there should — the Russian proposal for military-to-military talks. Is the administration going to go ahead with that? Do you think that's a worthwhile avenue to pursue?

MR. EARNEST: At this point right now I don't have a specific announcement to make about any additional consultations with the Russians. What we have said for some time is that we would welcome constructive Russian support for the efforts of the anti-ISIL coalition in Iraq and in Syria. But at this point, I don't have anything new to announce. "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 9/16/2015," [White House](#), 16 Sep 2015.

At the White House press briefing on 17 September,

QUESTION: Thanks, Josh. The Syrian air force has launched an air campaign against the Islamic State-held city of Raqqa. And is there any kind of coordination between the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State and the Assad government when they have a shared goal here?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Julia, we have made clear from the beginning of our actions inside of Syria that it was the responsibility of the Syrian government to not interfere in our activities. The fact is the United States and our coalition partners hold the Assad regime responsible for the dramatic growth that we've seen in ISIL over the last year and a half or so. It's because of Bashar al-Assad's failed leadership inside of Syria that that nation has ruptured and created an opportunity for extremists of a variety of flavors to establish a foothold in Syria.

No one has been able to as successfully exploit that opening as the extremists in ISIL. So we believe the thing that would do the most to advance our strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL is for Assad to leave power so that we can see the kind of political leadership inside of Syria that would restore at least some semblance of stability to that country, that would make it much more difficult for ISIL to operate and would enhance our efforts to degrade and ultimately destroy them.

QUESTION: Right. But is there any kind of communication even through a third country? When you have two different parties carrying out an air campaign on the same force in the same city — is there any kind of communication perhaps through another party?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I don't have any specific conversations to tell you about, other than the kinds of conversations that date back to the very beginning of our military

airstrikes, this military air campaign that began in Syria a little over a year ago now. At that point, the United States and our coalition partners made clear to the Syrians that they shouldn't interfere in those efforts, and they haven't.

....

QUESTION: Quick question on Russia. Apart from the Putin-POTUS possible meeting there, this proposal from the Russians to have a military-to-military conversation — where is the White House on that? And is there concern that having military chiefs, defense chiefs sit down together would at least give the appearance of collusion between the U.S. and Russia?

MR. EARNEST: Well, first, Margaret, the fact is — and we have said this many times, but in the context of this question I think it bears repeating — there's no military solution to the turmoil that plagues Syria right now. The solution to this lies in advancing the kind of political agreement that would transfer Assad out of power and put in power a government inside of Syria that has the confidence and reflects the will of the Syrian people. That's the root of this.

As you know, and as you've closely covered, the significant military-to-military cooperation between the United States and Russia was deeply affected by Russia's decisions to try to annex Crimea and engage in a variety of destabilizing actions using their military in eastern Ukraine. So we've made clear that Russia's military actions inside of Syria, if they are used to prop up the Assad regime, would be destabilizing and counterproductive; that propping up a regime that's losing its grip on power in many cases only has the effect of driving more Syrian citizens into the arms of extremists.

Now, that all being said, we have long indicated — and I've been saying this for quite a bit over the last couple of days — we would welcome constructive contributions from the Russians to the anti-ISIL coalition. So that's why we'll remain open to tactical, practical discussions with the Russians in order to further the goals of the counter-ISIL coalition and to ensure the safe conduct of coalition operations.

QUESTION: The proposal from the Russians, the word “de-conflict” was used there, sort of suggesting that if the U.S. coalition forces and Russians are acting in the same space, Syria, that there could be concern of being in conflict with each other —

MR. EARNEST: Surely.

QUESTION: — even inadvertently.

MR. EARNEST: That's right.

QUESTION: So when you say you're open to tactical, practical conversations, does that include this proposal from the Russians to sit down and say, let's not be at odds here, even if we don't have the same ends in our intervention?

MR. EARNEST: Well, again, I think we would use any venue that we had to reiterate to the Russians the things that I started out here — that there's no military solution, that we continue to have significant concerns with the conduct of their military in Ukraine, and we would warn them against doubling down on their support for the Assad regime. That's a losing bet. It's a losing bet for Russia, it's a losing bet for Syria, and it's a losing bet for our efforts to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

But we do have some of the concerns that you just described, and that's why we'll remain open to what I would describe as tactical, practical discussions with the Russians. And those discussions would be focused on furthering the goals of our counter-ISIL coalition and ensuring the safe conduct of anti-ISIL coalition operations.

QUESTION: Josh, thanks. I just want to sort of follow up very quickly on Margaret's question. You said earlier that you mentioned that Syria has a responsibility not to interfere with U.S. operations in Syria. Does that also apply to the Russians have a responsibility to not interfere with U.S. operations in Syria?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Kevin, I think what it is, is that we've made clear to the Syrians that they shouldn't interfere with our military activities inside of Syria. And when I say "our," I mean our coalition's anti-ISIL efforts that are focused on degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL.

When it comes to the Russians, we obviously would welcome their constructive contribution to that efforts, and we'll be open to the kind of tactical, practical discussions that may be needed to try to advance our anti-ISIL goals and to ensure the safe conduct of anti-ISIL coalition operations.

QUESTION: Does the White House view Russia's activities in Syria as a provocation?

MR. EARNEST: Well, we certainly would view Russian activities in support of the Assad regime as destabilizing and counterproductive. We've made that clear in private in the midst of conversations between Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov. I think they've spoken now three times in the last week or so. In each conversation, Secretary Kerry has made clear our view on that. And obviously that's something that we've discussed at some length publicly as well.

But ultimately — well, let me explain the reason for that. We believe that further propping up the Assad regime only serves to double down on a losing bet. The Assad regime has lost significant territory in the last several years. They are isolated, or largely isolated from the broader international community. And efforts to prop them up only makes the priorities of our counter-ISIL campaign more difficult to achieve.

"Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 9/17/2015," [White House](#), 17 Sep 2015.

My comment on the 17 Sep briefing by Obama's press secretary, Josh Earnest, is that it is mostly propaganda. Mr. Earnest says Assad is the "root" of the civil war in Syria. That may be true for the pro-democracy movement that began in March 2011. But the big problem — the problem that the U.S. Military is fighting against — is ISIL. It is clear that ISIL wants to

establish a caliphate in Syria and Iraq, and in furtherance of their goal ISIL will fight against *anyone* who opposes them. Assad is *not* to blame for either ISIL or Nusra Front (i.e., Al-Qaeda in Iraq).

Mr. Earnest reiterates the Obama slogan that there is "no military solution" in Syria. (The phrase "no military solution" can be traced back to Kerry on 7 October 2013.) That there is no military solution may be true of the Syrian civil war. But in the fight against ISIL the U.S. Military has been bombing ISIL every day during the past year, which sure looks like an attempt at a military solution. Furthermore, from 1 Nov 2013 to 18 Sep 2015, there were 686 days of fighting in Syria, but only 14 days of peace negotiations in Geneva. So about 2% of the time (14/686) was spent in peace negotiations. It appears that the parties to the conflict are more interested in a military solution than in negotiations. Further, the foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, USA) are continuing to send large amount of weapons to the parties, in what is called a proxy-war. Politicians and diplomats who talk about "no military solution" are doing *nothing* that is effective in ending this war. Sadly, many of these politicians and diplomats are hypocrites, in that while they *talk* about "no military solution", their nation contributes military aid to parties who are fighting in Syria.

The USA arrogantly told Syria "to not interfere" with U.S. airstrikes against ISIL inside Syria. That was arrogant, because the U.S. airstrikes violate the sovereignty of Syria. Now, the USA seems to demand that Russia get involved in the U.S.-led Coalition against ISIL. Hey wait! The Russians are in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government. The U.S. *should* be coordinating with Assad's government, instead of the U.S. demanding cooperation from Russia.

In short, I usually avoid quoting White House press briefings, because it wastes too much of my time to refute all of the propaganda that is hurled during those briefings.

On 16 September, [Reuters](#) tersely reported an anonymous U.S. official "said four [Russian] helicopters had been identified [at a Syrian airfield], including helicopter gunships, although it was not clear when the Russian helicopters had arrived there."

On 18 September, [Reuters](#) reported that an anonymous U.S. official "said four tactical Russian fighter jets were sent to Syria." [The New York Times](#) had more detail about Russian military aircraft in Syria: "four Sukhoi Su-27 Flanker fighter jets, four large Hip troop-transport helicopters[,] and four Hind helicopter gunships".

On 18 September, the Pentagon announced that U.S. Defense Secretary and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu had a conversation today and they would talk further to explore how to "de-conflict" airstrikes over Syria. This was the first conversation between the heads of the two militaries since August 2014, when the U.S. ended contact after Russia annexed the Crimea. [State Dept Daily Press Briefing](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP), 13:18 EDT; [Associated Press](#), 16:03 EDT; [Washington Post](#), 16:05 EDT; [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#), 18:34 EDT; all on 18 Sep 2015.

But on 22 September, Peter Cook, the spokesman for U.S. Defense Secretary, clarified that

18 Sep conversation. The Associated Press reported that Carter "intends no further conversations [with Russia] unless Moscow agrees to participate in talks aimed at a political solution to the civil war." [Associated Press](#). See transcript at the [Pentagon](#). The Pentagon transcript makes clear that discussions with Russia have *not* begun regarding de-conflicting airstrikes.

On 18 September, *The New York Times* posted an insightful article about the relationship between the U.S. and Russian governments in the Syrian civil war.

As the first Russian combat aircraft arrived in Syria, the Obama administration reached out to Moscow on Friday [18 Sep] to try to coordinate actions in the war zone and avoid an accidental escalation of one of the world's most volatile conflicts.

The diplomatic initiative amounted to a pivot for the Obama administration, which just two weeks ago delivered a stern warning to the Kremlin that its military buildup in Syria risked an escalation of the civil war there or even an inadvertent confrontation with the United States. Last week, President Obama condemned Russia's move as a "strategy that's doomed to failure."

But the White House seemed to acknowledge that the Kremlin had effectively changed the calculus in Syria in a way that would not be soon reversed despite vigorous American objections. The decision to start talks also reflected a hope that Russia might yet be drawn into a more constructive role in resolving the four-year-old civil war.

....

... the White House is trying to make the best out of a situation it feels it is powerless to prevent.

....

Moreover, experts said both sides were approaching the issue from weakened positions that could complicate a common diplomatic strategy. "The positions of both Moscow and Washington's proxies are worsening," said Andrew J. Tabler, a Syria expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"The Russians are going into Syria because the regime's position in the north is deteriorating," he noted. "The Pentagon has been unable to recruit and train a viable opposition to fight the Islamic State because the rebels' main interest is in fighting Mr. Assad. Given divisions between Moscow and Washington, it's hard to see how you turn convergence on tactical military issues into a collective and viable political strategy to stabilize Syria and end the war."

Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Begins Military Talks With Russia on Syria," [NY Times](#), 18 Sep 2015.

On 19 September, the Associated Press remarked in a news article:

The discussions [between Shoigu and Carter] also amount to a tacit acceptance [by Obama] of the Russian buildup, after weeks of warnings from Washington against any Russian escalation in Syria.

Ken Dilanian, "Kerry: Russian fighter jets in Syria raise serious questions," [Associated Press](#), 11:50 EDT, final version at 14:30 EDT, 19 Sep 2015.

Also posted at, e.g., [Yahoo News](#); [PBS](#); [Chicago Tribune](#); [Military Times](#).

My comment on 18 September is that the U.S. and Russia should both focus on *one* goal: the extermination of ISIL and Nusra Front. *After* that is accomplished, then there can be negotiations about the future of Syria, and the Syrian people can choose their leader.

I think my suggestion makes sense because *everyone* — Assad, Russia, Iran, and the U.S.-led Coalition — agrees that ISIL is a major problem. The Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL and Nusra Front) have refused to negotiate, and they will continue to fight to establish their caliphate or emirate in Syria, regardless of who heads the Syrian government. So the Islamic terrorists need to be exterminated. *After* the Islamic terrorists are removed from Syria — and also removed from neighboring nations, e.g., Iraq — the situation in Syria will be greatly improved.

After the Islamic terrorists have been defeated, there is hope of successful negotiations amongst the Syrian opposition and the current Syrian government. The negotiations need to be followed by elections in Syria, so the Syrian people (*not* foreign meddlers) choose their leader.

[Above](#), I commented that I worry that any new government of Syria will be inexperienced and will be indecisive. Any hesitation or vacillation could be exploited by vicious Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL and Nusra Front). As I said in a [review](#) that I wrote in June 2014, it is a bad idea to create a new government in the middle of a vicious civil war. Exterminating the Islamic terrorists first, *then* forming a new government for Syria avoids this problem.

I have omitted the jihadists (e.g., Islamic Front) from this discussion, because no one knows what the jihadists will do after the Islamic terrorists are defeated and there are serious peace negotiations. One hopes the jihadists will become more moderate after they see the annihilation of Islamic terrorists.

On 19 September Kerry spoke of the need to "de-conflict" Russian and U.S.-led Coalition aircraft flights over Syria.

QUESTION: Secretary Kerry, you've talked about the importance of divining Russia's intentions here. The indications are that the first Russian fighter aircraft recently arrived in Syria are equipped for air-to-air combat. ISIL doesn't have aircraft. The United States does have them flying over Syria. Does this worry you? And how do you — what do you believe Russia's intentions are at this time?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I'm not going to get into speculation. But clearly, the presence of aircraft with air-to-air combat capacity as well as air-to-surface — surface-to-air missiles raise serious questions, which is precisely why Secretary Carter talked with the Minister of Defense of Russia Shoygu yesterday, and that is precisely why we are engaged in further conversation about answering those questions and about de-conflicting the Russian activities from ours. We have more than 60 nations involved in a coalition against ISIL. Does it need to be able to do more? The answer is yes.

Would we welcome Russian help in going against ISIL? Obviously. We've talked about it for some period of time. That's always been one of the things we've talked about as an effective way to help resolve the problems there.

But the other part of the equation is Assad and how you resolve the fact that he is a magnet for foreign fighters who come to the region, which is, in the end, ISIL. So you get — there's a lack of logic in — if all they're doing — if they're bringing in more equipment, shoring up Assad at the same time as they say they're going after ISIL. That has to be resolved in our conversations over the course of the next days. And that's precisely what we're trying to do is, even as we immediately engage in an effort to de-conflict so there's no potential of a mistake or of an accident of some kind that produces a greater potential of conflict.

"Remarks With British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond After Their Meeting," [State Dept](#), 19 Sep 2015.

On 21 September, *The New York Times* reported that Russia now has 28 combat aircraft in Syria:

Russia has sharply increased the number of combat aircraft at an air base near Latakia, Syria, giving its forces a new ability to strike targets on the ground in the war-stricken country.

Over the weekend, Russia deployed a dozen Su-24 Fencer and a dozen Su-25 Frogfoot ground-attack planes, bringing to 28 the number of warplanes at the base, a senior United States official said on Monday [21 Sep]. Until the weekend, the only combat planes there had been four Flanker air-to-air fighters.

....

In addition, a total of 15 Russian Hip transport and Hind attack helicopters are also now stationed at the base, doubling the number of those aircraft from last week, the American official said. For use in possible ground attacks, the Russians now also have nine T-90 tanks and more than 500 marines, up from more than 200 last week.

Eric Schmitt & Neil MacFarquhar, "Russia Expands Fleet in Syria With Jets That Can Attack Targets on Ground," [NY Times](#), 21 Sep 2015.

On 21 September, a columnist in [Al-Arabiya](#) suggested that Putin's plan was for Russia to operate the war against ISIL in Syria, while the U.S. would operate the war against ISIL in Iraq. That plan makes some sense, in that the U.S.-led Coalition has been more heavily involved in Iraq than in Syria, while Russia has stronger interests in Syria. (During 24-27 Sep 2015, the U.S.-led Coalition had a total of 9 airstrikes in Syria, but 81 airstrikes in Iraq.) Further, Putin's plan would allow the U.S. to gracefully end its airstrikes in Syria, which airstrikes violate the sovereignty of Syria. Also, the U.S. desperately needs a graceful exit from the ignominious failure of the U.S. program to train and equip rebels in Syria. However, Putin's plan resembles colonial powers carving up primitive nations in Africa and the Middle East, something that ought to be repugnant.

Russia creates office in Baghdad

On 25 September, [Fox News](#) reported that Russia, Iran, and Syria would create an office in Baghdad "to try to begin working with Iranian-backed Shia militias fighting the Islamic State". However, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that the Kremlin denied this Fox News report.

On 26 September, [Russia Today](#) reported that Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria agreed to establish an office in Baghdad "to coordinate their operations against Islamic State". As of 26 September, it is *not* clear what is happening with this proposed office in Baghdad.

On 27 September, Iraq announced it would share intelligence on ISIL with Russia, Syria and Iran. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters).

My comment is that the U.S. Military is frozen out of this information sharing office, because of the persistent U.S. refusal to coordinate with Syria, Iran, and now Russia. Nevertheless, this new agreement seems to be a slap in Obama's face by Iraq. Iraq now has one foot in the U.S.-led Coalition against ISIL and the other foot in the Russian-Iranian alliance.

On 27 September, Agence France-Presse issued a news article with the headline "Putin's Syria gambit puts US on back foot at UN". That article says "The dramatic diplomatic gambit [by Putin] underlined the speed with which Russia has seized the initiative on Syria," [Arab News](#).

Also on 27 September, *The Washington Post* said the Baghdad office "could further sideline the United States in the battle against" ISIL. Further, "A larger role in Iraq [for Russia] could come at the expense of U.S. clout, with Washington already struggling to compete with Iran for influence on the battlefield." [Washington Post](#).

Also on 27 September, *The New York Times* reported that Obama and Kerry had been surprised by the rapid Russian military build-up in Syria earlier in September, and were surprised again by the agreement of Iraq to share military intelligence with Russia, Syria, and Iran. The *Times* says Russia is "assembling a rival coalition that includes Iran and the Syrian government." [NY Times](#).

On 28 September, [Reuters](#) said: "Russia appeared to seize the initiative in international efforts to end the conflict in Syria on Sunday as Washington scrambled to devise a new strategy for the war-ravaged country...."

On 30 September, [Reuters](#) says: "Despite the U.S. investment of at least an estimated \$90 billion in these counter-terrorism efforts, Obama has found few reliable [local] allies to carry the load on the battlefield — and he seems to have few good options to fix the situation." Further, "Russia's sudden moves to seize the initiative in the Syria and Iraq crises in recent weeks have stunned U.S. officials and laid bare the erosion of Washington's influence in the region."

So what was the public statement of the Iraqi government after the perfidious Iraqis agreed to

cooperate with Russia and Iran? *All Iraq News* reported:

Chairman of the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee, Hakim al-Zamili, assured that "The Iranian and Russian military experts have arrived in Iraq to start the intelligence alliance among Iraq, Iran, Russia and Syria within the efforts exerted to support war on terrorism."

In a press statement, Zamili said on Monday [28 Sep] "Iraq became in a dire need for exchanging expertise and intelligence information with other countries since the US is not serious and failed with the international coalition in defeating the terrorist ISIL gangs which started to threaten many territories in Iraq."

"Iraq will cooperate with any country that attempt to support Iraq in its war against terrorism," he added.

MP Zamili confirmed "This new alliance between Iraq, Russia, Iran and Syria violates former agreements concluded with the US but the US violated these agreements earlier because it did not act when the ISIL terrorists occupied three Iraqi provinces within a month."

"Zamili: Russian, Iranian military experts arrive in Iraq," [All Iraq News](#), 29 Sep 2015.

Also see [Rudaw](#).

Zamili's remark that the U.S. is "not serious" about defeating ISIL is not only wrong, but also insulting. The U.S. airstrikes are only part of the battle against ISIL. It is the Iraqi army that has repeatedly failed to engage and defeat ISIL.

Zamili's last paragraph is vague. He may be referring to Obama's refusal to assist Iraq in January 2014, when ISIL first attacked Iraq and quickly captured Fallujah. But Iraq pretends to be a sovereign nation, so Iraq — *not* the USA — has the responsibility for defeating any invasion.

My essay for [June 2014](#) quotes a 21 June 2014 *Wall Street Journal* article that says the Iraqi government placed restrictions on when and where the U.S. Military could fly surveillance drone aircraft in late 2013. And, of course, Iraqi prime minister Maliki wrecked the Iraqi army by placing his cronies in charge, and focusing on manning checkpoints. Maliki and his cronies made it difficult for the USA to help Iraq.

My comments: The U.S. Government spent many tens of billions of dollars improving the infrastructure in Iraq since 2003, and also training and equipping the Iraqi army. After these huge and continuing gifts to Iraq, Obama probably expected to be treated better than to read an Iraqi announcement that the Iraqi government had formed an alliance with Russia and Iran. But history teaches us that one can not purchase either loyalty or gratitude.

As chronicled [above](#), Iraq is a failed nation. Its government is corrupt and dysfunctional. The Iraqi army fled from Mosul in June 2014, and again from Ramadi in May 2015, both times abandoning huge amounts of U.S.-supplied material to be captured by ISIL. Giving munitions and vehicles to the Iraqi army is effectively a gift to ISIL. Further, the Iraqi army and Shiite militias are unable or unwilling to liberate Fallujah, Baiji, Ramadi, and Mosul. Iraqi prime minister Abadi surely recognizes the current stalemate in Iraq, where U.S.

airstrikes have been unable to defeat ISIL. So a desperate Abadi accepted the offer of help from Russia and Iran — Iran was already involved in advising and supplying some of the Shiite militia in Iraq.

However, Russia will encounter the same problems as the U.S.-led Coalition. Assad's military is now too weak to defeat the insurgents, including ISIL, in Syria. The Iraqi army and Shiite militias in Iraq lack the ability — and also lack the will — to fight against ISIL. Airstrikes alone, regardless of whether Russian or U.S., can *not* win the war against ISIL on the ground.

September 2015 has been a bad month for Obama:

- Obama's train-and-equip program for Syrian rebels (approved by U.S. Congress in Sep 2014) that was supposed to produce approximately 5000 trained rebels in the first year has actually produced fewer than 130 trained rebels by 26 Sep 2015.
- The first batch of U.S.-trained rebels was decimated by Nusra within a few weeks of their arrival in Syria. The second batch of U.S.-trained rebels handed over trucks and ammunition to Nusra within a few days of their arrival in Syria. The third batch is still in training.
- The Iraqi army and Shiite militia in Iraq are unable — or unwilling — to liberate either Fallujah, Baiji, Ramadi, or Mosul from ISIL. Fallujah has been under ISIL control since January 2014, Mosul was captured by ISIL in June 2014.
- The absence of adequate numbers of competent ground troops in both Syria and Iraq prevents military victories against ISIL, despite approximately 7000 airstrikes by the U.S.-led Coalition. (In northeast Syria and in northern Iraq, there have been military victories by the Kurds who fight against ISIL, but the Kurds are unwilling to fight far outside of their homeland.)
- Obama's obsession with removing Assad prevents U.S. cooperation with Assad's military. So Russia moves into Syria and cooperates with Assad.
- The long-standing U.S. hatred of Iran prevents U.S. cooperation with Iran, so Russia, Iran, and Syria establish an office in Baghdad to share military intelligence in the fight against ISIL. Suddenly and without warning to the U.S., the U.S.-led Coalition seems to be excluded by the disloyal, ungrateful, and perfidious Iraqi government.

It is easy to blame Obama for this series of huge failures in Iraq and Syria. Obama certainly deserves blame for:

- his obsession with deposing Assad, which obsession prevented cooperation with Assad in fighting Islamic terrorism in Syria.
- his ill-conceived — and stupid — plan to train-and-equip moderate Syrian rebels.
- underestimating ISIL in January 2014 (e.g., remember Obama's remark that ISIL was "junior varsity" terrorists — see my essays for [July 2014](#) and [August 2015](#)).

But Obama does *not* deserve blame for the failure of the Iraqi army to fight against ISIL, or for the perfidious Iraqi government suddenly aligning itself with Russia, Iran, and Syria. And Obama does *not* deserve blame for lack of cooperation from Turkey and other so-called allies.

More meetings between USA and Russia

On Sunday, 27 September, Kerry and Lavrov met face-to-face in New York City on the sidelines of a United Nations General Assembly meeting. An anonymous senior state department official later said: "They discussed the need not simply to de-conflict, but if possible, to get back to the conversation about a way forward on a political transition." [State Dept.](#)

On 28 September, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov proposed a meeting of Russia, the United States, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt — a so-called "international contact group" — "as soon as possible" in October 2015. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#); [SANA](#). My comment is that Qatar (a financial sponsor of insurgents in Syria) is missing. Egypt could be excluded, as it has an insignificant role in either Syria or Iraq. An honest name for the group would be Damned Meddlers in Syria and Iraq.

On 28 September, Obama and Putin met face-to-face in New York City for 90 minutes. They agreed to have their military conduct discussions about de-conflicting airstrikes inside Syria. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Russia begins airstrikes in Syria

On 30 September, Russia conducted its first airstrikes in Syria, in Homs and Hama provinces. The Russians claim the airstrikes targeted ISIL. The Pentagon claims ISIL was *not* in the location of the Russian airstrikes, and those airstrikes actually targeted rebels who were fighting Assad's army. An hour before the airstrikes, a Russian official visited the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and gave the U.S. advance notice of the airstrikes. Sources (all on 30 Sep 2015):

- "At least 27 killed as Syrian jets bomb western Syria — monitor," [Reuters](#), 12:19 GMT.
- "Russia launches airstrikes in Syria, says targeting IS," [Associated Press](#), 16:01 GMT.
- "8 ISIS targets hit during 20 combat flights in Syria — Russian military," [Russia Today](#), 18:09 GMT.
- "US defense chief: Russia airstrikes targeted non-IS areas," [Associated Press](#), 19:22 GMT.
- "Russian Jets Carry Out 20 Sorties Against ISIL Targets in Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 19:50 GMT.
- "Russia begins Syria air strikes as war enters volatile new phase," [Reuters](#), 20:00 GMT.
- "Russia unleashes first wave of airstrikes in Syria," [Al-Arabiya](#), 20:22 GMT.
- "Russian warplanes target the countryside of Hama and Homs and directly participate

- in the Syrian people killing," [SOHR](#), viewed at 21:30 GMT.
- "Russia begins airstrikes in Syria; U.S. warns of new concerns in conflict," [Washington Post](#), 22:40 GMT.
 - "The Latest: Syrian group says Russian strikes killed 36 [civilians]," [Associated Press](#), 22:44 GMT.
 - "Russian strikes in Syria likely hit U.S.- backed rebels, not Islamic State," [McClatchy](#).
 - "Russians Strike Targets in Syria, but Not ISIS Areas," [NY Times](#).

There is general agreement that Russia has blindsided the U.S. Government in both Syria and Iraq. [Washington Post](#); [BBC](#); [Politico](#); [Financial Times](#).

28 Sep 2015: Obama's speech at U.N.

The first thing to know about Obama's speech at the United Nations is that there was a 15 minute time limit. But Obama actually took 43 minutes to deliver his speech. The [Associated Press](#) says "Obama was the worst offender" in the overlong speeches in that U.N. meeting. Obama's behavior was an arrogant disregard for the rules and rude to other world leaders and diplomats.

Obama's speech rambles about the 70 year anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, criticizes Russia's annexation of Crimea, criticizes China's military expansion in the South China Sea, mentions the U.S. re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba, criticizes Iranians for chanting "Death to America", mentions "the plight of refugees", idealistically called to "eradicate extreme poverty and erase barriers to opportunity", and condemned "climate change", amongst other topics.

Here is the part of Obama's speech about the conflict in Syria and Iraq:

No matter how powerful our military, how strong our economy, we understand the United States cannot solve the world's problems alone. In Iraq, the United States learned the hard lesson that even hundreds of thousands of brave, effective troops, trillions of dollars from our Treasury, cannot by itself impose stability on a foreign land. Unless we work with other nations under the mantle of international norms and principles and law that offer legitimacy to our efforts, we will not succeed. And unless we work together to defeat the ideas that drive different communities in a country like Iraq into conflict, any order that our militaries can impose will be temporary.

....

Of course, around the globe, we will continue to be confronted with nations who reject these lessons of history, places where civil strife, border disputes, and sectarian wars bring about terrorist enclaves and humanitarian disasters. Where order has completely broken down, we must act, but we will be stronger when we act together.

In such efforts, the United States will always do our part. We will do so mindful of the lessons of the past — not just the lessons of Iraq, but also the example of Libya, where we joined an international coalition under a U.N. mandate to prevent a slaughter. Even

as we helped the Libyan people bring an end to the reign of a tyrant, our coalition could have and should have done more to fill a vacuum left behind. We're grateful to the United Nations for its efforts to forge a unity government. We will help any legitimate Libyan government as it works to bring the country together. But we also have to recognize that we must work more effectively in the future, as an international community, to build capacity for states that are in distress, before they collapse.

....

Nowhere is our commitment to international order more tested than in Syria. When a dictator slaughters tens of thousands of his own people, that is not just a matter of one nation's internal affairs — it breeds human suffering on an order of magnitude that affects us all. Likewise, when a terrorist group beheads captives, slaughters the innocent and enslaves women, that's not a single nation's national security problem — that is an assault on all humanity.

I've said before and I will repeat: There is no room for accommodating an apocalyptic cult like ISIL, and the United States makes no apologies for using our military, as part of a broad coalition, to go after them. We do so with a determination to ensure that there will never be a safe haven for terrorists who carry out these crimes. And we have demonstrated over more than a decade of relentless pursuit of al Qaeda, we will not be outlasted by extremists.

But while military power is necessary, it is not sufficient to resolve the situation in Syria. Lasting stability can only take hold when the people of Syria forge an agreement to live together peacefully. The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict. But we must recognize that there cannot be, after so much bloodshed, so much carnage, a return to the pre-war status quo.

Let's remember how this started. Assad reacted to peaceful protests by escalating repression and killing that, in turn, created the environment for the current strife. And so Assad and his allies cannot simply pacify the broad majority of a population who have been brutalized by chemical weapons and indiscriminate bombing. Yes, realism dictates that compromise will be required to end the fighting and ultimately stamp out ISIL. But realism also requires a managed transition away from Assad and to a new leader, and an inclusive government that recognizes there must be an end to this chaos so that the Syrian people can begin to rebuild.

We know that ISIL — which emerged out of the chaos of Iraq and Syria — depends on perpetual war to survive. But we also know that they gain adherents because of a poisonous ideology. So part of our job, together, is to work to reject such extremism that infects too many of our young people. Part of that effort must be a continued rejection by Muslims of those who distort Islam to preach intolerance and promote violence, and it must also a rejection by non-Muslims of the ignorance that equates Islam with terror. (Applause.)

This work will take time. There are no easy answers to Syria. And there are no simple answers to the changes that are taking place in much of the Middle East and North Africa. But so many families need help right now; they don't have time. And that's why the United States is increasing the number of refugees who we welcome within our borders. That's why we will continue to be the largest donor of assistance to support those refugees. And today we are launching new efforts to ensure that our people and our businesses, our universities and our NGOs can help as well — because in the faces of suffering families, our nation of immigrants sees ourselves.

"Remarks by President Obama to the United Nations General Assembly," [White House](#), 28 Sep 2015.

My comments: In the first paragraph quoted above, Obama says we learned in Iraq during 2003-2011: "unless we work with other nations ... we will not succeed." But in 2003 we *did* have a coalition of other nations, including the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland. I think the real lesson of this Iraq war is that foreign meddlers should *not* depose tyrants in primitive nations like Iraq, Libya, Egypt, and Syria. When the tyrant is deposed, anarchy and civil war follow, which are worse than the tyrant.

Moreover, 18 nations have contributed military personnel to the current U.S.-led Coalition operations (e.g., training, airstrikes) in Iraq to defeat ISIL, but progress is stalemated — largely by repeated failures of the Iraqi army.

Obama says "The United States is prepared to work with any nation, including Russia and Iran, to resolve the conflict [in Syria]." If true, then this is good news. Obama does *not* say whether he is willing to cooperate with Russia and Iran in defeating ISIL in Iraq.

Obama is surely correct when he says ISIL "gain adherents because of a poisonous ideology." But Obama is spending billions of dollars/year on airstrikes against ISIL, including killing the leaders of ISIL. Obama is spending very little money on a campaign against the ideology of ISIL. [Above](#) I argue that we need to focus on killing the ideology, *not* on killing leaders of ISIL.

Notice that Obama did *not* boast about progress in the war against ISIL. Obama also did *not* criticize the corrupt and dysfunctional Iraqi government for having an army that is unable or unwilling to liberate Fallujah, Mosul, and Ramadi from ISIL. Notice that Obama focused on Assad in Syria, and generally ignored the stalemate in Iraq.

28 Sep 2015: Putin's speech at U.N.

The Washington Post published an English translation of Putin's speech to the United Nations General Assembly. Here is the part about Syria and Iraq.

It seemed, however, that far from learning from others' mistakes, everyone just keeps repeating them, and so the export of revolutions, this time of so-called democratic ones, continues. It would suffice to look at the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, as has been mentioned by previous speakers. Certainly political and social problems in this region have been piling up for a long time, and people there wish for changes naturally.

But how did it actually turn out? Rather than bringing about reforms, an aggressive foreign interference has resulted in a brazen destruction of national institutions and the lifestyle itself. Instead of the triumph of democracy and progress, we got violence, poverty and social disaster. Nobody cares a bit about human rights, including the right to life.

I cannot help asking those who have caused the situation, do you realize now what you've done? But I am afraid no one is going to answer that. Indeed, policies based on self-conceit and belief in one's exceptionality and impunity have never been abandoned.

It is now obvious that the power vacuum created in some countries of the Middle East and North Africa through the emergence of anarchy areas, which immediately started to be filled with extremists and terrorists.

Tens of thousands of militants are fighting under the banners of the so-called Islamic State. Its ranks include former Iraqi servicemen who were thrown out into the street after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Many recruits also come from Libya, a country whose statehood was destroyed as a result of a gross violation of the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973. And now, the ranks of radicals are being joined by the members of the so-called moderate Syrian opposition supported by the Western countries.

First, they are armed and trained and then they defect to the so-called Islamic State. Besides, the Islamic State itself did not just come from nowhere. It was also initially forged as a tool against undesirable secular regimes.

Having established a foothold in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State has begun actively expanding to other regions. It is seeking dominance in the Islamic world. And not only there, and its plans go further than that. The situation is more than dangerous.

In these circumstances, it is hypocritical and irresponsible to make loud declarations about the threat of international terrorism while turning a blind eye to the channels of financing and supporting terrorists, including the process of trafficking and illicit trade in oil and arms. It would be equally irresponsible to try to manipulate extremist groups and place them at one's service in order to achieve one's own political goals in the hope of later dealing with them or, in other words, liquidating them.

To those who do so, I would like to say dear sirs, no doubt you are dealing with rough and cruel people, but they're in no way primitive or silly. They are just as clever as you are, and you never know who is manipulating whom. And the recent data on arms transferred to this most moderate opposition is the best proof of it.

We believe that any attempts to play games with terrorists, let alone to arm them, are not just short-sighted, but fire hazardous (ph). This may result in the global terrorist threat increasing dramatically and engulfing new regions, especially given that Islamic

State camps train militants from many countries, including the European countries.

Unfortunately, dear colleagues, I have to put it frankly: Russia is not an exception. We cannot allow these criminals who already tasted blood to return back home and continue their evil doings. No one wants this to happen, does he?

Russia has always been consistently fighting against terrorism in all its forms. Today, we provide military and technical assistance both to Iraq and Syria and many other countries of the region who are fighting terrorist groups.

We think it is an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces, who are valiantly fighting terrorism face to face. We should finally acknowledge that no one but President Assad's armed forces and Kurds (ph) militias are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria. "Read Putins U.N. General Assembly speech," [Washington Post](#), 14:51 EDT, 28 Sep 2015.

Another translation is at [Kremlin](#); [McClatchy](#).

My comments: Putin is correct to say that regime change in Iraq, Egypt, and Libya — supported by Obama and European leaders — had unintended consequences: "Rather than bringing about reforms, an aggressive foreign interference has resulted in a brazen destruction of national institutions and the lifestyle itself. Instead of the triumph of democracy and progress, we got violence, poverty and social disaster."

Putin claims that ISIL "was also initially forged as a tool against undesirable secular regimes." Actually, ISIL evolved from Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which was created in April 2004 to fight the invading U.S. Military.

"Russia has always been consistently fighting against terrorism in all its forms." That is pure propaganda. Russia does what is in its national interest, just like many other countries. As Putin recognizes, a large number of Russians (e.g., from Chechnya) are fighting with Islamic terrorists in Syria. When those radicalized Russians return home someday, they will bring Islamic terrorism with them. That is why Putin wants to fight terrorism, and kill these terrorists in Syria, before they can return home.

I agree with Putin that "it is an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with" Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorism in Syria.

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 September 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 1 September 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. Here is the entire press release:

On Aug. 31, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six airstrikes using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, fighter, fighter-attack, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

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

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL training camp and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL road grader and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Washiyah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Haditha, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL VBIEDs.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL light machine gun and an ISIL mortar tube.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck three ISIL staging areas
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

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

The strikes were conducted as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, the operation to eliminate the ISIL terrorist group and the threat they pose to Iraq, Syria and the wider international community.

The destruction of ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq further limits the group's ability to project terror and conduct operations. Coalition nations which have conducted

airstrikes in Iraq include Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan, Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States. Coalition nations which have conducted airstrikes in Syria include Bahrain, Canada, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and the U.S.

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

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

Astoundingly, the Pentagon version omits Turkey from the list of nations who conduct airstrikes in Syria. The Pentagon press release (and also the CENTCOM press release) on 31 August first included Turkey.

2 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sep. 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

“In the last two days, coalition airstrikes near Bayji have removed a number of Daesh terrorists from the battlefield,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, CJTF-OIR public affairs officer. “Daesh may persist on sending reinforcements, and we will continue to eliminate them.”

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

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mar’a, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings, an ISIL excavator, an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Washiyah, one airstrike struck an ISIL artillery piece.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL vehicles and an ISIL homemade explosives facility.
- Near Haditha, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

- Near Qayyrah, one airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL light machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar firing position.

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

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

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

3 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

"The battle to liberate Ramadi continues with Iraqi security forces clearing significant amounts of explosives and complex obstacles constructed by Daesh," said Brig. Gen. Kevin Killea, CJTF-OIR chief of staff. "Yesterday, coalition airstrikes permanently eliminated Daesh terrorists from the battlefield along with a Daesh tank. This frees up Iraqi explosive ordnance teams to methodically clear areas in order to completely secure them and prepare for the next operational phases."

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

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Ar Raqqah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike struck an ISIL bridge.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL bunker entrances.
- Near Mar'a, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike struck an ISIL light machine gun firing position.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an

- ISIL boat and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Haditha, one airstrike destroyed three ISIL VBIEDs and an ISIL excavator.
 - Near Kirkuk, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL mortar tubes.
 - Near Kisik, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL bunkers.
 - Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL observation tower and destroyed two ISIL checkpoints, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL vehicle.
 - Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL tank.
 - Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL light machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
 - Near Tuz, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

CENTCOM miscounted the number of airstrikes in Iraq, I changed their 16 to the correct 17.

4 September 2015: airstrikes

On Friday through Monday, 4-7 September, CENTCOM failed to post any press releases at its website.

On Friday, 4 September 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

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

- Near Hasakah, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Raqqah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mar'a, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL staging area.

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 15 airstrikes in Iraq, coordinated with the government of Iraq:

- Near Baghdadi, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL rocket firing position.
- Near Beiji, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Haditha, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Hit, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL anti-

- aircraft artillery piece and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
 - Near Ramadi, an airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
 - Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL mortar firing position and an ISIL rocket firing position and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL command and control facility.
 - Near Tuz, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL rockets and an ISIL vehicle.

[Pentagon](#), 4 Sep 2015.

On 8 Sep, [Central Command](#) finally posted this press release for 4 Sep.

5 September 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 5 September, neither the Pentagon nor Central Command posted a press release about airstrikes at their websites. However, on 8 September CENTCOM finally posted its 5 September press release.

On Saturday, 5 September, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Sept. 4, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight airstrikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 25 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike had inconclusive results.
- Near Mar'a, six airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar tube, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Tal Abyad, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike had inconclusive results.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL building, an ISIL tunnel entrance and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike struck an ISIL sniper firing position and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Haditha, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL heavy machine gun firing position and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL

- light machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL vehicle.
 - Near Ramadi, seven airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, five ISIL staging areas and destroyed an ISIL motorcycle, an ISIL building and an ISIL vehicle.
 - Near Rawah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives facility.
 - Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
 - Near Sultan Abdallah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
 - Near Tuz, two airstrikes destroyed 48 ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.

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

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

[Pentagon](#), 6 Sep 2015.

6 September 2015: airstrikes

On 8 September, CENTCOM finally posted its press release for 6 September.

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

On Sept. 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bulldozer, an ISIL excavator, an ISIL front end loader and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Tal Abyad, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and terrain features denying ISIL a tactical advantage and destroyed four ISIL buildings.
- Near Fallujah, five airstrikes struck three ISIL staging areas and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Hit, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives cache.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL training facility

- and an ISIL rocket firing position and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tuz, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 26 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL weapons caches and an ISIL VBIED.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 6 Sep 2015.
On the night of 6 September, the [Pentagon](#), posted a similar press release.

7 September 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 7 September, neither the Pentagon nor Central Command posted a press release about airstrikes at their websites. On 8 September, Central Command posted a press release that was written on 7 September.

The U.S. Central Command press release for 7 September 2015 says:

On Sept. 6, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Mar'a, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tamakh, two airstrikes destroyed five ISIL excavators.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one airstrike struck an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL light machine guns and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL heavy machine gun firing position.
- Near Tuz, one airstrike destroyed 49 ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL tunnels and an ISIL weapons cache.

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 7 Sep 2015. The Pentagon again omitted Turkey from the list of nations who were conducting airstrikes in Syria.

8 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 7, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL bunker and an ISIL trench.
- Near Ayn Isa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck one large and one small ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL vehicles and five ISIL buildings.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL trench lines and destroyed three ISIL bunkers, two ISIL buildings and two ISIL recoilless rifles.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed ten ISIL vehicles and four ISIL boats.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one airstrike struck an ISIL rocket firing position.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Tuz, one airstrike destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 8 Sep 2015. The Pentagon again omitted Turkey.

9 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sep. 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using attack, bomber fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

In coordination with the Government of Iraq, the Coalition conducted airstrikes against an ISIL operating base located near Ramadi.

"Coalition strikes targeted and destroyed a large Daesh staging facility that housed weapons caches, combat equipment and included a multitude of prepared defensive positions" said Col. Michael Indovina, spokesman, CJTF-OIR. "This facility was a key Daesh command and supply hub in the Ramadi region and was being used to store large amounts of homemade explosives, as well as VBIED components. Destroying this facility enables Iraqi security forces activities in and around Ramadi while degrading Daesh command and control capability throughout the area."

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one airstrike destroyed three ISIL bunkers.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and an ISIL training camp and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Mar'a, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL front end loader.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Habbaniyah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives cache and an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck two ISIL heavy machine gun firing positions and an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL heavy machine gun firing position and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL operating base and an ISIL staging area and destroyed five ISIL homemade explosives caches, two ISIL boats, an ISIL motorcycle and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL mortar

firing position and destroyed an ISIL bunker, an ISIL excavator, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL trench and an ISIL weapons cache.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 9 Sep 2015. The Pentagon press release again omits Turkey from the list of Coalition nations conducting airstrikes in Syria.

Earlier, CENTCOM explained about the destruction of the sports stadium near Ramadi:

In coordination with the Government of Iraq, the Coalition conducted airstrikes Sept. 8 against an ISIL operating base and staging area located in a stadium near Ramadi.

The stadium was a key ISIL command and supply hub in the Ramadi region and was being used to store large amounts of homemade explosives, weapons and ammunition as well as VBIED components. ISIL used the stadium as a base of operations to control fighters across the Ramadi region, and as a central node for lethal aid funneled down the Euphrates River Valley. Destroying this hub will significantly disrupt ISIL's ability to conduct operations and resupply their fighters in Ramadi.

"Sept. 9: Coalition airstrikes destroy an ISIL operating base and staging area,"

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

My essay for [July 2015](#) mentioned that "on 19 July, ISIL destroyed a 30,000-seat sports stadium near Ramadi that had been used as a military base by the ISF and Shiite militias", and cited the [Associated Press](#) article.

10 September 2015: airstrikes

Strangely, on 10 September neither the Pentagon nor CENTCOM posted any press release about airstrikes at their websites.

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

On Sept. 9, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 airstrikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one airstrike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Al Hasakah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL motorcycles and an ISIL structure.
- Near Al Hawl, one airstrike had inconclusive results.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kobani, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL excavators.

- Near Mar'a, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL mortar supply point and an ISIL mortar tube.
- Near Palmyra, one airstrike had inconclusive results.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two buildings.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL mortar firing position and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Rawah, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and an ISIL encampment
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and an ISIL mortar firing position and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL light machine guns.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Tuz, four airstrikes destroyed 13 ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.

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

[Central Command](#), 10 Sep 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 10 Sep 2015. The Pentagon again omitted Turkey.

11 September 2015: airstrikes

On 11 September, neither the Pentagon nor CENTCOM posted a press release about airstrikes at their websites. However, at night on 11 September [Reuters](#) reported that there were 3 airstrikes in Syria and 27 airstrikes in Iraq on Thursday, 10 Sep. On the morning of 14 Sep, CENTCOM finally posted its press release for 11 Sep.

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

On Sept. 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 27 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL

excavator and an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Palmyra, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL excavators.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three airstrikes struck two ISIL weapons caches and an ISIL vehicle storage facility.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL fighting position and destroyed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL mortar systems and an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Hit, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles and a building.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL heavy machine gun firing position.
- Near Tuz, ten airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and four ISIL staging areas and destroyed 20 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL trench.

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

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

Not posted at Pentagon.

12 September 2015: airstrikes

On 12 September [Reuters](#) reported that there were 3 airstrikes in Syria and 22 airstrikes in Iraq on Friday, 11 Sep. On the morning of 14 Sep, CENTCOM finally posted its press release for 12 Sep.

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

On Sept. 11, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two airstrikes struck two ISIL crude oil collection points.
- Near Al Hasakah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, two airstrikes struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery piece and an ISIL building.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, two airstrikes struck an ISIL heavy machine gun firing position and an ISIL rocket firing position and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL armored personnel carrier and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL IED.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one airstrike struck an ISIL rocket firing position.
- Near Tuz, eight airstrikes struck six ISIL tactical units and destroyed 22 ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL vehicles, one ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL ammunition cache, an ISIL light machine gun and an ISIL motorcycle.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 Sep 2015. The Pentagon again omitted Turkey.

The Australian Air Force flew its first mission in Syria, but dropped no bombs.

[Australian Government](#); [Australian Broadcasting](#). This mission is significant, because previously the USA and Canada were the only non-Muslim nations to engage in airstrikes in Syria (and to violate Syrian sovereignty).

13 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 12, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven airstrikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL tank.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kobani, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.

- Near Mar'a, three airstrikes struck an ISIL staging facility and destroyed four ISIL buildings an ISIL artillery piece and an ISIL weapons cache.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Fallujah, six airstrikes struck two ISIL VBIED facilities, two ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL command and control facility and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL truck.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL mortar firing position an ISIL rocket firing position and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings and an ISIL homemade explosives cache.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tuz, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL bunker.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 13 Sep 2015. The Pentagon again omitted Turkey.

14 September 2015: airstrikes

The 14 September CENTCOM press release about airstrikes on 13 Sep was first posted at the CENTCOM website on the morning of 15 Sep. This CENTCOM press release appears to be a verbatim copy of the Pentagon press release.

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

Fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted four airstrikes in Syria:

- Near Dayr Ar Zawr, two airstrikes struck an ISIL crude oil collection point and destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Kobani, an airstrike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Mar'a, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 18 airstrikes in Iraq, coordinated with the Iraqi government:

- Near Huwayjah, an airstrike destroyed three ISIL trenches.
- Near Beiji, four airstrikes struck one large and two small ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL buildings, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL ant-aircraft artillery piece and an ISIL structure.

- Near Fallujah, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Haditha, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Kisik, four airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL staging area and destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes destroyed two ISIL trenches, an ISIL bulldozer and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes destroyed four ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL armored personnel carrier and an ISIL vehicle bomb.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, an airstrike struck an ISIL sniper firing position.
- Near Tuz, an airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 14 Sep 2015. The Pentagon included Turkey, for the first time since 6 Sep.

15 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 14, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL armored personnel carrier.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL large tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Al Huwayjah, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL tunnels and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL buildings, an ISIL IED and an ISIL carport.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike destroyed three ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, two ISIL rocket firing positions and an ISIL mortar firing position and destroyed three ISIL berms and 14 ISIL fighting positions.

- Near Ramadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL house-borne IED, an ISIL VBIED, five ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL cache.

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

The strikes were conducted as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, the operation to eliminate the ISIL terrorist group and the threat they pose to Iraq, Syria and the wider international community.

The destruction of ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq further limits the group's ability to project terror and conduct operations. Coalition nations which have conducted airstrikes in Iraq include Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan, Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States. Coalition nations which have conducted airstrikes in Syria include Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and the U.S.

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 15 Sep 2015. The Pentagon press release omits Australia from the list of nations conducting airstrikes in Syria, but does include Turkey.

This is the first recognition by CENTCOM that Australia is conducting airstrikes in Syria. Australia flew its first mission over Syria on the night of 11 Sep, as reported on 12 Sep. The Australian air force destroyed an destroyed an ISIL armored personnel carrier in Syria on 14 Sep. [Australian Broadcasting](#); [news.com.au](#); [Reuters](#).

16 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Abu Kamal, two airstrikes struck two ISIL oil field wellheads.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one airstrike destroyed three ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck one large and one small ISIL tactical units, and destroyed three ISIL vehicles.

Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL rockets.

- Near Hit, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and 12 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL motor tube and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 16 Sep 2015. The Pentagon omitted Australia from the list of nations conducting airstrikes in Syria.

17 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one airstrike using remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, four airstrikes struck one large and one small ISIL tactical units, an ISIL backhoe, an ISIL tunnel and destroyed 14 ISIL vehicles, three ISIL support positions, and an ISIL armored bulldozer.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Kirkuk, two airstrikes struck two ISIL mortar firing positions.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, eight airstrikes struck five ISIL tactical units and destroyed 35 ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL armored vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and struck two ISIL mortar firing positions and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Airstrike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 17 Sep 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 17 Sep 2015. The Pentagon omitted Australia from the list of nations conducting airstrikes in Syria.

18 September 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 18 September, CENTCOM did not post a press release at their website about airstrikes. Around noon on 21 Sep, CENTCOM finally posted the press release at their website.

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

On Sep. 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five airstrike using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted nine airstrikes coordinated with the government of Iraq using, fighter, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Hasakah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL cache, three ISIL fighting positions and one ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Manbij, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL mortar tube.
- Near Mar'a, one airstrike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike with inconclusive results.
- Near Baji, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed one ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units, and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, one ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Rawah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and one ISIL excavator.

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

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

19-23 September 2015: no reports of airstrikes

On Saturday, 19 September, neither the Pentagon nor CENTCOM posted a press release at their websites about airstrikes. However, [Reuters](#) reported 5 airstrikes in Syria and 12 airstrikes in Iraq on Friday.

On Sunday, 20 September, neither the Pentagon nor CENTCOM posted a press release at their websites about airstrikes.

On Monday, 21 September, neither the Pentagon nor CENTCOM posted at their websites a press release about airstrikes on Sunday. However, CENTCOM did post at its website a belated 18 Sep press release.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, 22-23 September, neither the Pentagon nor CENTCOM posted at their websites a press release about airstrikes in Iraq and Syria.

My searches of the Reuters website found *no* articles on 20-23 September about airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. That probably means that CENTCOM did *not* distribute press releases to journalists during those four days.

24 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 23, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 airstrikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two airstrikes struck separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, one airstrike destroyed one ISIL towed artillery piece.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one airstrike destroyed 16 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL anti-air artillery pieces.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, six airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL VBIED facilities, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL cache, an ISIL bunker, and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL light machine gun, and two ISIL mortar positions.

- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL buildings, an ISIL excavator, and three ISIL mobility obstacles.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun and six ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike suppressed ISIL mortar fire.

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

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

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

25 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one airstrike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 airstrikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two airstrikes destroyed 37 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Hit, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL vehicles, and wounded three ISIL fighters.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four airstrikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL cache, and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Ramadi, five airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings, an ISIL light machine gun, an ISIL resupply truck, an ISIL dump truck, an ISIL cache, and cratered a road to deny ISIL use.
- Near Rawah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one airstrike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL vehicle, and wounded an ISIL fighter.

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

26 September 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 26 September — as usual for a weekend — the U.S. Central Command did not post a press release at their website today. However, on Saturday [Reuters](#) posted a news article about 1 airstrike in Syria and 24 airstrikes in Iraq. But on Monday morning (before 09:47 EDT), CENTCOM posted their press release.

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

On Sept. 25, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one airstrike using bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 24 airstrikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Al Huwayjah, four airstrikes destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Al Qaim, one airstrike had inconclusive results.
- Near Albu Hayat, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL training facility and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bayji, three airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL buildings, an ISIL VBIED, and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Habbaniya, two airstrikes destroyed seven ISIL rocket rails and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Mosul, five airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL staging positions, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL cache.
- Near Sinjar, three airstrikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle and an ISIL observation post.

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

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

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

27 September 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 27 September — as usual for a weekend — the U.S. Central Command did not post a press release at their website today. However, on Sunday [Reuters](#) posted a news article about 3 airstrikes in Syria and 20 airstrikes in Iraq. But on Monday morning (before 09:47 EDT), CENTCOM posted their press release.

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

On Sept. 26, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrike using bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 airstrikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL structure.
- Near Abu Kamal, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Mar'a, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 27 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL staging area and damaged an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Hit, five airstrikes destroyed an ISIL VBIED facility, an ISIL command and control facility, and an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL armored vehicle, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings and denied terrain to ISIL forces.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL armored vehicles.
- Near Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL mortar tubes, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL vehicle.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 27 Sep 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 27 Sep 2015.

On 27 September, France announced that six of its aircraft had destroyed an ISIL training camp in eastern Syria, near the town of Deir Ezzor. This was the first attack by France in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

28 September 2015: airstrikes

On Monday morning (before 09:47 EDT), CENTCOM posted their press release, thereby proving that it is possible to deliver news in a timely way, instead of waiting until late afternoon — or instead of waiting days — to post a press release at the CENTCOM website.

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

On Sept. 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three airstrikes using remotely piloted and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 airstrikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one airstrike struck an ISIL training area.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one airstrike resulted in inconclusive results.
- Near Mar'a, one airstrike suppressed an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Bayji, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and two ISIL caches.
- Near Habbaniyah, two airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, three airstrikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL tunnel, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, four airstrikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building, four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL boats, an ISIL home-made explosive cache, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and

suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

- Near Tal Afar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

For the first time, CENTCOM and the Pentagon credited France with airstrikes in Syria.

29 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 28, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five airstrikes using remotely piloted and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 airstrikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two airstrikes destroyed a crude oil collection point.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL rockets, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, one airstrike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Al Huwayjah, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL bunkers, and five ISIL tunnels.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike destroyed three ISIL weapons caches and two rocket positions.
- Near Kirkuk, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes destroyed an ISIL tunnel and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

30 September 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four airstrikes using remotely piloted, bomber, and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 26 airstrikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, fighter-attack, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Washiyah, one airstrike destroyed an ISIL excavator and damaged two other ISIL excavators.
- Near Palmyra, two airstrikes destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, eight airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area, 45 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, six ISIL vehicles, an ISIL trailer, and denied ISIL terrain.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings, eight ISIL fighting positions, and five ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Habbaniyah, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, nine rocket rails, and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Kirkuk, three airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL cache, five ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Kisik, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL cache, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, three airstrikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL obstacle belt, and denied use of an ISIL resupply point.
- Near Sinjar, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two airstrikes suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Tal Afar, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

Terrorism & Migration in Europe

Islamic Terrorism in Europe

History in my previous essays:

- My [first essay](#) tersely — and incompletely — recounts a history of Islamic terrorism from 1972 to 2013.
- My essay for [June 2014](#) mentions the Islamic terrorist attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels on 24 May 2014, and an attack in France on March 2012.
- My essay for [Jan 2015](#) describes the Islamic terrorist attacks in France on 7-9 January.
- My essay for [Feb 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Copenhagen on 14 Feb.

Each of these previous essays also mentions concerns by governments in Europe and Russia that Islamic terrorists will return from Syria and engage in terrorism in Europe and Russia.

In October 2014, a 15 y old girl in Denmark stabbed her mother to death with a kitchen knife. Before stabbing her mother 20 times, the girl repeatedly watched on the Internet (YouTube) videos of ISIL executions with her 29 y old boyfriend who was a so-called "refugee" from Iraq. The videos showed decapitations of hostages David Haines and Alan Henning. This crime in Denmark is now in the news, because the girl, Lisa Borch, and her boyfriend, Bakhtiar Mohammed Abdulla, were both found guilty on 14 September 2015, after a trial in a Danish court. Lisa and her boyfriend had planned to travel to Syria and fight for ISIL. [The Telegraph](#); [The Local](#); [Daily Mail](#).

On 17 September 2015, Rafik Mohamad Yousef ran amok in west Berlin, seriously injuring a policewoman with his knife, before a policeman shot him dead. Rafik, a citizen of Iraq, was convicted in a German court in 2008 of belonging to an Al-Qaeda group and attempted conspiracy to commit murder. In 2004, Rafik planned to assassinate the Iraqi prime minister during a visit to Berlin. For that plan, Rafik faces the death penalty if he returns to Iraq, so the German government chose *not* to expel Rafik to Iraq. [Associated Press](#); [The Guardian](#)(AFP); [tageschau.de](#); [Berliner Morgenpost](#).

Islamic Migration into Europe

One of the major news stories during September 2015 was the flood of approximately 100,000 migrants into Europe, mostly from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan. This increase in Muslim population in Europe will likely lead to an increase in Islamic terrorism in Europe for two reasons:

1. Muslim migrants do *not* speak the local language of their host nation, and the migrants have different religious values from the prevailing local Christian majority values, so

the migrants will feel out of place in European society. The migrants will become disenchanted with their new home, and some will become radicalized. The radicalization will most likely occur via the Internet, but could also occur from personal contact with Islamic radicals in Europe.

2. It is possible that some Islamic terrorists will enter Europe along with migrants. These could be terrorists sent to recruit more fighters for ISIL or Al-Qaeda. Or they could be Europeans returning from battle in Syria, but using a new name to avoid criminal prosecution for fighting in Syria.

This is a subject that humanitarians avoid considering, as the humanitarians welcome migrants to Europe.

As an example of criminal fraud committed by some of the migrants, on 6 September 2015 the [Associated Press](#) reported that non-Syrian migrants were discarding in Serbia their identity cards, passports, drivers's licenses, and other documents, so they could fraudulently claim to be refugees from Syria. On 23 September, *The Washington Post* has a similar report about fraud by migrants, and also tersely mentions "Islamic State sympathizers" are included in the migrants. On 25 September, the German interior ministry estimated that 30% of migrants in Germany are falsely claiming to be from Syria. [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#). Given that 527,000 migrants arrived in Germany during 2015 (as of 25 Sep), fraud by 30% of the migrants is a *huge* problem.

On the early morning of 22 September 2015, 400 policemen in Germany raided 7 buildings plus one mosque in Berlin, to find suspected Islamic terrorists who were recruiting for ISIL in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#); [Rudaw](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

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 [review](#). 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.

My conclusions for [August 2014](#) through [June 2015](#) contained a list of citations to some commentators who recognized that we should be cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL and other terrorist organizations. In the interest of brevity, I have deleted those citations from current and future essays.

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. However, the USA, Europe, and Arab nations were unable to cooperate with Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorism.

Conclusion for Syria

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

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

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

and most experienced leader of Syria, and the only plausible secular leader of Syria (without Assad, Islamic extremists would likely be controlling Syria).

Assad's military is currently stretched thin by fighting against the jihadists in the Islamic Front, against Al-Qaeda (i.e., Nusra Front), and against ISIL. It is conceivable that Islamic terrorists could eventually defeat Assad. Having Syria under the control of Islamic terrorists would be a much worse outcome for not only Syria, but also for surrounding nations. That is another reason why Obama should cooperate with Assad to defeat ISIL.

Here is how Obama painted himself into a corner. ISIL has been in Syria since May 2013, with an increasing number of atrocities committed by ISIL. ISIL began to invade Iraq in Jan 2014. Obama ignored the ISIL problem in both Syria and Iraq. But, on 7 Aug 2014, — after ISIL threatened genocide of the Yazidis — Obama decided to help defeat ISIL in Iraq, by ordering airstrikes in Iraq. But eastern Syria is now a safe haven for ISIL, so Obama realized sometime around 21 Aug that ISIL would *also* need to be defeated in Syria. The logical plan would be for Obama to call Assad on the telephone and begin to arrange cooperation between the Syrian military and U.S. Military on defeating ISIL in Syria. But Obama will *not* do that, because of Obama's obsession with deposing Assad. As a result of the failure to cooperate with Assad, Obama's military campaign in Syria will be less effective, as explained in the previous paragraphs. Ironically, *both* Assad *and* Obama need help from each other, but Obama is too stubborn to ask Assad, and it would be futile for Assad to ask Obama for help in defeating ISIL.

However, even *if* the U.S. Government were to support Assad's fight against terrorism, and *if* the moderate rebels rejoin the Syrian army, it will be a tough job to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria. The third U.N. envoy for Syria, de Mistura, proposed a freeze in Aleppo that was rejected by the Syrian National Coalition and the insurgents. As of 30 September 2015, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

Obama refuses to cooperate with Assad's military. Obama has been reluctant 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 *planned* to train 15,000 rebels by the end of the year 2018. Meanwhile, effective troops on the ground were needed in January 2014 to prevent ISIL from capturing cities and infrastructure. By 26 Sep 2015, fewer than 130 rebels have completed their training, and both batches of U.S.-trained rebels have performed poorly in Syria. 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 240,000 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
- approximately 4,400,000 refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and a flood of several hundred thousand migrants to Europe in August-September 2015. ([LA Times](#), 8 Sep 2015)

The "SCPR Alienation and Violence Report 2014", cited in my essay for [March 2015](#), contains an eloquent description of the destruction of Syria.

The peace negotiations sponsored by the United Nations have moved at a snail's pace since mid-2013 and there have been no significant results. The United Nations (e.g., Ban and de Mistura) are now trying to solve the problem that existed in the years 2011 and 2012: convert Assad's dictatorship to a democratic government. But, since June 2014, the current big problem is ISIL's creation of a caliphate in Syria, Iraq, and eventually other nations. Another current problem is Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda) creating an emirate in Syria. Other current problems are numerous jihadist organizations who want to create an Islamic government to replace Assad's secular government. Looking at all of these current problems, I conclude that Assad is better than any of the alternatives amongst the insurgents.

The Syrian government — regardless of who leads it — does *not* have the resources to defeat the multiple terrorist insurgencies. And the continuing civil war and its destruction of buildings, electricity supply, and other infrastructure is continuing to deplete resources of Syria.

Note that, consistently since mid-2013, *none* of the insurgent groups in Syria want to attend negotiations. That alone will kill any possible political solution for the Syrian civil war.

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 innocent civilians in repeated bombings in or near Baghdad.

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 January 2014 — to prevent ISIL from capturing more cities and infrastructure. In September 2015, it was obvious that the Iraqi army and Shiite militia in Iraq are unable — or unwilling — to liberate either Fallujah, Baiji, Ramadi, or Mosul from ISIL. 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/syria25.pdf>
begun 1 Sep 2015, last modified 2 Oct 2015.

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

[my homepage](#)