

Syria & Iraq: October 2015

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 23 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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*,
- news sources in Turkey (e.g., Anadolu Agency, Today's Zaman), and
- news sources in Russia (e.g., TASS, RIA-Novosti)

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

Beginning 23 Sep 2015, *All Iraq News* suddenly reduced the number of new news stories each day at its English-language website. This website *was* the best source of information about the dysfunctional Iraqi parliament, so it is a serious loss of information.

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.

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](#).

On 10 September 2015, the U.N. Security Council approved 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. On 15 September, the United Nations announced the names of the three members of the JIM. For details, see my essay for [September 2015](#).

On 7 October 2015, the OPCW-U.N. JIM is beginning to hire professional investigators (including some from OPCW and Interpol) and beginning to solicit financing. The JIM plans to begin work sometime around 30 October. [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). For unknown reasons, Western newsmedia (e.g., Reuters, Associated Press, The Washington Post, etc.) ignored this news story. Strangely, as of 10 Oct, OPCW has issued *no* press releases about the JIM.

On 26 October, I searched Google News, but found no published information about the United Nations investigation in Syria.

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".

October 2015: Iraq

On 20 October, [Reuters](#) reported: "A team of inspectors from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will go to Iraq next week to help determine if the blistering agent sulphur mustard was used in the battlefield, three sources told Reuters. The OPCW team's mandate will be limited to the single allegation of use in August against the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, which was allegedly fired using mortar rounds."

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 16 October 2015, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a new death toll of *at least* 250,124 dead since the Syrian civil war began on 18 March 2011.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 250124 persons since 18/03/2011, which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Daraa, until 10/15/2015. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 115627 including: 12517 children and 8062 female over the age of 18
- YPG, the rebel and Islamist fighters: 41201
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2551
- Arab fighters from Gulf countries, Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, Palestine, Jordan, Sudan and other Arab countries, as well as fighters from Europe, Russia, China, India, Chechnya, Afghanistan, America and Australia who fight with "Islamic State", al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, al-Khadra' battalion, Jund al-Sham Movement, Junud al-Sham al-Shishan, the Islamic Turkestan Party and other Islamist factions : 37010
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 52077
- Combatants from People's Committees, Syrian Social Nationalist Party, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informant, the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta", al-Baath battalion and the Palestinian

Liberation Army: 35235

- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 3395
- Fighters from Hezbollah: 971
- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 3258

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include more than 20000 detainees in regime prisons and thousands of those who disappeared during regime raids and massacres.

The numbers also do not include more than 1500 fighters from the YPG, IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic battalions and rebel battalions who were kidnapped during clashes among the mentioned parties.

This statistic does not include the destiny of 5000 abductees from the civilians and rebels inside IS jails, including hundreds of people of Shaitaat tribe who were kidnapped by the Islamic State in the province of Deir Ezzor.

It does not include the destiny of more than 6000 detainees from the regime forces and allied militiamen and about 2000 abductees kidnapped by "Islamic State", Jabhat al-Nusra, the rebel and Islamist factions for "supporting regime".

In addition, it does not include hundreds of non-Syrian Kurdish fighters who were killed in fighting with YPG in Syria.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, al-Ummah Brigade, the Islamic Turkestan Party, al-Battar Battalion, Jaysh al-Muhajereen and al-Ansar, Jund al-Sham, rebel battalions, regular forces and pro-regime militants to be approximately at 90000 more than the documented number due to the extreme discretion by all sides on the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

On the other hand, there are about 2 million were wounded and suffered from permanent disabilities, while more than 11 million have been displaced, as well as the infrastructure and properties have been destroyed.

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.

"About 2 millions and half killed and wounded since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution," [SOHR](#), 16 Oct 2015.

When I add the numbers in the indented list, I get a total of 291,325, which is 41201 more than SOHR's total. That difference may be that SOHR forgot to add the YPG, rebel, and

Islamist fighters. On the other hand, a total of 291,325 is *not* plausible, given previous totals and a rate of increase of about 4000/month.

Only one major source reported this quarter-million dead milestone: [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

In my [second essay](#), I wrote on 25 Nov 2013: “Does anyone want to see the death toll in the Syria civil war go past a quarter-million people? (This is not hyperbole: we are already half-way to a total of a quarter-million dead.) When do the rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda stop fighting and start a political process?” Not only is my rhetorical question still valid 23 months later, but also I believe that the death toll in the Syrian civil war can reach a half-million by the end of the year 2020. One can have confidence in the continuing death toll in Syria, because of:

- the intransigent refusal of *all* insurgents in Syria to attend negotiations,
- the holy zeal of ISIL to establish its caliphate,
- the holy zeal of Al-Qaeda (i.e., Nusra Front) to establish its emirate,
- the failure of Islamic nations to counter the ideology of Islamic terrorism,
- the persistence of foreign meddlers (e.g., Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Russia, Iran, and the USA), *and*
- the continuing ineffectiveness of diplomats at the United Nations.

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

Rebels in Syria

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.

On 12 July 2015, the first batch of U.S.-trained rebels — 54 of them — arrived in Syria. But during 31 July to 2 August 2015, this first batch of rebels was attacked by Nusra Front. Some rebels were captured, many scattered and disappeared. On 16 Sep, the commander of CENTCOM admitted that only "four or five" of the first batch of 54 rebels were still fighting in Syria. For details, see my essays for [August 2015](#) and [September 2015](#).

On 18 September, 75 U.S.-trained rebels had entered Syria after training in Turkey. This second batch of rebels had a dozen four-wheel drive vehicles with a machine gun mounted on each vehicle. On 21-22 Sep these rebels gave Nusra Front six trucks and some ammunition, in exchange for Nusra Front giving the rebels safe passage through Nusra territory. The rebels waited until 25 Sep to inform the U.S. Military of their gift to Nusra. For details, see my essay for [September 2015](#).

October 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](#). On 25 Oct 2015, the last news on this topic was the above-cited report on 25 August. This series of events since June 2015 shows that the FSA continues to be disorganized and fragmented.

On 25 October 2015, [Reuters](#) tersely reported: "The Free Syrian Army is a loose alliance of groups, ... that are often led by Syrian army defectors[,] but have no central command structure."

On 2 October, [Reuters](#) says the U.S. would be "unlikely" to defend U.S.-trained rebels in Syria from attack by Russian airplanes. On 13 October, the [Associated Press](#) also says the U.S. would be "unlikely" to defend CIA-trained rebels in Syria from attack by Russian airplanes.

On 9 October, the Pentagon announced that it will indefinitely "pause" its the train-and-equip program. The [Washington Post](#) reported: "The decision to significantly scale back the Pentagon's flagship effort against [ISIL] in Syria is a recognition of its repeated failures."

"The Pentagon will now provide equipment and weapons to vetted Syrian units" (e.g., Syrian Kurds) who are fighting against ISIL. Another beneficiary of the new Pentagon aid program will be the Syrian Arab Coalition, which is composed of approximately 4000 fighters from 10 to 15 Sunni tribes in Syria. The new U.S. military aid will go to groups of insurgents who are *only* fighting against ISIL. See also [Pentagon](#); [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The Associated Press quotes an anonymous U.S. Government official as saying that the U.S. Military spent \$300 million on the train-and-equip program in Syria.

On 13 October, a press briefing at the [Pentagon](#) said "On the Syria train and equip, hard to say, again, of the half a million dollars that has been allocated, approximately a little over \$300 million of it has been spent. A lot of that money, though, went to buy equipment."

My comment

My comment is that, with this announcement on 9 October, the New Syrian Forces became the Forgotten Syrian Mistake. Notice that the Pentagon was unable to say in plain English that it had wasted taxpayers' money and one year of time on a stupid program that was an ignominious failure. Journalists quoted the U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary, Christine Wormuth, as saying the "paused" train-and-equip program might be resumed someday. Obama's excuse is quoted [below](#).

Back on the night of 2 August 2015, journalists announced a new policy by Obama: U.S. airstrikes will defend U.S.-trained Syrian rebels inside Syria, including defending them from attack by the Syrian military and its allies. The exact contours of this policy were never announced, but apparently it applied to attacks on the ground by Syria army, Hezbollah, and other allies of the Syrian army. It is unclear in August whether U.S. fighter jets would shoot down Syrian air force airplanes that were bombing U.S.-trained rebels in Syria.

Beginning on 30 September 2015, the Russians began flying combat missions over Syria. It is generally agreed that to prevent a serious escalation of the conflict, U.S. and Russian airplanes should avoid each other. (See the discussion of the evolution of the written agreement for air safety between the U.S. and Russia, [below](#).) Now that Russian airplanes could be attacking U.S.-trained rebels, the prudent policy is for the U.S. *not* to defend those rebels from attack by Russian airplanes. And because Russian airplanes might defend Syrian airplanes who were attacked by the U.S.-led Coalition, we also should *not* defend rebels from attack by Syrian airplanes.

Fortunately, as described above, the U.S.-trained rebel program was an ignominious failure, both in training fewer than 130 rebels, and in the poor performance of those rebels in Syria. So the U.S.-trained rebel program was "paused" on 9 October 2015, *before* the U.S. needed to decide whether or not to protect those rebels from Russian/Syrian airstrikes.

The Russian airstrikes in Syria beginning 30 Sep 2015 greatly increased the possibility of military escalation, and made more risky any military intervention in Syria by the U.S.-led Coalition. If a Coalition airplane were shot down by the Syrians or Russians, the eight Coalition nations with aircraft involved in Syria (e.g., USA, Australia, Bahrain, France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates) might retaliate, and that could

begin a multi-nation conflict that could evolve into World War III. Some things are worth fighting for. Nothing in Syria is worth fighting a World War.

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](#).

On 9 October, the Pentagon announced (citations above) that it would supply weapons to the Syrian Kurds for their fight against ISIL.

On 12 October, a Syrian Kurdish YPG militia spokesman announced the formation of a new alliance with Syria Arabs and an Assyrian Christian group. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Anadolu](#).

On 13 October, the Turkish prime minister had his knickers in a twist over reported U.S. equipping the Syrian Kurd YPG. Turkey regards the YPG as an affiliate of the Turkish PKK terrorist organization. [Daily Sabah](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Reuters](#). On 14 October, the Turkish government summoned the U.S. ambassador and warned the USA not to supply weapons to the Syrian Kurds. [BGN News](#); [Daily Sabah](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).

Note that the U.S. airdrop announced on 12 October supplied ammunition to Syrian Arabs, *not* to the Kurds. The Turkish government is reacting to fears of future U.S. supplies to the Kurds.

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.

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions Turkey's apparent lack of interest in fighting ISIL.

October 2015

On 15 October, journalists reported what may be Turkey's third airstrike against ISIL in Syria. (Previous Turkish airstrikes in Syria were on 24 July and 28 August.) [Today's Zaman](#). On 16 October, [Hurriyet](#) confirms this was Turkey's third airstrike on ISIL.

On 31 October, Turkey conducted a fourth airstrike against ISIL in Syria. [Reuters](#).

On 16 October, [Rudaw](#) reported "Turkey has finished the first phase of a 36.5 kilometer wall along its border with Syria". Also, "Each barrier block is three meters high and two meters wide, the [CNN Türk] network said, and weighs seven tons." I calculate they would need 18,250 blocks to build a wall that has a height of 3 meters.

On 21 October (Wednesday), the Syrian Kurds declared a new government in the Syrian Arab town of Tal Abyad. This government might sometime become a fourth semi-autonomous region in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#). My comment is that this expansion of Kurdish Syria will probably alarm Turkey.

[Today's Zaman](#) in Turkey said the new canton was "likely to deepen Turkish concerns about the Kurds' expanding role just over the border." And the Turkish government feared the new canton in Syria might create a new wave of refugees into Turkey. [Anadolu Agency](#). On 24 October, the president of Turkey declared that he would *not* allow the Kurds to "seize" northern Syria. [Reuters](#); [Today's Zaman](#)(Reuters).

My comment is that the Kurds have *not* "seized" northern Syria. The Truth is that the Kurds have lived in northern Syria for many generations. Moreover, the brave Kurds have liberated Syrian towns from ISIL. The alarmist, belligerent rhetoric from Erdogan, the president of Turkey, is mostly bigoted, anti-Kurd propaganda that is intended to boost popular support for

Erdogan's political party in the 1 Nov elections in Turkey.

On 26 October, the Turkish prime minister boasted that Turkey had "struck twice" Syrian Kurds, because the Kurds crossed the Euphrates River in Syria. The Associated Press reports the Turks used machine gun fire. On 28 Oct, Hurriyet reported the Turks used machine gun fire, followed by tank fire, sometime around 17 October. [Hurriyet](#), 27 Oct; [Daily Sabah](#); [Today's Zaman](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#); [Hurriyet](#), 28 Oct.

On 29 October, [Rudaw](#) reported that Turkey had used "heavy weapons" to fire on Syrian Kurds on 27 Oct.

My comment is that Turkey is *not* helping in the fight against ISIL, when Turkey attacks the best ground forces who are fighting against ISIL. Moreover, it is arrogant and unlawful for Turkey to declare what the Kurds can, or can not, do in Syria. When a child misbehaves with his toys, responsible parents take the toys away. Maybe it is time for the USA and NATO to take away Turkey's military aircraft, artillery, and tanks — to stop the Turkish attacks on the PKK and the Kurds in Syria.

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](#), [August 2015](#), and [September 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 10 October 2015, there was a rally in Ankara in support of peace between the PKK and Turkish government. Two suicide bombers detonated, killing at least 95 people. The identities of the bombers was *not* known on the day of the bombing. This bombing is symptomatic of domestic terrorism, subsequent to the Turkish president's attacks on the PKK that began on 24 July 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#). A few hours after the bombing, the PKK offered a unilateral cease fire. [Reuters](#). The response of Erdogan's government was more airstrikes on PKK, allegedly killing 49 PKK members during 10-11 Oct. [Anadolu](#).

On 12 October, the identities of the two suicide bombers are still *not* known. However, the government is blaming ISIL, while some opposition politicians are claiming the government is responsible for the suicide bomb attack. [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Daily Sabah](#); [Reuters](#) (AKP blamed on 10 Oct); [Associated Press](#) (Erdogan blamed on 10 Oct.); [Washington Post](#) (survivors blame government).

Suspicion that the suicide bombing was caused by ISIL, plus concern about Russian and Syrian military harassing Turkish pilots (see [below](#)), have motivated the leader of a pro-secular Turkish opposition party to call for the end of Turkey's anti-Assad policy and to

"rapidly get out of the Middle Eastern quagmire." [Associated Press](#).

During the last several months, the Turkish government run by Erdogan has censored newsmedia and arrested journalists. This censorship continued with restrictions on coverage of the 10 Oct suicide bombing in Ankara, leading to a total ban on 14 Oct that lasted until 19 Oct. [The Independent](#), 10 Oct; [BGN News](#), 10 Oct (social media shutdown); [Today's Zaman](#), 13 Oct; (confidentiality order on investigation); [Hurriyet](#), 14 Oct (total ban); [Hurriyet](#), 19 Oct (ban ended).

One suicide bomber on 10 Oct was the brother of the suicide bomber in Suruc on 20 July 2015. Both brothers were emigrants from Syria to Turkey. [Hurriyet](#).

On 28 October, the Turkish government concluded that ISIL in Syria had ordered the suicide bombing in Ankara on 10 Oct. [Anadolu Agency](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Today's Zaman](#).

On 30 October, [Reuters](#); [Today's Zaman](#) reports that the Turkish government has killed more than 2000 PKK "militants" in Turkey and northern Iraq since late July 2015.

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](#), [August 2015](#), and [September 2015](#) chronicle the statements by Turkey and the opposition to safe zones by the U.S. Government.

On 7 October, [Reuters](#) reported "Russia's air strikes, ... , have made the prospects of the 'no-fly zone' Turkey has long campaigned for look more remote than ever."

On 9 October, the U.S. State Department spokesperson again said there are "no plans to put into effect a no-fly zone." That also included no plans for whatever might be called a "buffer

zone or safety zone or no-fly zone." [State Dept.](#)

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.

October 2015

On 4 October, in an interview with an Iranian television channel, Assad said:

It is self-evident that no state in the world conducts dialogue with terrorists, because terrorists, like other citizens, should be subject to the laws and should be brought to account. However, the state might conduct dialogue with terrorists in one case, when the objective of the dialogue is for the individuals who carried out terrorist acts to lay down their arms and embrace the state and the law. This has actually happened in Syria; and we held dialogue with many groups within the framework of what we call reconciliations through which the state grants amnesty to those individuals, provided that they go back to their normal lives.

....

.... there are ideological terrorist groups which do not believe in dialogue. They reject dialogue and reject reconciliation. They believe that these killings and these acts of terrorism are part of religion and part of Islam. They believe that when they commit these acts and get killed, they have done a service to religion, and then go to heaven. It is impossible to conduct dialogue with these groups; they do not accept it and we do

not accept it.

....

.... So, dialogue with [the terrorists] might be useful for the future of Syria, but not for solving the problem of terrorism. That is why the only option for us now is to destroy terrorism, because implementing any solution or any political ideas that might be agreed on will need a state of stability. Otherwise it has no value. Consequently, destroying terrorism is the foundation of any action in Syria. Political ideas can be implemented later.

transcript of interview by Iranian Khabar television, "President al-Assad: New anti-terrorism coalition must succeed, otherwise the whole region will be destroyed," [Syrian Radio&TV](#), 4 Oct 2015.

The conclusion is that Assad has declared there can be no peace negotiations until *after* the insurgents are defeated. [Washington Post](#); [The Hill](#). That declaration by Assad spoilt hopes by optimists that the Russian airstrikes would bring early peace negotiations.

On 20 October 2015, anonymous "senior officials" in the Turkish government said Turkey could accept Assad having "symbolic power" during a half-year transition. [Reuters](#); [Hurriyet](#). A consensus seems to be emerging amongst foreign meddlers that, given that Assad has survived more than four years of civil war, another half-year of Assad would be tolerable, if it leads to Assad's departure. My comment is the Syrian civil war would be simpler to end, if foreign meddlers would stop arguing about Assad's role. The Syrian people — without foreign interference — should choose their president.

On the night of 20 October 2015, Assad met with Putin in Moscow. This meeting was first publicly announced on the morning of 21 Oct, after the meeting, so the meeting was a surprise to U.S. and European diplomats and journalists. It was Assad's *first* trip outside Syria since the Syrian civil war began in March 2011. The Russian newsmedia reported that Assad thanked Putin for the military support from Russia. Details were sparse on 21 October. [TASS](#) at 09:46 GMT; [TASS](#) at 10:19 GMT; [RIA-Novosti](#) at 06:34 GMT; [Russia Today](#).

The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported Assad's trip to Moscow. [SANA](#). SANA also reported that, after the meeting with Assad, Putin called the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Turkey. [SANA](#). See also [TASS](#) and [Kremlin](#).

The [Associated Press](#) optimistically suggested that the Assad/Putin meeting "could signal that Russia ultimately seeks a political settlement after weeks of heavy airstrikes in Syria."

[Reuters](#) at 07:23 GMT reported a transcript of opening remarks at the meeting posted at the [Kremlin](#) website. Later, [Reuters](#) reported that Russia would *not* disclose details of the meeting.

The [Washington Post](#) reports: "But few specific details emerged from the meetings with

Assad. The extraordinary trip was announced after Assad had already returned to Damascus."

On 25 October, Assad said: "eradicating terrorist organizations would lead to the political solution that we, in Syria and Russia, seek in a way that satisfies the Syrian people and protects Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity." [SANA](#). See also [Syrian Times](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Again, Assad wants to end the civil war, including the fight against ISIL and Nusra Front, *before* discussing constitutional reforms and holding early elections. In my opinion this makes sense, because reforming the government in the middle of a brutal civil war could create anarchy that would be exploited by terrorists.

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](#).)

On 15 October 2015, [Reuters](#) reports that Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Jan Eliasson, "is pushing for local ceasefires in three or four areas in Syria".

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.

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

For details, see my essay for [September 2015](#).

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.

On 3 October, the Syrian National Coalition and more than 70 rebel groups issued a joint press release that declares de Mistura's Working Groups are *not* acceptable. Here is part of that press release:

First: This political process however must ensure that the current regime is not reproduced or that its head and pillars, whose hands are stained with the blood of Syrians, are given any role in the transitional political process or in Syria's future.

....

Third: The Syrian people have completely lost confidence in the ability of the international community to support their cause after five years of regime crimes committed against them

....

Fourth: Bashar al-Assad has no place in any political process depending on the following legal and practical reasons: [six reasons omitted]

....

Fifth: We consider that dissolving the security agencies and the restructuring of the military institution directly responsible for killing Syrians an essential item for any political solution. This beleaguered and crumbling military institution has turned into sectarian militias led by Iran. It cannot therefore form the nucleus of a national army, nor can it be trusted by the Syrian people to restore security and stability to the country.

Sixth: The formation of a transitional governing body is a process of full transfer of power in which Bashar al-Assad and pillars of his regime have no place. We

emphasize the need to preserve state institutions and prevent their disintegration as they belong to the Syrian people, and to prevent the country from sliding into more chaos.

Seventh:

Eighth: We consider that the "work groups" initiative in its current form and its unclear mechanisms provides the perfect environment to reproduce the regime. These "work groups" must instead be based on clear principles regarding standards for selecting the participants in these groups and the final vision for the solution.

. . . .

[Conclusion] Accordingly, the "work groups" initiative in its current form is unacceptable neither practically nor legally process unless the above-mentioned points are taken into consideration and the ambiguities shaping the mechanisms of this initiative are resolved.

"Joint Statement on the Latest Developments and Implications of the Political Process in Syria," [SNC](#), 3 Oct 2015.

On 3 October, [Reuters](#) reports that "Syria's western-backed opposition and rebel groups" declared "a U.N. plan towards ending the civil war in Syria would not work in its current form". However, Assad's government "was ready to participate in de Mistura's initiative, although [the Syrian foreign minister] said any outcome would be non-binding."

My comment is that the *only* political solution that is acceptable to the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) is a new government in which Assad and his cronies are absent. But in the sixth point, the SNC also wants "to preserve state institutions" and prevent "more chaos". The goals in the sixth point are contradictory with deposing Assad and his cronies.

In the fifth point, the SNC wants to completely reconstitute the Syrian army, which is inconsistent with the sixth point.

The major revision of both the Syrian government *and* Syrian army envisioned by the SNC would be difficult in peacetime, and unwise in the midst of a war against ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

The above-quoted SNC document says, in the reasons for the fourth point, "Finally, Bashar al-Assad has handed over Syria to Iranian and Russian invaders, thus committing an unforgivable act of betrayal to the country's history, its future and dignity." This is pure propaganda. First, the Iranians and Russians are *not* "invaders", because they are there by invitation of the lawful government of Syria. Second, it is inconsistent for the SNC to criticize foreign support as a "betrayal", when the SNC (and also the FSA) itself receives financial and material support from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the USA, and other foreign nations.

In Jan/Feb 2014, the SNC frustrated Brahmi's negotiations in Geneva. From Dec 2014 to Mar 2015, the SNC refused de Mistura's proposed freeze of hostilities in Aleppo. Now the SNC continues to make demands and create artificial obstacles for de Mistura. In summary, the SNC continues to be an obstacle to peace in Syria.

On 9-12 October, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) held a so-called "General Assembly". On 12 October, the SNC declared that the SNC would boycott de Mistura's working groups, because of the Russian military intervention in Syria.

5. While the Russian aggression on Syria represents a violation of international law, it is aimed at propping a murderous Assad that commits war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. It also reflects Russia shirking its responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council and sponsor party of the Geneva I Communique and the Geneva II Conference as well as undermines chances of reaching a political settlement.

The Syrian people, who are countering the despotic regime for the fifth consecutive year, consider countering the Russian and Iranian invasion a top priority ahead of all other efforts. They hold Russia primarily responsible for creating a tense atmosphere, derailing the settlement process, and impeding the political process. Accordingly, the Syrian Coalition's General Assembly has decided not to participate in the consultative "Working groups." It considers that the commitment to the Geneva I Communique and the UN Security Council resolutions as well as stopping the Russian aggression on Syria a basis for resuming the negotiation process.

Press Release, "Response to the 'Working groups' Proposed By UN Envoy Staffan De Mistura," [SNC](#), 12 Oct 2015.

Agence France-Presse says the SNC made the decision on 11 October to boycott the working groups. [Al-Arabiya](#).

My comment is that the SNC is like a child who refuses to eat his broccoli until there is peace in Africa. Obviously, de Mistura did *not* invite the Russian military involvement in Syria. There is very little that de Mistura can do to persuade Russia to abandon its military involvement in Syria. I am *not* optimistic about de Mistura's working groups, but at the moment these working groups are the *only* effort towards a political solution to the Syrian civil war. The SNC *ought* to cooperate with de Mistura.

On 26 October 2015, there were still no publicly announced plans to have a meeting of one or more working groups. These working groups were first announced on 29 July 2015. Just because the Syrian National Coalition will boycott the working groups is *not* a good reason to delay convening the working groups with other Syrian opponents of Assad. Possible members of working groups include

- internal political opposition in Syria,
- Syrian expatriates now living in Turkey,
- Qadri Jamil — the former deputy prime minister of Syria, who now lives in Moscow.

Some of these Syrian opponents of Assad attended conferences in Moscow in January and April 2015, so their identity is established. 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.

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.

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.

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions that a third conference in Moscow might be held before the end of 2015.

On 27 October, [TASS](#) mentioned the Syrian ambassador to Russia discussed with the Russian foreign ministry the possibility of a third intra-Syria conference in Moscow.

With the massive Russian airstrikes that began on 30 September 2015, and the failure of Russia to convene a third peace conference since April 2015, it is clear that the Russian government is *not* interested in a negotiated end to the Syrian civil war.

Meetings in Vienna

On 21 October, a meeting was announced for Vienna on 23 October. [U.S. State Dept](#); [Associated Press](#), 21 Oct.

On 23 October, the foreign ministers of USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey met in Vienna for a two-hour meeting about political transition in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [U.S. State Dept](#); [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RBTH](#) (no deal on Assad).

On 26 October, Matthew Lee — the provocative Associated Press journalist who covers the U.S. State Department — began his report: "Another meeting in another luxury hotel in another European city oozing with diplomatic history." [Associated Press](#). My comment is that a peace conference needs to begin somewhere. Vienna has a large airport with many international flights per day, so it is a convenient location for travelers. No one expects John Kerry to stay in a cheap hotel room, with the toilet located in a communal bathroom down the hall, like a military barracks.

Russia supported the inclusion of all interested parties, and an expansion of the Vienna meeting from four nations to more than a dozen nations. [Russia Today](#); [TASS](#).

On 29 October, there was a second meeting in Vienna, again with the foreign ministers of Russia, the United States, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

On 30 October, there was another meeting in Vienna, this time with foreign ministers of 17 nations, plus the EU and UN: USA, Russia, European Union, U.N. Special Envoy to Syria (Staffan de Mistura), China, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom (i.e., Britain). The meeting lasted seven hours and produced a written statement that is quoted below.

The 30 October meeting in Vienna produced a written statement, which is quoted here in its entirety.

Meeting in Vienna, on October 30, 2015, China, Egypt, the EU, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, and the United States [“the participants”] came together to discuss the grave situation in Syria and how to bring about an end to the violence as soon as possible.

The participants had a frank and constructive discussion, covering major issues. While substantial differences remain among the participants, they reached a mutual understanding on the following:

1. Syria’s unity, independence, territorial integrity, and secular character are fundamental.
2. State institutions will remain intact.
3. The rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination, must be protected.
4. It is imperative to accelerate all diplomatic efforts to end the war.
5. Humanitarian access will be ensured throughout the territory of Syria, and the participants will increase support for internally displaced persons, refugees, and their host countries.
6. Da'esh, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the U.N. Security Council, and further, as agreed by the participants, must be defeated.
7. Pursuant to the 2012 Geneva Communique and U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, the participants invited the U.N. to convene representatives of the Government of Syria and the Syrian opposition for a political process leading to credible, inclusive, non-sectarian governance, followed by a new constitution and elections. These elections must be administered under U.N. supervision to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, free and fair, with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate.
8. This political process will be Syrian led and Syrian owned, and the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria.

9. The participants together with the United Nations will explore modalities for, and implementation of, a nationwide ceasefire to be initiated on a date certain and in parallel with this renewed political process.

The participants will spend the coming days working to narrow remaining areas of disagreement, and build on areas of agreement. Ministers will reconvene within two weeks to continue these discussions.

"Final communiqué on the results of the Syria Talks in Vienna as agreed by participants," [European Union](#), 30 Oct 2015.

Copy at [German Foreign Ministry](#).

After the meeting, Kerry, Lavrov, and de Mistura held a joint press conference. In choosing the following quotations, I have deleted most of the propaganda about Assad, and the mentions of Obama's [decision](#) to send U.S. special operations forces into Syria. Except as indicated with ellipses, I have quoted entire paragraphs.

KERRY: Four and a half years of war in Syria we all believe has been far too long, and the consequences of that war for so many people, innocent people, is beyond description — devastation in refugee camps, migration effects all over. The result has been a lot of suffering and far too much damage to the economic and social and political fabric of the region. And so we came here — the foreign ministers who came here today — with the conviction that the fighting and the killing absolutely has to end. And it's up to us to try to find a way to do that.

Our shared task is to find a way to use the tools of diplomacy in order to make that happen. This is a relatively large diplomatic group that met today because there are a lot of people who are stakeholders because there are a lot of neighbors, and there are a lot of people who are supporting, one way or the other, one side or another. And so it will take pressure from many different directions to reverse the escalation of conflict and to lay a credible groundwork for peace.

Daesh and other terrorist organizations, we all believe, can never be allowed to unite or govern Syria. The United States position regarding Syria, I emphasize, has not changed. Sergey Lavrov and [Iranian] Prime Minister Zarif and I and others agree to disagree. The United States position is there is no way that President Assad can unite and govern Syria. And we believe that Syrians deserve a different choice, and our goal is to work with Syrians from many factions to develop that choice.

But we can't allow that difference to get in the way of the possibility of diplomacy to end the killing and to find the solution. And that is a significance of the decision that was really made here today was that even though we acknowledge the difference, we know it is urgent to get to the table and to begin the process of real negotiations.

....

.... Make no mistake, the answer to the Syrian civil war is not found in a military alliance with Assad, from our point of view. But I am convinced that it can be found through a broadly supported diplomatic initiative aimed at a negotiated political

transition, consistent with the Geneva communique.

And I want to thank Sergey Lavrov for his efforts to try to find that diplomatic solution and for the commitment of Russia even as it is engaged in supporting Assad, which is not a secret, in believing that we need to move towards a political solution. There is nothing inevitable in our judgment about the war in Syria. The war came about because of choices that people made. And what people have the power to choose, they have the power to change.

....

The participants agreed today that Syria's unity, independence, territorial integrity, and secular character are fundamental. We agreed that Syria's state institutions will remain intact. We agreed that the rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination, must be protected. We agreed that it is imperative to accelerate all diplomatic efforts to end the war. We agreed that humanitarian access must be assured throughout the territory of Syria, and the participants will increase support for internally displaced persons, refugees, and their host countries.

We agreed that Daesh and other terrorist groups as designated by the UN Security Council and as agreed by the participants must be defeated. Pursuant to the 2012 Geneva communique and UN Security Council Resolution 2118, we invited the UN to convene representatives of the Government of Syria and the Syrian opposition for a political process leading to a credible, inclusive, non-sectarian governance followed by a new constitution and elections. We agreed that these elections must be administered under UN supervision to the satisfaction of the government and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, free and fair, with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate.

We agreed that this political process will be Syrian-led and Syrian-owned and that the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria. And we agreed together with the United Nations to explore modalities for and implementation of a nationwide ceasefire to be initiated on a date certain and in parallel with this renewed political process.

We will spend the coming days working to narrow remaining areas of disagreement and to build on the areas of agreement, and we will reconvene within two weeks to continue these discussions.

....

De MISTURA: Well, I have very little to add. You saw it, you have heard it. Would you have imagined a few weeks ago that we would have been able to have what Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has been asking for months, that the Russia and United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, and many other countries are involved in this conflict in one form or the other, sitting on the same table, and today having both of you sitting here, having come with a meeting of seven hours. No one left the room. No one disagreed fundamentally on the major issues. There is, obviously, areas which

have been not covered by an agreement. But look at the outcome — proof. They are going to meet again in this type of contact group, which we can call a special contact group for the peace in Syria — again, within 14 days.

....

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) I did not say that Assad has to go or that Assad has to stay. I said that Assad's destiny should be decided by the Syrian people, as well as all other aspects of further development of the Syrian state.

....

.... We have a common enemy [Daesh or ISIL] and we need to make sure that this enemy does not come to power in Syria or in any other country.

"Joint Press Availability with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura," [State Dept](#), 30 Oct 2015.

On 31 October, the United Nations Secretary General said that issues about the continued presence of Assad in Syria should *not* delay either a ceasefire or an end to the Syrian civil war. Ban said: "Basically I believe that it is up to the Syrian people who have to decide the future of President Assad." [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

My opinion: This was the first time that Iran had been invited to a meeting about the civil war in Syria, because of past objections by Saudi Arabia and the USA. It has taken the USA 22 months to change position from rejecting Iran in January 2014 to including Iran in October 2015, evidence of the slow evolution of positions.

Note that Syria — the most important party in a discussion about Syria — was *not* invited by these foreign meddlers. The absence of anyone from Syria gives the impression that these foreign meddlers are imperialists who will impose a solution on the Syrian people. But note Nr. 8 of the Communiqué explicitly says "the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria."

If these foreign meddlers can agree to stop sending munitions to insurgents in Syria, then the negotiations will be an important first step in ending the Syrian civil war. The "efforts to end the war" and "nationwide ceasefire" mentioned in Nrs. 4 and 9 of the Communiqué are ambitious. If the Free Syrian Army will stop fighting, that would help Russian airstrikes identify the jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL — who need to "be defeated" (Nr. 6).

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.

The decision of the SNC on 12 October to boycott de Mistura's working groups further marginalized the SNC.

On 12 October, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) issued a press release condemning the Russian military intervention in Syria.

For the second week, the world has been witnessing an intense Russia aggression on the Syrian people. The Russians deploy aerial and missile bombardment in conjunction with ground operations by regime and Iranian militias with the help of Russian officers and experts against the Free Syrian Army. This has taken place in several Syrian provinces.

The second form of aggression is a naval, ground and air bases built by the Russians in Syria. These not only violate Syria's sovereignty, but also aim to continue and escalate the aggression, thus turning the Russian military presence in Syria into a direct occupation.

The third form is substantial Russian assistance to the Assad regime, including, in addition to political support, economic aid, military equipment and ammunition, as well as new types of sophisticated weapons aimed at strengthening the capabilities of the Assad regime in its war on the Syrian people.

Russia's main objective is not to combat extremist groups, particularly ISIS, as Russia claims, but to prop up the Assad regime. This was clear in the remarks made by Russian leadership after starting their operations striking civilian targets. Women, children and the elderly as well as Free Syrian Army fighters were killed in the Russian aerial attacks.

....

While Russian aggression has also exacerbated the war in Syria, as Russia has committed its capabilities to join the circle of murder and destruction, it impedes international efforts for reaching a political solution and will have regional and international implications. It also reveals Russia abandoning its role as a major power in the efforts aimed at reaching political solution in accordance with the Geneva I Communiqué. Moreover, Russia has now become a party to the Syrian crisis.

We in the Syrian Coalition; in the light of the Russian aggression and its implications, reaffirm our rejection of Russian aggression along with all its accompanying justifications, lies, fabrications and the false allegations of countering ISIS. We declare that resisting the Russian aggression is a national mission with which everybody must engage. We call upon the Friends of the Syrian People countries to provide political, material and military support to counter the aggression against Syria and its people. We also call upon the United Nations and all international organizations to condemn Russia's aggression on Syria.

Long live Syria, a free country and people
Shame for all the enemies of the Syrian people
Press Release, "Response to the Russia's Aggression on the Syrian People," [SNC](#), 12 Oct 2015.

My comment is that, in the second paragraph, Russia's airbases do *not* "violate Syria's sovereignty", because the lawful ruler of Syria, Assad, invited and approved these airbases. Similarly, there is *no* "occupation", because Assad continues to rule Syria.

The SNC is absolutely correct when it says "Russia's main objective is not to combat extremist groups, particularly ISIS, as Russia claims".

My comment is that the SNC is correct in the penultimate paragraph that the Russian military intervention in Syria is a serious exacerbation of the Syrian civil war. Russia has been a long-standing "party to the Syrian crisis" through their support of Assad, *not* "has now become a party".

In the last full paragraph, the SNC appeals to the "Friends of the Syrian People" nations. The Friends held their most recent meeting in November 2014, 11 months ago, and the Friends are now dormant, and likely extinct. The Friends seem to have been replaced with the U.S.-led Anti-ISIL Coalition, which has different goals than the Friends of the Syrian People.

The SNC also appeals to the United Nations, which has a long track record of doing nothing in Syria, because of the veto in the Security Council by Russia (and sometimes also the veto by communist China).

The SNC has reduced itself to an observer, who watches a catastrophe occur, and who begs someone else to do something to end the catastrophe. Such a role shows the SNC is unfit to lead Syria.

On 29 October, the Syrian National Coalition was *not* invited to a meeting in Vienna on 30 October. The meeting was attended by 17 foreign ministers. [Reuters](#).

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 for the Google Chrome webbrowser 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.
-

October 2015: Islamic Bombings

On 3 October, two ISIL suicide bombers detonated in Baghdad, killing at least 18 people.

[Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Agence France-Presse said at least 24 people died. [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 5 October, ISIL detonated car bombs in al-Khales (Diyala province), Baghdad, and al-Zubair (Basra province), which killed at least 56 people. [Associated Press](#) (bombing); [Associated Press](#) (credits ISIL).

On 8 October, mortar shells landed in the city of Baquba, the capital of Diyala province, killing at least 27 people. [Reuters](#). The following morning, the Associated Press reports at least 35 civilians died. [Tasnim](#).

On 26 October, [Reuters](#) reported that an ISIL suicide bomb killed at least 7 Shiites in Baghdad.

On 29 October, at least 16 rockets hit an Iranian refugee camp near the Baghdad airport, killing 3 Iraqi guards and also killing at least 20 refugees. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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. My essay for [July 2015](#) mentions that the Iraqi

parliament was on vacation again from 6 July to 25 July 2015.

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions the Iraqi government is selling unsecured junk bonds to obtain money to operate its government, the slow progress of the draft National Guard Law, and a cholera epidemic in Iraq.

October 2015

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Iraq is a failed nation, on 7 Oct the U.S. State Department spokesman actually praised Abadi for "forging ahead to form a government that is inclusive and participatory and representative of all Iraqis." [State Dept](#). The Truth is that the Iraqi government is corrupt, incompetent, dysfunctional, and has an army that is either unable or unwilling to liberate cities occupied by ISIL.

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentioned the Iraqi government plans to sell unsecured junk bonds to obtain money to operate its government. On 13 September, Reuters (copy at [Al-Arabiya](#) and [Gulf News](#)) reported that the Iraqi government was offering US\$ 6 billion in bonds. Although the maturity and yield had not yet been specified by Iraq, Reuters quoted an expert as saying the interest would need to be at least 10.75%/year.

On 11 October, Reuters reported that Iraq's finance minister had cancelled the planned sale of Iraqi bonds, because investors demanded an interest rate that was too high.

Iraq has halted its plan to issue international bonds because the yield it would have to pay on the debt was too high, Deputy Finance Minister Fathil Nabi said on Sunday [11 Oct] in a fresh blow to the country's efforts to finance itself.

Finance minister Hoshiyar Zebari "ordered that the bond be halted because the interest rate is high", Nabi told Reuters. He did not comment further and it was unclear when, if ever, the plan might be revived.

....

[Iraq] aimed to raise about \$2 billion in an initial U.S. dollar-denominated issue, its first international bond sale in nine years. The bond, with a tenor expected to be five or seven years, would have been part of a series eventually totaling up to \$6 billion.

The government, which has projected a fiscal deficit of about \$25 billion this year in a budget of roughly \$100 billion, said it needed the proceeds of the bond to pay salaries and fund infrastructure projects in the oil and gas, electricity and transportation sectors.

But investors demanded extremely high yields, which would have been financially burdensome for Iraq if it had agreed to pay them, sources familiar with the matter said.

Zebari told members of parliament's financial committee last week that "it was too difficult to accept paying an 11.5 percent yield in return for an \$2 billion bond", the committee's secretary Ahmed Haji Rashid told Reuters.

Ahmed Rasheed & Hadeel Al Sayegh, "Exclusive: Iraq halts plan for international bond issue

due to high price," [Reuters](#), 13:27 GMT, 11 Oct 2015.

A \$1000 bond with a five-year term and 11.5%/year interest rate would have a purchase price of \$580. It is easy to see why Iraq regards such bonds as a too expensive way to raise money.

On 15 October, an arrest warrant was issued for the former minister of electricity, Karim Aftan al-Jumaili. [Iraqi News](#). [BAS News](#) reports he was charged with 27 counts of corruption. As of 3 November there were no reports of his arrest.

On 18 October, an arrest warrant was issued for "the current Minister of Trade Mlas Mohammed and his brother on charges of financial corruption." [Iraqi News](#). [Reuters](#) reports the trade minister's name is "Mohammed Abdul Kareem". Reuters says the trade minister "faced charges related to accepting bribes, receiving illegal benefits, and misusing his position." [Agence France-Presse](#) reports the trade minister's name as "Malas Abdulkarim al-Kasnazani". On 26 October, [Reuters](#) reports his name as "Milas Mohammed Abdul Kareem". Reuters reports that his bodyguards murdered "Iraqi Trade Ministry media adviser, Nadhim Naeem". The murder prevented Nadhim Naeem from handing over files to the Iraqi Integrity Commission that investigates corruption. And, on 3 November, [Reuters](#) reported: "[Trade Minister Milas Mohamed] Abdul Kareem, whose current whereabouts are unknown, has said the allegations are not based on solid evidence."

On 23 September, Reuters reported that there were 121 confirmed cases of cholera in Iraq. On 20 October, Agence France-Presse reported that the number of cholera cases in Iraq had increased to 1809, and the epidemic has spread north to Kurdistan. [Al-Arabiya](#).

My essay for [August 2015](#) mentions numerous reforms to the Iraqi government by Abadi on 11 Aug and 16 Aug. On 29 October, [Reuters](#) reports: "More than 60 members of Iraq's ruling coalition [State of Law] will seek to withdraw parliamentary support for Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's reforms if he does not respond [in writing] within 72 hours to their demands for wider consultation.... Some of the measures have been implemented, while others appear to have stalled. Iraq's three vice presidents, whose positions were to be cut, remain in place."

On 30 October, former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki — a vice-president since 8 Sep 2014 — said he had challenged the constitutionality of Abadi's reforms in an Iraqi court. [Rudaw](#).

On 2 November 2015, [Reuters](#) reported: "Iraq's parliament voted unanimously on Monday [2 Nov] to bar the government from passing important reforms without [parliament's] approval in an effort to curb Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi...." See also [BASnews](#).

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 2015.) 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", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.
- On 15 October, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).

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.

Admittedly, 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. 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](#).)

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. [Ahrām 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. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
- 17.

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.

As an example of how fighting Islamic terrorism can continue for many years, the U.S. has been fighting against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan since 2001. On 15 October 2015, Obama postponed the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan until sometime after the year 2016. The next U.S. president will inherit 5500 U.S. Military personnel in Afghanistan in January 2017. [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#) (commentary). In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the corrupt and weak governments are unable to defend their nations from Islamic terrorists. Substantial numbers of U.S. Military personnel and many tens of billions of US dollars in both Afghanistan and Iraq also have not defeated the Islamic terrorists. That includes 14 years of continuous U.S. Military involvement in Afghanistan, which hints that the fight against Islamic terrorists will take tens of years. No one is asking the question *why* Islamic terrorists are so successful in their battle, while national armies and

police are unable to defeat Islamic terrorists.

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 8 October 2015, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of Sep. 15, 2015, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on Aug. 8, 2014, is \$4 billion and the average daily cost is \$10 million for 404 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 8 Oct 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.

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](#).

On 8 October, journalists reported that on 23 September ISIL executed 3 Assyrian Christians who were abducted by ISIL in February 2015. [SOHR](#); [AINA](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

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-Raqqa". 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](#), [August 2015](#), and [September 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.

October 2015: Baiji

On 14 October, [Reuters](#) reports the Iraqi army and Shiite militias have begun an assault on ISIL in the city of Baiji.

On 14 October, the Iraqi federal police announced they had "fully liberated" the oil refinery near Baiji, although reading the text clarifies that the refinery is only 90% liberated. [Iraqi News](#).

On 15 October, [Reuters](#) reports "Iraqi forces and Shi'ite militia fighters recaptured most of the country's largest oil refinery from Islamic State". Also, "Iraqi federal police forces also seized most parts of the town of Baiji, Baiji's mayor Mohammed Mahmoud told Reuters."

On 16 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported the Iraqi army and Shiite militia had expelled ISIL from the refinery near Baiji, and retaken control of the refinery. My comment is that the last time Baghdad had a military victory to celebrate was on 1 April 2015, when Iraqi forces liberated Tikrit (and also destroyed much of that city). But, if history is any guide, ISIL will recapture the oil refinery near Baiji in the coming weeks or months.

On 17 October, Agence France-Presse reports that the Iraqi army immediately pushed about 25 km north of Baiji, to disrupt ISIL supply lines. [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 20 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the Iraqi army had "full control" of the town of Baiji. The Iraqi army continues to fight to liberate the oil refinery near Baiji.

On 21 October, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve in Baghdad said: "In Baiji, Iraqi forces have regained most of the oil refinery. So, there's still small pockets of enemy

resistance that are being cleared." [Pentagon](#).

On 24 October, Abadi visited the town of Baiji and declared victory there. [Rudaw](#); [BAS News](#).

On 28 October, a [Pentagon](#) press briefing said: "In Baiji, CTS, that's counterterrorism service, the federal police and the PMF continue to clear both Baiji City and the Baiji oil refinery. Coalition air strikes this weekend killed dozens of enemy fighters and destroyed weapons, equipment and supplies."

Iraqi Army Intends to Liberate Anbar Province

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

But in September 2015, it became obvious 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](#).
7. On 7 October, "The leader in al-Hashed al-Shaabi forces, Awas al-Khafaji[,] stressed on Wednesday [7 Oct], that the next few hours will witness the liberation of the city of Ramadi from ISIS control." [Iraqi News](#).

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.

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 U.S. Defense Secretary Carter said on 24 May 2015: the Iraqi army "showed no will to fight."

The delay in liberating Ramadi since mid-May 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.

October 2015: Ramadi

On 28 Sept 2015, the Taliban suddenly captured Kunduz, the capital of a province in Afghanistan. ([Associated Press](#)(blog); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).) Three days later, on 1 Oct 2015, the Afghani army counterattacked and liberated most of Kunduz. ([Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).) This quick liberation prevented the Taliban from entrenching in Kunduz. I suggest that this is an example of what the Iraqi army *should* have done when ISIL captured Ramadi on 17 May 2015. On 5 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Kunduz was returning to normal.

On 1 October, Col. Steve Warren, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve in Baghdad, spoke about the battle for Ramadi:

QUESTION: All right. Can you give us a sense about why Ramadi has been stalled for as long as it has been? The Iraqi campaign in Ramadi?

COL. WARREN: Sure. That — I'm glad you asked, because that's something I wanted to talk about a little bit.

So, Ramadi. You know, it's a hard fight. Ramadi has been a difficult fight. I tell you, I feel like we are coming out of what essentially was an operational pause. Throughout the course of the summer, several things stacked up to cause, essentially, an operational pause in the fight for Ramadi.

What happened? Well, there was tremendous environmental conditions, right. This was the hottest summer on record, temperatures in the — like, the 130s. And it's hard to fight in those conditions.

Of course, there was Ramadan, there was Eid. There were several things externally and environmentally, slowed the process.

But there was something else, too, and that's what I want to cover in a little more detail. And what we've seen is the enemy's way of war, is not exactly what we had seen here in Iraq, you know, in the early 2000s.

What ISIL is doing is — or certainly what they've done in Ramadi is really build a hard point. They've defended Ramadi almost in an early 20th century style, with belts of defenses, defensive belts.

Now, a lot of this is the use of improvised explosive devices, IEDs that they're using not the way we saw IEDs several years ago, which is an individual, almost a booby-trap explosive on the side of the road. Rather, they're using these IEDs almost as landmines, to create these minefields, which they can then cover with fire.

So, this is not what we trained the Iraqi army back in the earlier and middle 2000s to fight against. Right? We trained and built a counterinsurgency army. And this is much more of a conventional fight.

....

And I want to be clear. We are — every day, we are encouraging — strongly encouraging the general officers that we interact with, the government of Iraq officials that we interact with, the chain of command in the Iraqi military — we are all urging them to begin with the utmost haste to finish this fight in Ramadi. It's an important fight and it needs to be finished.

"Department of Defense Briefing by Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman Col. Warren via DVIDS in the Pentagon Press Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 1 Oct 2015.

On 9 October, the Iraqi Security Forces announced "More forces reached the suburbs of Ramadi city and became only 800 meters away from central Ramadi city." [All Iraq News](#). Then there was silence during the following week.

On 13 October, the Col. Steve Warren, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve in Baghdad, again spoke about the future liberation of Ramadi.

Iraqi ground forces recently trained and equipped by the coalition have been deployed around Ramadi in time for the decisive phase of this operation. We now believe that battlefield conditions are set for the ISF to push into the city.

....

What we've seen is good progress over the course of the last week to ten days, maybe two weeks. As I have told you before, progress — fighting had slowed down substantially over the summer for several reasons, environmental, which includes the extreme heat that was here, social, which includes the religious holidays that came up during the late part of the summer and some other factors.

All those factors are now beginning to — to fade away, and we're starting to see progress. Like I said, ISF has tightened their ring around Ramadi, they're approaching on several axis, and they've in fact made about 15 — 14 or 15 kilometers here in the last two weeks. So we're seeing movement. We're also seeing some better combined arms integration. We're seeing Iraqi F-16s providing direct support to maneuvering forces. We're seeing Iraqi forces approach these hardened obstacles that ISIL has placed around Ramadi in a more efficient way.

So I don't know that anything's holding them up, I think they're moving. We'd like to see them move as rapidly as possible. We believe that now a combination of the recent successes that they've had, along with the increased air power and increased ISR that we've allocated to the Ramadi fight, we believe that now is the time for a final push into Ramadi.

So we'll continue to encourage the Iraqis. The Iraqis are encouraged by their own success that they've had here recently, and we're going to continue to watch and see how this develops.

....

So, we estimate the enemy strength inside Ramadi to be somewhere between 600 and 1,000. It's difficult to get an exact count, but that's I think a good ballpark. Important to note that this is an enemy who's had time to dig in, establish some very hard defensive positions. There's trenches, there's berms, there's obstacles, there's what would amount to minefields created by placement of IEDs.

So it's a strong — it's a strong defense. It's a strong defense and it's going to take a very determined effort to break it. But we think the combination of coalition air power and ISF — we think they have the combat power to do just that.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via Teleconference in the Pentagon

Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 13 Oct 2015.

The [Associated Press](#) summarized Col. Warren's briefing: "conditions are now right for Iraq to launch a decisive assault on Ramadi and reclaim the provincial capital from Islamic State fighters".

On 21 October, Col. Warren again spoke about the future liberation of Ramadi:

In Ramadi, after advancing along multiple axes over several days, the ISF is consolidating and reorganizing their forces in preparation for continued offensive operations.

The ISF forces on the northern, southern and western axes have continued to move forward, clearing IEDs in sections of populated areas. Their progress has slowed from the beginning, several days ago, but they are still moving.

I'd also like to point out that ISIL forces in Ramadi have conducted several unsuccessful counter-attacks in recent days. Yesterday, for example, the enemy attempted a counter-attack along the western access. They used three VBIEDs, they used indirect fire and a ground assault, and they did this throughout the entire night.

Aided by coalition airstrikes, the ISF fought off these attacks and in the process destroyed a command and control node, struck a VBIED before the enemy was able to use it, and killed several enemy, of course.

In support of the fight for Ramadi, coalition forces have conducted 21 strikes since we last spoke. They've destroyed tactical units, fighting positions, supply caches, and two boats.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 21 Oct 2015.

On 28 October, Col. Warren spoke again about Ramadi:

COL. WARREN: In Ramadi, Iraqi security forces are conducting consolidation and reorganization operations on all five axis of attack. The ISF continue to face IEDs, counter-attacks spearheaded by VBIEDs and Iraqi forces have held the line.

Coalition forces have conducted 26 air strikes in Ramadi since we last spoke. These strikes have broken several enemy counter-attacks, and provides maneuver space as the ISF continues to clear obstacles and IED clusters.

....

QUESTION: And also, I had a question about Ramadi. It seems like you've been talking for weeks about the progress along the various axis and the explosive mine fields and so on. Do you have a timeline? Can you give us actually a better impression of when Ramadi is going to be re-taken?

COL. WARREN: Thanks. I can't and won't give you a timeline for when Ramadi will

be re-taken. You know, this is a tough fight, there's a lot of obstacles, there's a determined, dug-in enemy. So this fight is going to continue. I'm confident that Ramadi will be liberated, but I'm not going to predict a timeline. It's just, I try not to do that, because I always get it wrong.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference in the Pentagon Briefing Room from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#) 28 Oct 2015.

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 the first 25 days of September 2015, there were only 2 reports. The progress reports became sparse after 12 August 2015. In September 2015, it was 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, August, and September 2015, the U.S.-led Coalition continued airstrikes in and near Mosul, but there was no reported military action on the ground.

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."

October 2015: Mosul

On 5 October, [Rudaw](#) reported "An Iraqi military official says that the army's priority is to take the city of Ramadi from Islamist militants and that Mosul has been put on the backburner because they cannot run two battles simultaneously." Rudaw also says: "Among other reasons for the slow march north [toward Mosul] is that for months the army and Shiite militia have been bogged down in fierce battles in the town of Baiji and around Tikrit, brining their Mosul plans to a grinding halt."

Kurdish/U.S. Rescue Mission in Iraq

Around 11:00 EDT on 22 October 2015, journalists began to report that there had been a Kurdish rescue mission in northern Iraq, in which at least one U.S. soldier was killed. This mission is important for two reasons:

1. a U.S. soldier was killed — the first U.S. combat fatality in Iraq since November 2011 — and
2. it appears to be a broadening of the rules of engagement when U.S. Military personnel accompany Kurdish or Iraqi fighters in ground combat missions.

Reuters reports that the mission involved an attack on the night of 21 October by Kurds — plus "dozens" of U.S. personnel — on an ISIL prison, approximately 7 km north of the town of Hawija. Hawija is southwest of Kirkuk. The mission rescued 69 hostages from the ISIL prison, including approximately 20 members of the Iraqi security forces (i.e., army and federal police), some Arab citizens, and some ISIL members who were suspected of spying. Neither Kurds nor Americans were rescued from the ISIL prison. The mission was begun when intelligence indicated that ISIL planned to execute all of the hostages. The U.S. provided five helicopters and some troops for this mission. Apparently there were no intention for U.S. personnel to engage in combat, but ISIL directed "heavy fire" at the Kurds and U.S. helicopters, and then the U.S. personnel decided to return fire.

Sources:

- "No Kurds among hostages freed in joint US-Kurdish operation," [Rudaw](#), 22 Oct 2015.
- "Iraq rescue mission launched after word on imminent execution — Pentagon," [Reuters](#), 15:21 GMT, 22 Oct 2015.
- "No Kurds among hostages rescued in U.S. special forces raid in Iraq," [Reuters](#), 16:13 GMT, 22 Oct 2015.
- "Iraq rescue was 'unique' situation, not change in tactics — Pentagon," [Reuters](#), 18:24 GMT, 22 Oct 2015 (This mission "was a 'unique circumstance,' not a change in U.S. tactics in the war, the Pentagon said".).
- "U.S. commando killed in raid to free hostages of ISIS in Iraq," [Reuters](#), updated at 03:43 GMT, 23 Oct 2015 (gives details of mission).

On 22 October, the Pentagon released the following statement:

Early today in Iraq, at the request of the Kurdistan Regional Government, U.S. Special Operations Forces supported an Iraqi Peshmerga operation to rescue hostages at an ISIL prison near Hawijah, Iraq.

This operation was deliberately planned and launched after receiving information that the hostages faced imminent mass execution. It was authorized consistent with our counter-ISIL effort to train, advise, and assist Iraqi forces.

The U.S. provided helicopter lift and accompanied Iraqi Peshmerga forces to the compound. Approximately 70 hostages were rescued including more than 20 members of the Iraqi Security Forces. Five ISIL terrorists were detained by the Iraqis and a number of ISIL terrorists were killed as well. In addition, the U.S. recovered important intelligence about ISIL.

One U.S. service member was wounded during the rescue mission acting in support of Iraqi Peshmerga forces after they came under fire by ISIL. He subsequently died after receiving medical care. In addition, four Peshmerga soldiers were wounded.

On behalf of the men and women of the Department of Defense, we offer our sincere condolences to the family of the U.S. service member who was killed in this operation. The U.S. and our coalition will continue to work with our Iraqi partners to degrade and defeat ISIL, and return Iraq to the full control of its people.

"Pentagon statement on hostage rescue mission in Iraq," [CENTCOM](#), 22 Oct 2015.

The Pentagon press secretary gave a briefing on 22 October. Here is what was said about the rules of engagement for this mission.

QUESTION: Does that not violate the president's order — mandate that there be no U.S. boots on the ground, if they were involved in a direct combat mission?

MR. COOK: This was authorized by the secretary of defense specifically under our —

in our — our Operation Inherent Resolve mission, specifically the campaign to defeat ISIL through support to Iraqi security forces, which includes these Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

So it was within Operation Inherent Resolve that they were acting.

QUESTION: But they were involved in a direct combat mission, which would seem to violate the president's mandate — there will be no U.S. boots on the ground. I think everybody understands that would constitute U.S. boots on the ground.

MR. COOK: Jim, but they're — in that support role, they are allowed to defend themselves, and also defend partner forces, and to protect against the loss of innocent life. And that's what played out in this — in this particular operation.

They were there in that support role, and — again, acted under those circumstances.

....

QUESTION: is this a new phase of the way that the U.S. is going to conduct operations, with these small forces on the ground, alongside Iraqi forces?

MR. COOK: (Inaudible), I would not — wouldn't suggest you should look at this as some change in tactics on our part. This was a unique circumstance in which very close partners of the United States made a specific request for our assistance.

And there was a deliberate process to — to analyze this situation and the circumstances, and that's when the decision was made to — to move forward with this operation.

So I would not suggest that this is something that's going to now happen on a regular basis, but I — I do think it is symbolic of the — the kinds of efforts that we are taking on behalf of our partners, and — and the steps that we're willing to take in conjunction with our coalition partners in — in trying to address ISIL and the threat ISIL poses not only to us, but to our partner members as well.

....

MR. COOK: There were — there were — there were lives at risk here. This was a unique circumstance, a specific request from the Kurdistan regional government. And again, we acted and, thanks to the actions of not only the — the Iraqi forces involved here, but the U.S. forces, we — lives were saved.

And, again, this is a specific circumstance — a unique circumstance. But that's what took place in this instance, and — and unfortunately, there was a U.S. service member who lost their life in this operation, and there were others wounded.

But there are people now — again, there were people — hostages at the scene whose

lives were saved as a result of this operation.

....

QUESTION [by Barbara]: You have several times called this "unique" and "a mission to save lives". My question — couple of questions: if it is unique, then — and it's not happened before, how is this not, essentially, mission creep?

Advise and assist — you — we've asked many times, you — this building has told us that U.S. troops do not go outside their training areas, they do not engage in something that would take them into combat.

So my first question is how is this not mission creep? What was — sadly, ISIS has killed thousands of people. That is sadly not anything new. What was so worth it to risk U.S. military lives?

What specific benefit was there to national security that made it worth risking and knowing you were risking U.S. military lives?

MR. COOK: Okay. Again, Barbara, this was a support mission at the request of a partner — a close partner of the United States, and the forces — the U.S. forces that were brought to bear here were in that support role to try and save lives — hostages.

There was information, as I said, indicating that these lives were at risk. I can tell you that some of the debriefs that we've gotten, already, back indicate that not only had some people been executed recently at this facility, but that the people at this facility feared that their lives were in danger within a matter of hours. They could lose their lives.

That's some of the early indications we've gotten from some of the debriefs, from some of those people. So our forces acted, again, after this request from the Kurdistan regional government, and knowing that information that there were lives on the line.

QUESTION: Peter, what has changed that now you are putting U.S. troops into a position —

MR. COOK: Nothing has changed, Barbara. This is a — this was a support mission that we were asked to perform, and we carried out, and under the terms of this — under Operation Inherent Resolve, we are — we provide support —

QUESTION: — (inaudible) — had these requests before and turned them down? Have you had them and done them, and we don't know about them?

MR. COOK: This is — I can tell you about this particular circumstance, in which we were asked to participate from a loyal and close partner, and we responded to that request after assessing this situation and determining that this was an operation that merited our participation.

....

MR. COOK: This was in the national security interests of the United States because this is part of the larger effort against ISIL and to support those coalition members — those partners — who are in the fight with us and have asked for our help in this unique situation, in which the United States was able to provide specific assistance to further this operation.

....

QUESTION [by Carla?]: Which is — which is — I'm sorry, I'm — I'm uncertain what that is, because where does the line cross from "assisting" to being "boots on the ground"? Because somebody's being shot at.

MR. COOK: Well, in this instance, U.S. forces always have the right to defend themselves, and in this instance, they also have the ability to protect partner forces as well, and to protect against the loss of innocent civilian life, and that's what took place in this circumstance in particular.

....

MR. COOK: This is a unique situation. This particular instance in which we were asked for assistance from the Kurdistan regional government, and in this particular instance, the United States, after assessing the situation, the intelligence information we had, the lives on the line decided to take this action.

QUESTION [by Jim]: Can you say that U.S. forces had not been a similar situation before where they provided direct combat assistance?

MR. COOK: Jim, I'm not going to — our mission in Iraq is the train, advise and assist mission. This was a unique circumstance. And you've seen what our forces are doing in terms of the training in Iraq. We've got several locations where U.S. forces are training and assisting Iraqis along the way. They have the right to defend themselves, those U.S. forces, but this was a unique circumstance. And this particular situation is not something that has played out across Iraq previously.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Press Secretary Cook in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 22 Oct 2015. [some editing of transcript by Standler, to eliminate crosstalk, improve coherence]

My comment on 23 October is that Mr. Cook at the Pentagon denies there is a change in the rules of engagement. Mr. Cook stresses "unique circumstance", which suggests that U.S. ground combat in Iraq will *not* be common practice. Cook's reasoning that 70 lives were saved is classic "the end justifies the means." Despite the Pentagon's denials, this mission does seem to be either a change — or a violation — of the rules of engagement, so that U.S. soldiers are now in combat missions on the ground in Iraq, in violation of Obama's promise "no boots on the ground". I added this mission to my list of U.S. escalation in my HTML webpage on [Iraq](#).

Details were sketchy until about 19:00 GMT on 22 Oct.

At 19:57 EDT (23:57 GMT) on 22 Oct the [Associated Press](#) issued its final version of this news article.

At 21:13 EDT on 22 Oct (01:13 GMT on 23 Oct) [CNN](#) issued its final version of this news article. CNN revealed: "Mass graves dug inside the compound were spotted during surveillance, a U.S. official with direct knowledge of details of the raid told CNN. After the rescue, hostages said they had been told they would be executed after morning prayers [on 22 Oct]." CNN also reports "Thirty troops from Delta Force on an 'advise and assist role' participated in the raid when Kurdish 'Cobra' commandos were overwhelmed after entering the walled compound on their own".

My comment is that 30 U.S. soldiers seem to be many soldiers for a train-advise-assist combat mission. One would need 10 pilots and co-pilots for the 5 helicopters, leaving 20 advisors.

On 23 October, Defense Secretary Carter gave a press [conference](#) at the Pentagon, but he did *not* reveal any new facts about the mission. Surprisingly, journalists did *not* grill Carter about the rules of engagement, and there is *no* mention of "boots on the ground".

Intelligence on 22 October indicated that Kurds were present in the ISIL prison, which is why Kurdish forces wanted a rescue mission. But the Kurdish prisoners had been moved from that ISIL prison sometime before the rescue mission. [Reuters](#).

On 23 October, [McClatchy](#) newspapers published an account of the mission from the Kurdish perspective.

On 24 October, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government thanked the Americans, and praised the bravery of the dead U.S. soldier. [Rudaw](#). My comment is that — unlike the ungrateful Iraqis — the Kurds show gratitude toward the Americans.

On 24 October, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan reported the mission began at 02:00 local time on 22 Oct, using 48 Peshmerga and 30 U.S. Special Forces personnel. "Six helicopters — three Chinooks and three Black Hawks — took part in the operation." The mission ended at 04:00 local time.

Note that U.S. personnel composed 38% of the total personnel in this mission, which is a very large number of "advisers". That suggests to me that the U.S. part of this mission was intended to be more than advising.

On 27 October, U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter told the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that there would be more U.S. "raids" on ISIL, similar to the raid on the ISIL prison on 23 Oct and the U.S. raid on an Syrian ISIL office on 16 May 2015. [Pentagon](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that this is another step in the escalation of U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Syria.

On 28 October, NBC News reported that the Iraqi government did *not* want more U.S. raids like the one on 22 Oct.

The Iraqi government said Wednesday [28 Oct] it didn't ask for — and doesn't need — the "direct action on the ground" promised by the Pentagon.

.....

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's spokesman told NBC News that any military involvement in the country must be cleared through the Iraqi government just as U.S.-led airstrikes are.

"This is an Iraqi affair and the government did not ask the U.S. Department of Defense to be involved in direct operations," spokesman Sa'ad al-Hadithi told NBC News. "We have enough soldiers on the ground."

Cassandra Vinograd, "Iraq: We Didn't Ask for U.S. Ground Operations," [NBC News](#), 11:11 GMT, 28 Oct 2015.

Russian Airstrikes in Syria

My essay for [September 2015](#) chronicles in detail the arrival of Russian military equipment at an air base in Latakia and the first Russian airstrike on 30 Sep 2015.

On 1 October, the Russians conducted a second day of airstrikes in Syria. The Russians claim they attacked ISIL and Nusra in Idlib, Hama, and Homs provinces. But the rebels, Syrian National Coalition, SOHR, and U.S. Military all say Russia attacked U.S.-supported rebels. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [The Guardian](#). The [Washington Post](#) reports the Russian airstrikes hit rebels who were equipped by the CIA, and that ISIL was more than 160 km from the Russian airstrikes.

On 2 October, Russia conducted a third day of airstrikes in Syria. Again, Russia claimed it attacked only ISIL. France agreed that the Russian attack on Raqqa hit ISIL, but the Russian airstrikes in other places did *not* target ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). [Reuters](#) reports: "Russia bombed Syria for a third day on Friday [2 Oct], mainly hitting areas held by rival insurgent groups rather than the Islamic State fighters it said it was targeting, according to UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights." Later, [Reuters](#) reported the U.K. Defense Minister said that 95% of Russian airstrikes were hitting either civilians or the Free Syrian Army.

I comment that after three days of Russian airstrikes in Syria it is already becoming confusing about which targets were struck on which days. CENTCOM publishes daily press releases about the location of U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes, but there is no similar information for Russian airstrikes. Both the lack of detail and the conflicting information frustrate any chronicle about the Russian airstrikes.

On 3 October, Russia conducted airstrikes in Syria for the fourth consecutive day. Amongst other targets, Russia hit ISIL in Raqqa. Russia also struck Idlib province, where ISIL is

absent. [CNN](#). [RIA-Novosti](#) and [Reuters](#) at 15:02 GMT quote the Russian army as saying Russian airstrikes targeted more than 50 ISIL locations in the past three days.

On 3 October, Russian newsmedia were reporting large numbers of insurgents in Syria were fleeing from Russian airstrikes. [RIA-Novosti](#); [TASS](#). [TASS](#) quotes a Russian general: "There is panic and desertion among [ISIL's] ranks. Nearly 600 mercenaries have abandoned their positions and are making attempts to get out to Europe." My comment is, *if true*, that is good news for Syria and bad news for Europe. It could also be bad news for Russia, when Islamic terrorists flee from Syria and return home to Russia.

On 4 October, Russia conducted airstrikes in Syria for the fifth consecutive day. Russia claims to have hit 10 ISIL targets in Idlib province and also near Raqqa. [TASS](#); [Reuters](#).

The [New York Times](#) published maps showing the location of Russian and U.S. airstrikes in Syria from 25 Sep to 4 Oct. The map clearly shows that Russian airstrikes are concentrated in western Syria, far from areas controlled by ISIL. The *Times* article also mentions U.S. plans for the Syrian Arab Coalition to isolate the ISIL capital city of Raqqa, with U.S. airstrikes.

On 5 October, Russia claims to have hit 9 ISIL targets in Homs and Idlib provinces. [RIA-Novosti](#). [Reuters](#) tersely reported that approximately "20 Islamic State tanks and three artillery positions were destroyed in Homs province". The Associated Press did *not* report Russian airstrikes in Syria on 5 Oct.

On 5 October, [Russia Today](#) reports that an estimated 3000 terrorists have fled from Syria to Jordan, since the Russian airstrikes began on 30 Sep. The terrorists were members of either ISIL, Nusra Front, or Jaish al-Yarmouk. This announcement by the Russian military follows similar news stories on 3 Oct, reported above.

On 6 October, Russia claims to have hit 12 ISIL targets near Palmyra and Damascus, and additionally in Idlib and Deir Ezzor provinces. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 7 October, Russia claims its airplanes hit ISIL targets in Idlib and Hama provinces. The Russian Navy launched 26 cruise missiles at 11 targets in Syria on 7 Oct. The missiles were launched from 4 ships in the Caspian Sea and traveled 1500 km, including over Iran and Iraq, to reach their targets in Raqqa, Idlib, and Aleppo provinces. Together with the Russian airstrikes, Assad's army began a ground assault against rebels in Hama and Idlib provinces. [Reuters](#) (missiles); [Reuters](#) (ground assault); [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [SOHR](#); [TASS](#); [Russia Today](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). [Reuters](#) reports that Russian airstrikes had destroyed "the main weapons depots" in western Aleppo province of the Liwa Suqour al-Jabal, one group of CIA-trained rebels in the Free Syrian Army.

Incredibly, on 7 October, [RIA-Novosti](#) reports: "Around 40 percent of Islamic State infrastructure in Syria has been destroyed since Russia began its military operation in the country, Syria's Ambassador to Russia Riad Haddad told Sputnik on Wednesday [7 Oct]." More believably, [Russia Today](#) boasts that in 8 days of bombing, Russia has destroyed "19 command facilities, 2 communication centers", and "23 depots with fuel and ammunition", amongst a total of 110 targets. [TASS](#) reports a total of 112 targets hit in Syria

during 8 days.

On 7 October, U.S. State Department Spokesperson, John Kirby, said:

What our concern is is more about the impact that the [Russian] military activity is having inside Syria in terms of going after groups that are not ISIL and not al-Qaida affiliate terrorists. And greater than 90 percent of the strikes that we've seen them take to date have not been against ISIL or al-Qaida-affiliated terrorists. They've been largely against opposition groups, groups that want a better future for Syria and don't want to see the Assad regime stay in power.

....

What I can tell you is based on where we've seen [Russian airstrikes in Syria] hit, and we have many sources of information to gather this, certainly the great majority — greater than 90 percent — is not in ISIL territory and not against ISIL groups or units or activities.

"Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept](#), 7 Oct 2015.

On 8 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes against 27 ISIL targets in Homs, Hama, and Raqqa provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#) (uninformative); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 9 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes against 60 targets in Raqqa, Latakia, Idlib, Aleppo, and Hama provinces. [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 9 October, ISIL captured five or six villages near Aleppo, after Russian airstrikes. These victories by ISIL show that Russian airstrikes have *neither* caused ISIL to retreat *nor* defeated ISIL. [SOHR](#); [NY Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [BBC](#). On the morning of 10 Oct, [Reuters](#) again reported that ISIL was advancing on Aleppo. My comment is that Assad has attempted to seize Aleppo from jihadists and Nusra Front since May 2014. If ISIL captures Aleppo, it will be a major victory for ISIL.

My comment is that in only 10 days the Russians have already significantly exacerbated the Syrian civil war. By bombing the Free Syrian Army, the Russians have damaged the FSA, an organization that was fighting against ISIL (but the FSA is principally fighting against Assad). Further, the massive infusion of Russian military equipment into Syria might appear to Islamic militants to be a foreign invasion, thereby attracting more foreign fighters to ISIL in Syria. Additionally, Russian airstrikes near Raqqa will threaten U.S.-sponsored rebels (e.g., Syrian Arab Coalition) who are planning a ground attack on Raqqa, the capital city of ISIL.

On 10 October, the [Associated Press](#) reports that Russian airstrikes have attacked CIA-trained rebels in Idlib and Hama provinces. These rebels were fighting against Assad's army. The Associated Press article confirms what other sources had previously reported.

On 10 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 55 targets in Raqqa, Hama, Damascus, and Aleppo provinces. The Associated Press says targets in Idlib province were also hit. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 11 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 63 targets in Hama, Latakia, Idlib, and

Raqqa provinces. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 11 October, Liz Sly, writing in *The Washington Post* mentions that the large number of Russian airstrikes on CIA-supplied rebels (i.e., Free Syrian Army) is where the rebels have been using U.S. TOW anti-tank missiles against Assad's tanks. Assad's tanks are manufactured in Russia. No doubt Russia is displeased that rebels are destroying Russian-made tanks. Sly says: "It was no accident, say U.S. officials and military analysts, that the first targets of Russian airstrikes in Syria were the locations where the rebels armed with TOW missiles have made the most substantial gains and where they most directly threaten Assad's hold over his family's heartland in the coastal province of Latakia." My comment is that Sly's article is the best explanation that I have seen for why the Russians initially concentrated on attacking the Free Syrian Army, instead of attacking ISIL or Nusra Front — the genuine Islamic terrorists.

On 12 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 53 targets in Idlib, Latakia, Homs, and Hama provinces. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 13 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 86 targets in Raqqah, Hama, Idlib, Latakia, and Aleppo provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 14 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 40 targets in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Latakia, and Deir Ezzor provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 15 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 32 targets in Idlib, Hama, Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir Ezzor provinces. Both TASS and Reuters note that Russia had reduced the number of airstrikes per day since the high number on 13 October. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 16 October, the Russians did *not* report any airstrikes in Syria.

On 17 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 49 targets in Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, and Aleppo provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 18 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 51 targets in Latakia, Aleppo, Hama and Damascus provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 19 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 49 targets in Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, Idlib, and Latakia provinces. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 20 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 60 targets in Hama, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo, Idlib, and Deir Ezzor provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

Also on 20 October 2015, the U.S. and Russia signed an agreement on air safety in Syria, as described [below](#).

On 21 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 83 targets in Idlib, Aleppo, Deir Ezzor,

Damascus, and Hama provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 22 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 72 targets in Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Aleppo, Damascus, and Deir Ezzor provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 23-24-25 October, I looked at the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters, but there were no reports of Russians airstrikes in Syria on either 23, 24, or 25 Oct.

Russia reported a total of 934 sorties in Syria, which allegedly destroyed 819 ISIL targets in Syria, beginning 30 Sep and ending on 22 Oct. [RIA-Novosti](#), 22 Oct; [Russia Today](#), 23 Oct; [TASS](#), 24 Oct; [RIA-Novosti](#), 24 Oct; [Reuters](#), 24 Oct.

On 24 October, Russia was continuing airstrikes against the Free Syrian Army, according to commanders of the Free Syrian Army. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#) ("[Lt. Col. Ahmed] Saoud, ... who leads the 13th Division [of the FSA], added that Russia was still striking FSA positions.").

On 26 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 94 targets in Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo, and Deir Ezzor provinces. Over the past 3 days (i.e., 24, 25, 26 Oct), Russia claims airstrikes on a total of 285 targets in Syria, an average of 95/day. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#). Reuters reported there are neither ISIL nor Nusra Front fighters in Latakia, Idlib, and Hama provinces.

In contrast, the U.S.-led Coalition reported *one* airstrike in Syria on 23 Oct, and reported *zero* airstrikes in Syria on 24-25-26 Oct.

On 27 October, I looked at the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters, but there were no reports of Russians airstrikes in Syria on 27 October.

On 28 October, the Russians claimed airstrikes on 118 targets in the Idlib, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Damascus, and Latakia provinces. Reuters says the 118 targets were hit during two days. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 28-29 October, the U.S.-led Coalition reported *zero* airstrikes in Syria.

On 29-30-31 October, I looked at the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters, but there were no reports of daily Russians airstrikes in Syria.

On 29 October, Médecins Sans Frontières complained that airstrikes in Syria during October had hit at least 12 hospitals, killing at least 35 people, including hospital staff. Reuters suggests the airstrikes are by either Syria or Russia. [MSF](#); [Reuters](#). The [Associated Press](#) reports that MSF blames Russian airstrikes for killing 13 people on 20 October at a hospital in Sarmeen, Syria.

On 30 October, the Russian defense ministry claims to have destroyed a total of "1623 terrorist targets" beginning 30 September. [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 31 October, there were no reports from Russia on their airstrikes in Syria.

Russia vs. Free Syrian Army

On 1 October, the Russian foreign minister, Lavrov, declared that the Free Syrian Army is *not* a terrorist organization.

Russia does not consider the Free Syrian Army a terrorist group, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said during the press conference following the 70th UN General Assembly session.

"We don't consider the Free Syrian Army a terrorist group. We believe that the Free Syrian Army should be part of the political process, like some other armed groups on the ground composed of the Syrian patriotic opposition," Lavrov told reporters.

"This is absolutely necessary for the political process to hold and to be sustainable," he added.

"Russian FM Sergei Lavrov Holds Press Conference Following 70th UNGA Session," [RIA-Novosti](#), 1 Oct 2015.

I find Lavrov's statement remarkable, because the Free Syrian Army was founded in 2011 to fight against the Assad regime, but Russia supports the Assad regime. Moreover, many of the Russian airstrikes in Syria during 30 Sep to 7 Oct actually targeted the Free Syrian Army, although Russia *claimed* to be attacking ISIL.

On 1 October, Reuters reported the same remarks by Lavrov:

Lavrov said Russia's targets were those considered terrorists by the United Nations and by the Russian legal system, including Islamic State and the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front.

"This is the same position that the Americans are taking. The representatives of the (U.S.-led) coalition command have always said their targets are ISIL, al-Nusra and other terrorist groups. This is basically our position as well," he said.

Lavrov did not specifically deny that Russian planes had attacked Free Syrian Army facilities, but said: "We don't consider Free Syrian Army a terrorist group.

"We believe that the Free Syrian Army should be part of the political process, like some other armed groups on the ground composed of the Syrians' patriotic opposition individuals," Lavrov said.

Michele Nichols, "Russia says U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army not a terrorist group," [Reuters](#), 18:23 GMT, 1 Oct 2015.

On 5 October, Lavrov said Russia was willing to work with the Free Syrian Army.

Russia's Foreign Minister said Russia was willing to work with the Syrian opposition army to settle the crisis in Syria.

Moscow is prepared to set up contacts with the opposition's Free Syrian Army and have asked the United States for information on them, but so far Moscow has not received a response, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday [5 Oct].

"In any case, I asked [US Secretary of State] John Kerry to have [the United States] give us some sort of information of where the Free Syrian Army is and who's running it," Lavrov said.

"Lavrov Says Moscow Ready to Establish Contacts With Free Syrian Army," [RIA-Novosti](#), 10:00 GMT, 5 Oct 2015.

Then TASS reported that Lavrov was claiming ignorance about the Free Syrian Army. The Free Syrian Army and the moderate opposition in general remain a "phantom" group, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said, adding that Moscow has called on the US to explain what it is and where it is based.

"No one has told us where the Free Syrian Army operates or where and how the other units of the moderate opposition act," Lavrov said.

"We will even be ready to establish contact with it, if these are indeed efficient armed groups of the patriotic opposition that consist of Syrians," the foreign minister added.

So far, the Free Syrian Army remains a "phantom group," he said. "Nothing is known about it," Lavrov said.

Lavrov said he has asked US Secretary of State John Kerry to provide information on this group and its leadership.

"Russian Foreign Minister calls Free Syrian Army 'phantom' group," [TASS](#), 10:59 GMT, 5 Oct 2015.

On 5 October, [Russia Today](#) reported Lavrov said: The Americans "tell us about the Free Syrian Army, but where is it? It remains a phantom group, nothing is known about it". See also "Russian insider: Have a better plan for Syria? 'Give us some names'," [CNN](#), 5 Oct 2015, updated 14:47 GMT, 6 Oct 2015.

My comment is that Assad's government uses the word "terrorist" to refer to *anyone* who is fighting against the government, including the moderate rebels (e.g., Free Syrian Army), jihadists, Al-Qaeda (i.e., Nusra Front), and ISIL. Russia and the USA use the word "terrorist" to refer to Al-Qaeda and ISIL. It is possible that Assad's army gave the coordinates of Free Syrian Army positions to the Russian air force, and told the Russians "go bomb these terrorists". The Russians may have genuinely believed they were bombing ISIL, when in fact they were bombing the Free Syrian Army.

Alternatively, the Russian/Syria talk about "fighting terrorism" may be empty propaganda, and the *only* purpose of the Russian airstrikes in Syria — including deliberate attacks on the Free Syrian Army — may be to ensure the survival of Assad's government in the civil war.

Either way, the Russians are attacking the moderate rebels, who Western Europe and the USA hope will be the future of Syria.

On 5 October, the six days of Russian airstrikes against the Free Syrian Army led more than forty rebel groups to declare that they would attack Russian forces. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Syrian National Coalition](#).

My comment is the Russian military is better equipped and better trained than the rebels in Syria, so I would expect the Russians to slaughter the rebels.

After a massive bombing campaign that hit the Free Syrian Army — although the Russians *alleged* they only targeted ISIL — on 7 Oct Russia proposed to cooperate with the Free Syrian Army. *Russia Today* reported:

The Russian Defense Ministry is ready to assist Assad's military and the Free Syrian Army in uniting forces against Islamic State jihadists and other terror groups, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said.

In a statement Wednesday [7 Oct], Zakharova said that such diplomatic efforts are "based on the position voiced by Russia's president, Vladimir Putin," adding that Moscow will carry on with contacts with the "whole spectrum" of Syrian opposition.

Following Putin's orders, the Foreign Ministry is now also seeking to establish contacts with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) leadership to discuss the possibility of their involvement into the process of political settlement of the Syrian crisis.

....

[Putin] said, however, that Russia does not know where exactly the FSA is or who heads it.

"Moscow ready to establish contacts with FSA, help it unite forces with Assad against ISIS," [Russia Today](#), 7 Oct 2015.

See similar news at [RIA-Novosti](#).

My comment is that it would be much better for Russia to talk to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) *before* Russia bombed the FSA. However, it is well known that the FSA opposes Assad and Russia supports Assad, so cooperation between Russia and the FSA was always unlikely. This unlikely cooperation is especially unlikely after Russia repeatedly bombed the FSA.

On 8 October, RIA-Novosti published a provocative propaganda article. RIA-Novosti's summary says: "What the United States terms as a moderate Syrian opposition faction fighting against Syrian President Bashar Assad does not exist, and is being used by Washington to justify its support for extremists, experts told Sputnik on Thursday [8 Oct]." Part of this article says:

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday [5 Oct] that Moscow was ready

to establish contact with the Free Syrian Army, but that it currently appears to be a "phantom." He added Russia sent a request about the group to Washington.

Seyed Mohammad Marandi, a professor at the University of Tehran, said Washington knows exactly where the different extremist groups in Syria are located, but also that "the US knows quite well that there is no Syrian moderate opposition."

....

Seyed Marandi also noted that Washington's goal is to overthrow the government of democratically-elected President Bashar Assad, adding that the United States would go so far as to use jihadists to achieve their goals because Assad's fall is "more important [...] than the defeat of ISIL, the rise of which it both foresaw and tolerates."

"Syrian Moderate Opposition Myth Exists to Justify US Support for Extremists," [RIA-Novosti](#), 8 Oct 2015.

My comment is that RIA-Novosti quotes two Americans and one Iranian to support RIA-Novosti's conclusion that the U.S. Government is *not* fighting against ISIL. The fact that Obama's military campaign in Syria is inept and has failed to defeat ISIL does *not* imply a lack of sincerity by the USA. The U.S. failure in Syria is mostly due to the lack of a competent army on the ground in Syria who can coordinate with U.S. airstrikes. (The Kurds in Syria are competent, but the U.S. is reluctant to equip the Kurds, because of objections by Turkey.) Furthermore, just because the Free Syrian Army is disorganized, fragmented, amateurish, and lacks a central command does *not* imply that the FSA is a "phantom" that is a nonexistent fiction.

On 11 October, Liz Sly suggested (see [above](#)) that Russia concentrated airstrikes on the Free Syrian Army to stop the FSA from using U.S.-supplied anti-tank missiles against Russian tanks operated by Assad's army.

On 13 October, Lavrov whined that the USA refused to give locations of the Free Syrian Army to Russia. TASS reported an interview with Lavrov on the NTV television channel: According to the minister [Sergey Lavrov], Russia has received no information from the West about Syria's moderate opposition.

"No one has provided coordinates of the 'moderate opposition' to us. They used to tell about the Free Syrian Army, but it is still a ghostly organization," he said. "Now they are saying about the Democratic Forces of Syria alliance. We have taken a closer look at it to see that it has groups that previously collaborated with terrorists."

....

According to the diplomat [Lavrov], the United States keeps on evading contacts with Russia on coordination of anti-terrorist efforts.

"Subordinates of the US president are still refraining from it [coordination of anti-terrorist efforts]. At least, they are seeking to evade such coordination in contacts with

us," [Lavrov] said.

....

Lavrov added that Moscow, since the very beginning of the Russian Aerospace Forces' strikes in Syria, offered the United States and other members of the anti-terrorist coalition to come to an agreement on the targets of the military operation and the areas that should not be affected by it. "So far, we have received no answer," the Russian foreign minister said.

"Lavrov: Russia has no doubts US weapons supplies to Syria fall into hands of terrorists," [TASS](#), 10:03 GMT, 13 Oct 2015.

My comment is that, *if* the Pentagon had provided coordinates of the Free Syrian Army to Russia, then Russia would probably have bombed all of those coordinates.

On 24 October, Lavrov declared that Russia was ready to provide airstrikes to assist the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in their fight against ISIL. This is a really bizarre offer, because Russia has been "helping" the FSA by bombing the FSA for more than twenty days. The FSA rejected Russia's offer. [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 27 October, the Associated Press reported that after Russia "pounded" the Free Syrian Army with airstrikes, the Russians repeatedly offered to cooperate with the Free Syrian Army in the fight against "terrorists".

When Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said his country was ready to aid Syrian rebels fighting the Islamic State group, rebel commanders scoffed, pointing out that Russian aircraft were pounding their bases in central and northern Syria on a daily basis.

Moreover, Lavrov not long ago had ridiculed the main Western-backed rebels known as the Free Syrian Army, calling the group a "phantom structure."

But some in the Syrian opposition are wondering whether the Russian offer, for all its ambiguity, might be worth seizing in order to test Moscow's commitment to finding a negotiated solution to the four-year civil war. The seeming change of tune is in sharp contrast to the stance of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who considers all rebels on the ground to be terrorists.

....

Russia is signaling that it is willing to include rebel fighters in any unified Syrian military force to fight terrorism that might emerge from negotiations, [Retired Lebanese army Gen. Hisham] Jaber said. But Moscow also wants to underline to the U.S. and its allies how disunited the Free Syrian Army is and how difficult it is to negotiate with them. Still, with 25,000 to 30,000 fighters on the ground who claim affiliation with the Free Syrian Army, Russia knows they are a force to reckon with.

....

Jamil Saleh, the commander of the CIA-backed rebel faction Tajammu Alezzah, said the group's bases in central Hama have been pounded by Russian airstrikes every day since the campaign was launched on Sept. 30. Last week, an emissary of the Russians contacted him to arrange for a meeting in a third country. Saleh said he rejected the offer.

Sarah El Deeb, "Russia pounds Syrian rebels, then reaches out to opposition," [Associated Press](#) 21:39 GMT, 27 Oct 2015.

Conclusion for Russia vs. Free Syrian Army

The Russians are *not* stupid — surely the Russians know that the Free Syrian Army was created in 2011 to depose Assad. The Russian government supports Assad, which makes the FSA the enemy of Russia. So, one wonders *why* the Russians are continuing to suggest cooperation with the Free Syrian Army. I can suggest the following reasons:

- By saying that neither the USA nor Europe will identify the locations of the Free Syrian Army, the Russians can cast doubt on the existence of the Free Syrian Army and other so-called "moderate" rebels. See, e.g., Lavrov's 5 Oct remarks, quoted above, that the FSA was a "phantom group".
- Russia's offer to cooperate with the Free Syrian Army is a hoax, probably a pretext to obtaining information on the location of the Free Syrian Army, so Russia can more accurately bomb the Free Syrian Army.
- Russia offers cooperation, but the Free Syrian Army fails to reply. Russia can then claim that the Free Syrian Army is uncooperative.
- Lavrov asked Kerry for information on both the FSA and ISIL, which the U.S. failed to provide, so Lavrov says the U.S. Government is uncooperative in the fight against "terrorism".

In summary, the Russian offers of cooperation with the FSA is just another of the "big lies" that Russia is spewing, as discussed in the next section of this essay.

Russia's Big Lies

In daily news reports by Russian newsmedia (e.g., TASS, RIA-Novosti, Russia Today), the Russians report that their airstrikes "hit ## ISIL targets", where ## is a two-digit integer, depending on the day. (See news reports cited [above](#).) In this way, the Russians repeatedly state that that Russian airstrikes hit *only* ISIL targets.

By the middle of October, it was obvious that Russia had *repeatedly* made blatantly false statements that Russian airstrikes are targeting ISIL in Syria. This Russian statement is false, because nearly all of Russia's airstrikes occurred in locations far from where ISIL is located. (See 13 Oct map at the [Washington Post](#); also see the maps at the [NY Times](#), first posted on

29 Sep 2015 and last updated on 12 Oct.) The [Associated Press](#) on 20 Oct: "Russia has said its air campaign is aimed at helping the government defeat the IS group and other 'terrorists,' but many of the strikes have targeted Syrian rebels in areas where the extremist group is not present." And on 21 Oct, [Reuters](#) reported that "Almost 80 percent of Russia's declared targets [i.e., "named locations"] in Syria have been in areas not held by Islamic State, a Reuters analysis of Russian Defence Ministry data shows, undermining Moscow's assertions that its aim is to defeat the group."

Because of limited resources, Assad's army has concentrated its fighting in western Syria, where most of Syria's population lives. Assad's battleground stretches from Damascus north to Aleppo, through the provinces of Homs, Hama, and Idlib. The Russian airstrikes are heavily concentrated in the same area where Assad's army is fighting, especially Hama and Idlib. That is no surprise, because Russia was invited by Assad, and Russia is cooperating with Assad. Russia's cooperation with Assad means that most of the Russian airstrikes targeted either the Free Syrian Army or other insurgents (e.g., Nusra Front, jihadists) who are fighting against Assad's government.

While Russia claims to be fighting only against ISIL, ISIL is concentrated in northern and eastern Syria. Only a few airstrikes by Russia have been in ISIL territory (e.g., Raqqa).

Let me be clear. I am *not* criticizing Russia for supporting Assad. I am criticizing Russia for making repeated false statements about Russia fighting against ISIL, when Russia is really intervening in the Syrian civil war to support Assad. Russia is actually attacking *all* of the insurgents: rebels (e.g., Free Syrian Army), jihadists, Al-Qaeda (i.e., Nusra), but only rarely attacking ISIL.

In another big lie, Lavrov offered to cooperate with the Free Syrian Army, at the same time that Russian airstrikes were attacking the Free Syrian Army, as described [above](#).

In another big lie, on 12 October, Lavrov said: "We are interested in establishing coordination between the coalition, led by the United States and the countries of the Arab world, including the countries of the Persian Gulf, and our military, so that it's not only establishing rules to avoid incidents, but so that we could coordinate joint actions. Our colleagues from the coalition are not ready for this yet." [RIA-Novosti](#). But the fact is that on 7 October, Russia launched 26 cruise missiles that flew over Iraq without informing either Iraq or the U.S.-led Coalition. (See citations [below](#), between 13 and 14 Oct.).

In still another big lie by Russia, on 17 October, the Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, was interviewed by a television channel. TASS reported:

Russia is fighting in Syria not for some leaders, including President Bashar Assad, but for its own national interests. It will be the Syrian people, who will decide who will run the Syrian Arab Republic, Russia's Prime Minister said.

"Of course, we are fighting not for certain leaders, we are fighting for our own national interests, on one hand," he said recollecting the Russian president saying if the terrorists in Syria are not killed they would later on come to Russia. "And secondly — we have a request from the legal authorities; this is our position."

"It is not of major importance who will be running [Syria]," Medvedev said. "We do not want IS to be running the Syrian Republic, don't we? Right? That should be civilised, legitimate power."

Medvedev replied in the negative to the question if it matters for Russia Bashar Assad remains at power.

"Now," he said. "Who will be the leader of Syria is an issue to be decided by the Syrian people," he said.

"Our current position is that the legitimate president is Assad," Medvedev said. "Medvedev: Russia open for dialogue with U.S. on Syria," [TASS](#), 17 Oct 2015.

[Reuters](#) summarized: "The aim of Russia's military operation in Syria is not to keep President Bashar al-Assad in power but to defeat Islamic State militants, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said". [RIA-Novosti](#) summarized: "The goal of Russia's air campaign in Syria is not to protect President Bashar Assad, but to fight terrorists, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said on Saturday [17 Oct]."

My comment is that, *if* defeating ISIL were the goal of Russia, then most of the Russian airstrikes would be targeting ISIL. There can be no doubt that Russia is currently propping up the Assad regime. And with Russia's large military presence on the ground in Syria, Russia is well positioned to influence the selection of the next president of Syria.

In conclusion, after these false statements by Russia became apparent, there is no reasonable basis for either the Free Syrian Army or the U.S.-led Coalition to trust the Russians. And that means it will be very difficult for the U.S.-led Coalition to cooperate with the Russians.

Russian Soldiers in Syria?

On 27 September 2015, Putin was clear that the Russian army would *not* be fighting alongside Assad's army in Syria. In an interview by CBS News, the following exchange occurred:

Charlie Rose: Are you prepared to put Russian combat troops on the ground in Syria if it's necessary to defeat ISIS?

President Putin: Russia will not participate in any troop operations in the territory of Syria or in any other states. Well, at least we don't plan on it right now. But we are considering intensifying our work with both President Assad and with our partners in other countries.

Charlie Rose, "All eyes on Putin," [CBS News](#), 27 Sep 2015.

On 5 October, Reuters reported that Russia was considering sending "volunteers" to fight on the ground in Syria.

Russian volunteers who have honed their combat skills in Ukraine are likely to travel

to Syria to fight alongside the forces of President Bashar al-Assad, Admiral Vladimir Komoyedov, the head of the Russian parliament's defence committee, said on Monday [5 Oct].

"It is likely that groups of Russian volunteers will appear in the ranks of the Syrian army as combat participants," Komoyedov told the Interfax-AVN news agency.

....

Interfax-AVN quoted unnamed media reports as saying that such volunteers could make \$50 per day.

Andrew Osborn, "Russian volunteers likely to fight in Syria, says senior lawmaker," [Reuters](#), 11:04 GMT, 5 Oct 2015.

This news received much attention in the USA: [NY Times](#); [Voice of America](#); [Bloomberg](#); [Washington Post](#); all on 5 Oct 2015.

My comment is that Russian troops guarding a Russian airbase in Syria is *not* different from U.S. troops guarding either U.S. training facilities in Iraq or the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. But Russians fighting alongside Assad's military would be a serious escalation of the Syrian civil war. Like all so-called "information" coming from Syria or Russia, one must ask "Is this report true?" And we do *not* know at this time.

One can argue over the distinction between Russia sending its professional army and Russia sending so-called "volunteers" (i.e., mercenary soldiers). With the volunteers, Russia at least allows — and maybe actively supports — their arrival and operations in Syria.

On 6 October, the Russian Foreign Ministry denied that Russia was recruiting "volunteers" to fight in Syria. [TASS](#).

On 6 October, Reuters tersely reported:

Russia is not conducting operations in Syria involving its own ground troops and will not do so, Admiral Vladimir Komoyedov, the head of the lower house of parliament's defence committee, said on Tuesday [6 Oct], according to the RIA Novosti news agency.

Komoyedov, who on Monday 5 Oct] had said it was likely that Russian volunteers would travel to Syria to fight there, was also quoted as saying that Russia was blocking any attempts by its citizens to fight on either side in the Syrian conflict.

"Russia is not and will not launch infantry operations in Syria, says senior lawmaker," [Reuters](#), 10:23 GMT, 6 Oct 2015.

On 11 October, Putin himself said that Russia would *not* send soldiers for ground operations in Syria. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#); [Pravda](#), [Reuters](#), and [Al-Arabiya](#) said Putin also clarified that Russia does not see a difference between Sunni and Shiite groups, and that Russia wants to avoid being involved in a sectarian civil war.

- [Pravda](#) ("... Putin stressed out that the Kremlin did not make a difference between

Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims and had no intention to get involved in inter-religious conflicts.").

- [Reuters](#) ("Russia does not want to get involved in an inter-religious war in Syria, news agency Interfax cited President Vladimir Putin as saying on Sunday [11 Oct]. Putin said Russia does not see a difference between Sunni and Shi'ite groups, Interfax reported,").
- [Al-Arabiya](#) ("[Putin] also said Russia does not want to get involved in an inter-religious war in Syria. He also explained that Russia does not see a difference between Sunni and Shiite groups.").
- [TASS](#) ("In the mission in Syria Russia is not taking part in the conflict between Shiites and Sunnis.").

My comment is that, by repeatedly bombing the Free Syrian Army, Russia has already strongly intervened in the sectarian civil war in Syria.

On 14 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported that an anonymous "regional official" says that in October 2015, Iran sent 1500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards to fight in Syria. Obviously, Iranian soldiers are distinct from Russian soldiers, but since the secret meeting in July 2015 between Putin and Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, there has been close cooperation between Russia and Iran in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 27 October, [Reuters](#) reports General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said: "In Syria, we think the numbers are probably something less than 2,000 [Iranian troops]."

De-Conflicting Airstrikes in Syria

On 1 October (Thursday), there was an hour-long videoconference between U.S. and Russian defense officials about deconflicting airstrikes in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

De-conflicting was reported on 7 October, as U.S.-led Coalition airplanes were re-routed at least once to space them further from Russian airplanes in Syria. In one case, two F-16 jets aborted a bombing mission, to avoid Russian aircraft. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On 10 October, the U.S. and Russia had their second video conference on de-conflicting air flights over Syria. (The first conference was on 1 Oct.) [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).

On 13 October, the U.S. Military said Russian and U.S. airplanes "came within visual identification range over Syria". [Reuters](#).

This incident on 10 October shows the need to de-conflict the airspace. A press briefing by Col. Warren at the [Pentagon](#), tersely said the aircraft were "close enough for them to get

some visual contact, but it was — they were miles apart." On 14 Oct, [TASS](#) reported: "A Russian fighter jet approached a US aircraft on October 10 to identify it rather than to scare it".

Back on 7 October, Russia launched cruise missiles that flew over Iraq, but Russia notified *neither* Iraq *nor* the U.S. in advance. [Washington Post](#). Col. Warren (citation in previous paragraph) called that failure to notify a "case of reckless and indiscriminate conduct by the Russians."

On 14 October, the U.S. and Russia had a third videoconference about de-conflicting the Syrian airspace. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 20 October 2015, the U.S. and Russia signed an agreement with the long title: "The Memorandum of Mutual Understanding between the Defense Ministries of Russia and the United States on preventing incidents and providing for aviation flights during operations in Syria". Note that the U.S. Government is calling this agreement "air safety" and *not* "de-conflicting". The act of "de-conflicting" apparently involves more coordination — and possible cooperation with Syrian air traffic controllers — than the U.S. desires. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 20 October, there was a briefing by the Press Secretary at the Pentagon.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Today, senior officials from the Department of Defense and the Russian Ministry of Defence signed a memorandum of understanding [MOU] regarding measures to minimize the risk of in-flight incidents between coalition and Russian aircraft operating in Syrian airspace.

With today's signatures, the MOU is now in effect. The MOU includes specific safety protocols for air crews to follow. These protocols include maintaining professional airmanship at all times, the use of specific communication frequencies and the establishment of a communication line on the ground. The U.S. and Russia will form a working group to discuss any implementation issues that follow.

The MOU does not establish zones of cooperation, intelligence sharing or any sharing of target information in Syria. The discussions through which this MOU has developed do not constitute U.S. cooperation or support for Russia's policy or actions in Syria. In fact, far from it. We continue to believe that Russia's strategy in Syria is counterproductive and their support for the Assad regime will only make Syria's civil war worse.

The United States will continue to focus on advancing our interests in Syria. We will continue our efforts to go after ISIL, which poses a threat to us and the international community.

We will continue to support a moderate opposition that is essential for a political resolution in Syria. We will continue to be the single largest donor in addressing the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria and beyond its borders. Unlike Russia, in those efforts we are joined by a coalition of 65 partners.

So that is the latest with regard to the memorandum of understanding with Russia. And again, that was signed a short time ago earlier today.

And with that, happy to take some questions.

....

[There will be a communication line on the ground between the U.S.-led Coalition and the Russians, as a "backup", in case air-to-air communication fails. Also, the Russians requested that the text of the MOU *not* be publicly released.]

QUESTION [by Barbara]: While the negotiations or discussions were going on with the Russians about this agreement, they flew within 500 feet, on one occasion, and within 1500 feet of U.S. fighter jets over Syria.

So if they want flight safety, and yet they're flying within 500 feet of U.S. aircraft, what makes you believe you can trust them?

MR. COOK: Well, Barbara, I think you just highlighted why we need this kind of agreement in place. Our air crews continue to fly in a professional fashion, and this agreement, now — this understanding obligates the — the Russians to do the same, and we — again, call on them to abide by the protocols that they have now agreed to.

And what you just described would not — would not reflect the professional airmanship that — that this understanding now calls for.

Q: What does it say, that they're doing that even as they're negotiating or discussing flight safety with you, and yet, at the very same time, flying within 500 feet of U.S. aircraft and U.S. pilots over Syria? What's that say about their trustworthiness to you?

MR. COOK: What it says to me is that the Russians need to abide by these flight safety protocols that they've now agreed to, because we don't want miscalculation and misunderstanding. The kinds of activities you just described could lend themselves to misunderstanding and to miscalculation, and that's certainly something we want to avoid.

We do not agree with the Russians on their strategy in Syria. At a minimum, we can agree with them on the safe operations of flights over Syria between our air crews and theirs.

....

QUESTION: Peter, does this [MOU] apply to drones as well?

MR. COOK: Yes, this covers both.

Q: And drone-on-drone?

MR. COOK: This covers all aircraft over Syria operated by Russia and the coalition.

....

MR. COOK: Lucas, the fact that we have had to resort to a memorandum of understanding here to try and work out what should be — you know, standard protocol over Syria — it gives you an indication of our concern about Russia's activities, but our willingness to — to work with the Russians when it's — it's in our own interest, and that's what's happening here.

We are looking to the Russians to abide by these protocols to ensure safe flight operations over Syria. But let me reaffirm once again, this is a narrow understanding with the Russians dealing with a very specific issue.

Russia's larger efforts in Syria — their strategy there — we've been quite clear — the secretary's been quite clear. We don't agree with what they're doing. And that has not changed.

We can agree, on this limited basis, to try and promote the safety of our air crews over Syria, and — and again, that's — that's where things stand with — with Russia. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 20 Oct 2015.

Above, Mr. Cook at the Pentagon said "We don't agree with what [the Russians are] doing. And that has not changed." Over at the U.S. State Department, Spokesperson John Kirby said similar words in his daily press briefing.

QUESTION: So the Pentagon has just confirmed that they've signed a de-confliction agreement, or at least they've agreed a memorandum — I'm not sure exactly the form of words — with Moscow on the flights in Syria. We'll go to them for the details of that, but does this — and in parallel to this — Secretary Kerry's been pushing his colleague Mr. Lavrov on the political side of things. Now that the military side of things is out of the way, is that — does that bring that a step closer or does that take the pressure off? Does this have any effect on the way things are being pursued from this office?

MR KIRBY: It's not going to change his focus on trying to move forward towards a political transition in Syria and to continue to have discussions with Foreign Minister Lavrov to that end. In fact, I just talked about some of the meetings we expect him to have on this upcoming trip for the remainder of this week.

If it's — and again, I'll let the Pentagon speak to the specifics of it, but obviously, if it's fully implemented and Russia abides by what they've agreed to, that will at least ensure the safety of coalition pilots. And that's really what this is designed to do. It's not a treaty of cooperation or anything like that. In fact, I think the Pentagon was crystal clear what it doesn't do. It doesn't connote cooperation or coordination or joint

targeting. It simply is designed to keep coalition pilots safe in the air and to ensure safe and professional conduct by all.

....

MR KIRBY: Well, I can't speak for how the Russians are going to take it in terms of what they think it frees them up to do. Nothing has changed about our position that there can't be a military solution to the civil war in Syria. And if you take a look at the targets they continue to hit and the support they're giving to the Syrian regime on the ground, it can only leave one to conclude that they are intent on propping up the Assad regime, which is only going to exacerbate the conflict, inflame sectarian tensions, and lead to more extremism there and elsewhere in the region. So I don't — I mean, I don't think you're asking this, but let me just state unequivocally: The signing of this memorandum, while important to safe and professional airmanship, does nothing to assuage our concerns about Russian military activities in Syria.

"Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept.](#), 20 Oct 2015.

On 21 October, Col. Warren, the Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman in Baghdad, said: Yesterday [20 Oct], as you know, still on Syria, we signed a memorandum of understanding with Russia regarding measures to minimize the risk of in-flight incidents. This MOU is currently in effect. It does not establish zones of cooperation. It does not establish intelligence sharing or any type of target information. This MOU includes safety protocols for air crews, and that's it.

....

And I think it would also cause us to have to, you know, really examine exactly, you know, what we're doing. You know, the Russians have been indiscriminate, they've been reckless in Syria, they seem to have no difficulty dropping cluster munitions around where civilians may be. They do not appear to be — based on their actions, they do not appear to be interested in defeating ISIL, they appear to be interested in preserving the Assad regime. So that — you know, that's problematic.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 21 Oct 2015.

Russian intervention in Iraq?

On 25 September 2015, Russia, Iran, Syria, and Iraq agreed to create an office in Baghdad for sharing intelligence about the fight against ISIL.

On 1 October, Lavrov said: "We are not planning to expand our airstrikes to Iraq. We were not invited, not asked." [TASS](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#) in Turkey.

My comment is that if Russia has no intention to conduct airstrikes in Iraq, then the Russian intelligence sharing office should be somewhere in Syria (e.g., Damascus or at the Russian airbase near Latakia). Putting the office in Baghdad makes it convenient for the Russian and

Iranian air forces to coordinate airstrikes in Iraq. And the office in Baghdad is also a thorn in the side of the USA, reminding the U.S. that the U.S.-relationship with the Iraqi government is *very fragile*.

On 1 October, FRANCE24 interviewed Abadi in New York City. Abadi suddenly welcomed Russian airstrikes in Iraq and also criticized the allegedly inadequate airstrikes provided by the U.S.-led Coalition.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi told FRANCE24 in an exclusive interview broadcast on Thursday [1 Oct] that he is open to allowing Russia to carry out air strikes against Islamic State group militants in Iraq.

"Not yet. It is a possibility. If we get the offer, we will consider it," Abadi told FRANCE24.

....

Abadi told FRANCE 24 on the sidelines of the annual United Nations General Assembly, "We were expecting the international coalition, Americans to bring massive air power to protect our forces.

"We haven't received that. At the moment we are getting support, but it's not major, it's limited. What matters for us is how best to fight Daesh (the Islamic State group)", the prime minister said.

"Iraq PM open to Russian airstrikes on Islamic State militants," [FRANCE24](#), 1 Oct 2015.

See also [Reuters](#), 1 Oct; [Washington Post](#); [Rudaw](#); [Reuters](#), 2 Oct.

[Reuters](#) reported: "But diplomats and officials said Abadi may use the growing Russian presence as leverage against the Americans as he seeks more weapons from Washington."

Abadi's welcoming Russians bombing ISIL in Iraq may be the invitation that the Russians have been awaiting.

My comment is that Abadi criticism of the alleged inadequacy of U.S. airstrikes in Iraq is just a cheap excuse to deflect blame from the cowardly and incompetent Iraqi army that has repeatedly failed to defeat ISIL. Abadi is ungrateful and disloyal to the U.S.-led Coalition that has stalemated the ISIL conquest of Iraq. And is Abadi really stupid enough to welcome Russia bombing Iraqi cities into rubble? After the Russians depart, Iraq will be unable to afford to rebuild those cities. During the last ten years, Iraq has not been able to build water purification and sewage treatment plants, to prevent repeated cholera epidemics.

On 7 Oct, Russia said it had *not* received any formal request for airstrikes in Iraq. However, Hakim al-Zamili, in the Iraqi parliament, continues to clamor for Russian airstrikes in Iraq. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [Russia Today](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Iraqi News](#). (See my [September 2015](#) essay for a 29 September statement by al-Zamili.)

I wonder if the U.S. is increasing the number of airstrikes in Iraq, in order to persuade Abadi *not* to invite Russian airstrikes in Iraq. To answer that question, I compare the average

number of airstrikes in Iraq reported during 1-15 August 2015 (i.e., before the Russian build-up in Syria) with the average number of airstrikes in Iraq reported on 8 days from 30 Sep to 7 Oct. In the first half of August, there were 16.5 airstrikes/day, while during early October, there were 18 airstrikes/day, probably not a significant difference. (I am *not* doing formal statistical hypothesis testing, because the number of airstrikes on each day is *not* random.)

On 7 October, a journalist asked John Kirby, the U.S. State Department's spokesperson, to comment on the public views of Zamili and Abadi welcoming Russian airstrikes in Iraq.

Well, as I understand it, this is a member of parliament that is not speaking for the Abadi government. And I have not — Prime Minister Abadi said himself, I think a few days ago, that while he would be willing to have a discussion with Russia about support against ISIL, that it can't be independent and it has to be part of an integrated coalition effort against ISIL. But as far as I know, we've seen no reaction by the Iraqi Government to this particular claim. And so until we do, I'm simply not going to entertain hypotheticals about it.

....

I haven't seen an indication that Iraq is turning to Russia in this fight. You have one individual saying that he wants this. And you're right, but you only read half of what Abadi said: He would welcome it, but it had to be integrated inside the larger coalition. And what coalition is he talking about? The 63-member coalition that the United States is leading.

Now, I'm not going to get into military matters from this podium about what or what is not happening operationally on the ground inside Iraq, but I think, if you look at the last year — let me finish, please. If you look at the last year, we have been very supportive of Prime Minister Abadi's government, both his efforts against ISIL and his leadership efforts, which have been notable in terms of forging ahead to form a government that is inclusive and participatory and representative of all Iraqis. And he's made some important decisions, and again, we continue to want to support and to see him succeed.

So our support to the Iraqi Government is unshakable and it will remain unshakable as we continue to go after this very deadly enemy.

John Kirby, "Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept](#), 7 Oct 2015.

My comment is that after reading Mr. Kirby's remarks, I went back and reread the above-quoted FRANCE24 news story. The FRANCE24 story does *not* mention any condition of Russian joining the U.S.-led Coalition. The Reuters story on 1 Oct also does *not* mention this condition. I have not seen a transcript of the entire interview.

On 8 October, John Kirby recognized that Iraq was a sovereign nation and they could make their own decisions. Kirby's answer was in response to a question about the office in Baghdad to share intelligence between Iraq, Russia, Iran, and Syria.

Here's what I'd say. I haven't seen those comments, so rather than address the opinion expressed here — because I had not seen that — here's how I would speak to this: Number one, Iraq is a sovereign country, and I know some people don't like to

continue to think of it that way because we had such a long presence in Iraq, but it's a sovereign nation. And as a sovereign nation, it has every right and responsibility to have relationships with neighbors and even countries that aren't neighbors.

And Prime Minister Abadi has reached out in the region and beyond, as you would expect him to do. He has a very serious threat inside his country — ISIL — that he is trying to grapple with at the same he's trying to make important political and economic reforms in his country. So number one, it's a sovereign country and they have the right to reach out and have relationships.

Number two, a relationship with Russia is not new for Iraq. They've had a long security relationship with Russia, to include the provisions of arms material, equipment, military capabilities, as well as some measure of information sharing — call it intel, call it information, but there's been a relationship in the past. And that he would continue to try to improve his information-sharing capability inside his country when he's facing such a dire threat, I think, is for him to speak to. But it's not completely out of the realm of what you would consider normal for a leader in his position.

....

But ultimately, who Iraq has relationships with and how those relationships are managed is up for the Iraqi people to determine and for Prime Minister Abadi to execute.

John Kirby, "Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept](#), 8 Oct 2015.

My comment is that it is critically important to recognize that Iraq is *not* a puppet state of the U.S. As Kirby said, Iraq is a sovereign nation that can make its own decisions. But, I would suggest that if Iraq makes cooperation with the U.S. too difficult, then the U.S. should cease aiding Iraq.

On 13 October, Hakim al Zamili announced that Iraq has used information from the new Russian/Iran/Iraq/Syria intelligence-sharing cell to target ISIL inside Iraq. [All Iraq News](#); [Reuters](#).

On 14 October, [Reuters](#) reports that the Russian foreign minister, Lavrov, said that only Syria had requested direct military support from Russia, although Russia was following the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. I wonder if Lavrov is disappointed that Abadi has *not* requested Russian airstrikes in Iraq. I wonder if the U.S. Government strongly directed Abadi *not* to request Russian airstrikes in Iraq.

On 20 October, the new Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, visited Baghdad. The Associated Press reported:

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the Iraqis promised they will not request any Russian airstrikes or support for the fight against Islamic State militants.

Shortly after leaving Baghdad, Dunford told reporters traveling with him that he laid

out a choice when he met with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi earlier Tuesday [20 Oct].

"I said it would make it very difficult for us to be able to provide the kind of support you need if the Russians were here conducting operations as well," Dunford said. "We can't conduct operations if the Russians were operating in Iraq right now."

He said there was "angst" in the U.S. when reports surfaced that al-Abadi had said he would welcome Russian airstrikes in Iraq. The U.S., Dunford said, "can't have a relationship right now with Russia in the context of Iraq."

....

Dunford also said Iraqi leaders told him that the planned intelligence coordination center operated by the Russians and Iranians in Baghdad hadn't done anything yet. Robert Burns & Lolita C. Baldor, "Russia, US agree on Syria; Iraqis won't seek Russian strikes," [Associated Press](#), 20:59 EDT, 20 Oct 2015.

Reuters reported the same information:

U.S. Marine General Joseph Dunford, on his first trip to Iraq since becoming chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Oct. 1, said Abadi and Iraqi Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi both told him they were not seeking Russia's help.

"I said it would make it very difficult for us to be able to provide the kind of support that you need if the Russians were here conducting operations as well," Dunford told a small group of reporters traveling with him after his talks.

"Both the minister of defense and the prime minister said: 'Absolutely.' There is no request right now for the Russians to support them, there's no consideration for the Russians to support them, and the Russians haven't asked them to come in and conduct operations."

Dunford also played down a much-touted Baghdad-based intelligence-sharing cell between Russia, Iran, Syria and Iraq, which has stoked questions about Moscow's intentions in Iraq.

....

But Obeidi, Dunford said, told him during closed-door talks in Baghdad that the intelligence cell so far "hasn't stood up." "He said they have not done anything right now," Dunford said.

Phil Stewart, "U.S. general wins assurance Iraq will not seek Russia air strikes," [Reuters](#), 00:12 GMT, 21 Oct 2015.

My comment is that Obeidi on 20 October contradicted the head of the Iraqi parliament's defense committee, Hakim al Zamili, on 13 October about the intelligence-sharing cell in Baghdad. It may be that Abadi's government is in conflict with Hakim al Zamili. But I believe it is more likely that Abadi's government told Dunford what Dunford wanted to hear,

because on 1 Oct Abadi publicly declared he welcomed Russian airstrikes in Iraq.

Sometime during 11-17 October, the largest coalition of political parties in the Iraqi parliament (i.e., National Alliance) asked Abadi to request Russian airstrikes in Iraq. On 21 October, leaders of Shiite militias in Iraq asked Abadi to request Russian airstrikes in Iraq. Sources on 21 October 2015:

- "Iraq's ruling alliance, militias urge PM to seek Russian strikes," [Reuters](#) (quoted below).
- "Shi'ite Militia Leaders Urge Abadi to Request Russian Airstrikes," [BAS News](#) in Kurdistan, (Badr Brigade official Muen al-Kadhimi: "I am positive that the government will respond to pressures, especially after the official mandate of the National Alliance for prime minister Abadi to request Russia's participation.").
- "Iraqi groups call on premier to seek Russian anti-terror airstrikes," [PressTV](#) in Iran, ("I am positive that the government will respond to pressures, especially after the official mandate of the National Alliance for Prime Minister Abadi to request Russia's participation," Kadhimi [a senior figure of the Badr Brigade militia] said.).
- "Iraq Alliance, Mobilization Forces Urge Abadi to Seek Russian Strikes," [Al-Manar TV](#) in Lebanon.
- "Iraqi Parliament to Vote on Request for Russian Airstrikes," [RIA-Novosti](#), ("Iraq's parliament is planning to vote to request support from Russia in fighting the Islamic State (ISIL) by the end of the month, a member of the State of Law Coalition told Sputnik on Wednesday [21 Oct]. The legislator also told Sputnik that the vote is expected to pass with majority support.").
- "Iraq Moves to Exclude US from Anti-ISIL Campaign," [FARS](#) in Iran, ("... on Tuesday [20 Oct], [Member of Iraqi parliament] al-Rubaie underlined the necessity for replacing Washington with Moscow for joint war on terrorist groups.").
- "Iraq's MPs urge authorities to ask Russia for help in anti-IS fight," [TASS](#), ("Baghdad needs to replace the United States with Russia for joint fight against terrorist groups, Iraq's former national security adviser, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, has said in an interview with Fars News Agency.").
- "Iraq's ruling bloc wants Russian airstrikes, politician tells RT 'lack of trust' between Iraq & US," [Russia Today](#), (Saad Al-Matlabi, a member of the country's State of Law Coalition: "One could question the honesty and integrity of the US airstrikes.").

On 21 October 2015, Reuters reported:

Iraq's ruling alliance and powerful Shi'ite militias have urged Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to request Russian air strikes on Islamic State militants, who control large parts of the country, members of the coalition and militias told Reuters.

Growing pressure on Abadi to seek Russian support puts him in the delicate position of

trying to appease his ruling coalition, as well as militias seen as a bulwark against Islamic State, while keeping strategic ally Washington on his side.

....

Two members of parliament said the prime minister was under "tremendous pressure" from the ruling National Alliance to request Russian intervention.

Iraq received over \$20 billion in U.S. military training since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 but its army virtually collapsed when Islamic State fighters swept through the north last year and made gains in the west.

....

MPs and alliance members said an official request for Russian air strikes was relayed to Abadi last week [11-17 Oct] and that he has not officially responded.

"Abadi told the meeting parties that it wasn't the right time to include the Russians in the fight because that would only complicate the situation with the Americans and could have undesired consequences even on long-term future relations with America," said a senior Shi'ite politician close to Abadi.

Abadi's spokesman said he has not discussed air strikes with Russia. At the same time he was "not ruling out any side that could provide support to Iraq," Saad al-Hadithi [Abadi's spokesman] said.

Ahmed Rasheed & Saif Hameed, "Iraq's ruling alliance, militias urge PM to seek Russian strikes," [Reuters](#), 18:58 GMT, 21 Oct 2015.

My comment is that Abadi will probably soak up a few more billion dollars in U.S. aid to Iraq, then Abadi will perfidiously agree to Russian airstrikes in Iraq. At that time, a frustrated U.S. Government may abandon Iraq and Syria, leaving our allies in the Middle East to deal with the Russian/Iranian military presence.

Also on 21 October, [TASS](#) reported that the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mikhail Bogdanov, said that Iraq had *not* asked Russia for airstrikes. He said: "We are going to study the request very carefully if we receive it. There is nothing to talk about now." Above, I mention similar remarks by Lavrov on 14 October, as the Russians wait for the Iraqis to reject the benevolent USA.

On 22 October, Putin said Iraq's government had *not* asked Russia for airstrikes in Iraq. [TASS](#); [Reuters](#).

The U.S./Kurdish rescue [mission](#) on 22 October that freed 69 Iraqi Arab hostages — in which one U.S. soldier died — ought to impress Abadi with the sincerity of the U.S. forces.

On 23 October, Hakem al-Zameli, the chairman of the Iraqi parliament's National Security and Defense Commission, announced that Iraq would allow Russian airstrikes in Iraq, in the specific case of ISIL terrorists fleeing from Syria into Iraq. [Anadolu](#) in Turkey, 23 Oct; [Al-](#)

[Manar TV](#) in Lebanon, 23 Oct; [FARS](#) in Iran, 25 Oct; [RIA-Novosti](#), 25 Oct (cites FARS).

On 26 October, there is a strange article in *Today's Zaman*, a news website in Turkey, that claims the Iraqi parliament voted to allow Russian airstrikes in Iraq. The *Zaman* article is attributed to "Today's Zaman With Reuters", but my search of the Reuters website failed to find the original Reuters article. The attribution to Reuters *may* refer to other topics appended to the end of the *Zaman* article. I looked at websites of TASS, RIA-Novosti (i.e., Sputnik), and Russia Today, but *none* of those three major Russian newsmedia mentioned the Iraqi parliament's acceptance of Russian airstrikes. Here is the part of the *Zaman* article about the U.S. Government's view of proposed Russian airstrikes in Iraq.

After weeks of political wrangling, the Iraqi parliament finally agreed to allow Russia to launch air strikes against the terrorist Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq, paving the way for the involvement of a powerful new combatant in an already complex battleground in a move that will likely incense the US.

....

Hakim al-Zamili, the head of the defense and security committee of the Iraqi parliament, announced on Monday [26 Oct] that Iraq had struck a deal with Russia to launch operations against ISIL targets in the country. According to a report by Russian news agency Sputnik, once the air strikes are under way, ISIL fighters who might seek safe haven in Iraq after fleeing strikes in Syria will not find safety in Iraq. With the agreement, Russia aims to cut the supply lines of ISIL between Iraq and Syria.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi had previously said Iraq might seek Russia's help against ISIL if Russian air strikes prove to be effective in Syria. Baghdad's appeal to Moscow has irked the US, which reportedly told the Iraqi government that it would have to choose between the US and Russia in the fight against ISIL.

In a visit to Baghdad last week [20 Oct], US Chief of General Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford told Iraqi officials that possible Russian air operation would make it almost impossible for the US to continue its military campaign.

"Iraqi parliament approves Russian air strikes against ISIL," [Today's Zaman](#), 14:34 GMT, 26 Oct 2015.

On 27 October, [RIA-Novosti](#) cites Mowaffak Rubaie, a member of the Iraqi parliament, as saying "the Iraqi Parliament may begin discussions" on Russian airstrikes "at the end of this week". The end of this week could be sometime around 29 or 31 October.

The lack of confirmation by other sources of the *Today's Zaman* article on 26 Oct, plus the terse RIA-Novosti article on 27 Oct, shows that the Iraqi parliament has *not* yet agreed on Russian airstrikes in Iraq. However, the *Zaman* report on past and probable future U.S. reaction seems accurate.

On 30 October, Obama had a friendly telephone conversation with Abadi. Here is the entire statement issued by the White House on this conversation:

President Obama today spoke by phone with Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi to discuss the political and security situation in Iraq and underscore the United States' enduring support for Iraq in its fight against ISIL. The President commended the recent progress that Iraqi forces have made against ISIL in Baiji and welcomed the ongoing campaign to isolate ISIL in Ramadi, noting that the United States in partnership with the Iraqi Government will intensify support for the Iraqi Security Forces in these efforts. The President also voiced support for Prime Minister al-Abadi's leadership in his efforts to combat corruption and implement governance reforms critical to promoting Iraq's political stability and economic prosperity. The two leaders noted their full support for the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, emphasizing that both the United States and Iraq are fully committed to partnering with the international community to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. They also reaffirmed their commitment to the strategic partnership between the United States and Iraq.

"Readout of the President's Phone Call with Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi of Iraq," [White House](#), 30 Oct 2015.

My comments: Obama touts the "ongoing campaign ... in Ramadi", but that campaign has stalled. The Iraqi army is unable — or unwilling — to liberate Ramadi, after the Iraqi army fled from Ramadi on 17 May 2015.

"Abadi's leadership ... to combat corruption and implement governance reforms" has also been ineffective. Many of the reforms proposed by Abadi in August 2015 have not been implemented, and few corrupt officials have been sent to prison. The Iraqi parliament has not yet passed the National Guard Law that Abadi proposed in 2014, although the Law is urgently needed to bring the many militias under the control of the government in Baghdad. No one has been punished for abandoning Mosul to ISIL in June 2014.

My comment is that the last two sentences are code for Abadi promised to continue to work with the U.S.-led Coalition, and *not* invite Russian airstrikes in Iraq.

Russian/Syrian incursions in Turkey

On 3 October at 12:08 Turkish time, a Russian SU-30 military airplane flew inside Turkey for 2 minutes. The Turkish government and NATO both reacted angrily to this minor incident in which no one was harmed. Russia responded by claiming the incursion had a duration of "a few seconds" and was a mistake caused by "navigation error" during "bad weather".

I initially ignored this incident because it is hypocritical for the U.S.-led Coalition — including Turkey — to complain of a minor incursion by Russia when flights by the Coalition have not only repeatedly and deliberately violated the sovereignty of Syria, but also conducted more than 2500 airstrikes inside Syria without permission from the Syrian government.

But on 12 October, I decided to add this section to my essay, because a minor incident like this could escalate into a serious confrontation if an aircraft were shot down. History teaches

us that wars often begin over such minor incidents (e.g., sinking of U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor in 1898, assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914). Furthermore, Russia and Syria have continued to harass Turkish jet fighters.

Here is a brief list of some of the news articles on the 3 October incursion by Russia:

- "Russia says violation of Turkish airspace was 'navigation error'," [Hurriyet](#) in Turkey, 5 Oct. ("Turkish military sources said a Russian SU-30 breached Turkish airspace for hundreds of meters in the southern district of Yayladagi in Hatay province for two minutes at 12:10 p.m., but returned to Syrian airspace after one warning.")
- "Turkey says 'no tension' after Russian airspace violation mistake, NATO cries foul," [Russia Today](#), 12:38 GMT, 5 Oct.
- "NATO condemns Russia's violations of Turkish airspace," [Reuters](#), 16:01 GMT, 5 Oct.
- "US officials question Russian flight incursion into Turkey," [Associated Press](#), 16:12 GMT, 5 Oct. ("The U.S. does not believe Russia's incursion into Turkey's airspace was an accident,")
- John Kerry, "Our Ocean Town Hall Event in Valparaiso, Chile," [State Dept](#), 5 Oct. (Kerry: "With respect to the incursion by a Russian plane into Turkey, And we're greatly concerned about it, because it is precisely the kind of thing that, had Turkey responded under its rights, could have resulted in a shoot-down. And it is precisely the kind of thing that we warned against, and it is why we have engaged in initial conversations with Russia about making certain that there is no possibility of accidental conflict, accidental confrontation.") See also: [Reuters](#).
- "NATO denounces Russian incursion into Turkish airspace," [Reuters](#), 03:20 GMT, 6 Oct. ("NATO held an emergency meeting in Brussels.")
- "NATO chief: Russian jets in Turkish airspace no accident," [Associated Press](#), 14:17 GMT, 6 Oct.
- "NATO rejects Russia explanation on Turkish air space," [Reuters](#), 01:11 GMT, 7 Oct.
- "Furious but powerless, Turkey left smarting by Russian action in Syria," [Reuters](#), 14:41 GMT, 7 Oct.
- "Angered by air strikes, Turkey's Erdogan warns Russia on energy ties," [Reuters](#), 09:20 GMT, 8 Oct. ("Erdogan ... warned Russia there are other places Turkey could get natural gas and other countries that could build its first nuclear plant.")
- "Russia Has Fully Explained Turkish Airspace Violation — Deputy FM," [RIA-Novosti](#), 09:21 GMT, 8 Oct. ("The Russian Defense Ministry confirmed the incident [that occurred on 3 Oct], saying an Su-30 Flanker multirole fighter briefly entered Turkish airspace for a few seconds due to poor weather conditions.")

- "Washington Fails to 'Set All NATO Members Against Russia' [RIA-Novosti](#), 12:29 GMT, 10 Oct. ("The Russian Defense Ministry later explained that on October 3, a Su-30 fighter briefly entered Turkish airspace for a few seconds due to poor weather conditions.")
- "Russian army delegation visits Ankara, informs Turkish military about violations of air space," [BGN News](#), 14:55 GMT, 15 Oct. (Russian air force delegation in Ankara on 15 Oct to discuss violations on 3-4 Oct.) See also [Reuters](#).

There has been a continuing series of incidents:

2. On 4 October, a Russian jet entered Turkish airspace. Neither Reuters nor Hurriyet reported details. [Reuters](#); [Hurriyet](#). But [Russia Today](#) reported: "Ankara also claimed that a MiG-29 fighter jet, which is used by both Russia and Syria, harassed two of its F-16's on Sunday [4 Oct] by locking radar on to them...." The [Associated Press](#) reported: "Turkey's military said a MiG-29 jet had harassed two Turkish F-16s for five minutes and 40 seconds on Sunday [4 Oct] by locking its radar onto them. The [Turkish] military said it did not know which country the MiG-29 belonged to." Five hours later, the [Associated Press](#) suggested that a Syrian pilot flew the MiG-29 aircraft that violated Turkish airspace and locked its radar onto Turkish F-16s.
3. On 5 October, there were two incidents: a "MIG-29 locked its radar onto the Turkish patrol for 4 minutes 30 seconds, and a Syria-based missile system locked onto [eight Turkish F-16 jets] for 4 minutes 15 seconds, the Turkish military said." It is *not* known whether the MIG-29 was flown by Syrian or Russian pilots. [Reuters](#).

The [Associated Press](#) reported: "Turkey's military said ... that eight Turkish F-16 jet patrolling the Turkish-Syrian border were harassed by a MIG-29 plane as well as surface-to-air missile systems based in Syria in two separate incidents on Monday [5 Oct]. The MIG-29 locked radar on the planes for 4 minutes and 30 seconds, while the missile systems threatened the planes for 4 minutes and 15 seconds, the [Turkish] military said."

4. On 6 October, "surface-to-air missile systems based in Syria locked radar on Turkish jets for 1 minute and 30 seconds Tuesday [6 Oct]. It was not clear if they were Syrian or Russian systems." [Associated Press](#).
5. On 10 October, there were two incidents. First, "three [Turkish] jets were among 12 F-16s patrolling the border when they were interfered with for two minutes by Syria-based missile systems." Second, the three Turkish jets "were also harassed for 35 seconds by two SU-22 and one SU-24 planes" flown by Syrian air force. [Reuters](#).
6. On 11 October, "Syria-based missile systems harassed four Turkish F-16 warplanes near the border between the two countries". Turkey vaguely said its fighter jets gave the "necessary response." Reuters explains: "The military did not specify what that response was, but it was the first time it referred to such a response after around a week of harassments of its jets." [Reuters](#).

7. On 12 October, "Syria-based missile air defence systems harassed Turkish warplanes". [Reuters](#). Turkey released few details about this incident. See also [Today's Zaman](#).
8. On 16 October, a Turkish F-16 fighter jet shot down an unidentified drone aircraft 3 km inside Turkey's border. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Daily Sabah](#); [Today's Zaman](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). Russia was absolutely certain that the downed drone was *not* operated by Russia. [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#). Details were sparse on 16 Oct. The *Daily Sabah* quoted the Turkish military: "Despite three warnings [the drone] continued its flight," How did Turkey communicate warnings to a pilotless aircraft from an unknown nation? On 19 Oct, [Reuters](#) reports that the Turkish prime minister said the drone was manufactured in Russia.

On 15 October, [Reuters](#) tersely reports that Turkey claims "Russian and Turkish planes had 13 dangerous encounters between Oct. 3 and Oct. 10". That is significantly more than the incidents reported by journalists. I have cited five days with incidents during 3-10 October, although there were two incidents/day on each of 5 and 10 October.

On 17 October, the Turkish prime minister again declared that Turkey would shoot down any airplane that violated Turkish airspace. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#). That is Turkey's legal right. But it is also Syria's legal right to shoot down airplanes that are violating Syrian airspace. Such airplanes include fighters and bombers from the USA, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and — rarely — Turkey. Looking at the big picture, it would be preferable for Turkey *not* to escalate confrontations by enforcing the sovereignty of Turkey's borders.

News reports about incursions into Turkish airspace ended after Turkey shot down one drone on 16 October.

USA Policy/Strategy in Iraq & Syria

It is blatantly obvious that Obama's so-called "policy" or "strategy" in both Iraq and Syria is a failure.

The principal element of Obama's military strategy was airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria. U.S. military commentators were clear from the beginning of airstrikes in Aug 2014 that airstrikes alone would *not* defeat ISIL. One would also need an adequate number of competent troops on the ground.

In Syria, Obama planned on training and equipping 15,000 rebels in three years (by the end of 2017) — planned on training 5400 rebels in the first year (by the end of 2015) — but by 30 Sep 2015 fewer than 130 rebels had been trained. After wasting a year, on 9 Oct 2015 the U.S. ended the train-and-equip program.

In Iraq, Obama apparently believed the Tooth Fairy was going to wave her magic wand and make the cowardly and incompetent Iraqi army into a force who would expel ISIL from

Fallujah, Baiji, and Mosul. But on 17 May 2015, the Iraqi army fled from Ramadi, just as they had fled from Mosul in June 2014, showing that the Iraqi army had learned nothing in one year. In Sep 2015, it was painfully obvious that the Iraqi army is either unable or unwilling to liberate cities controlled by ISIL.

On the political side in Syria, Obama's policy since mid-2011 has been an obsession with deposing Assad. But Assad not only clung to power, but also is now actively supported by Russian airstrikes in Syria. Assad will remain president of Syria for the foreseeable future, despite Obama's rhetoric about Assad having lost legitimacy.

On the political side in Iraq, Obama's policy has been to praise the corrupt and dysfunctional Iraqi government for its inclusiveness, while ignoring that Iraq is a failed nation. (See my documentation [above](#).)

The situation in Syria is complicated by the large number of foreign meddlers. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and the USA each support various insurgent groups. Russia and Iran support Assad. Much of the foreign meddling is purely sectarian: Assad and Iran are Shiites, while Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey are Sunni. Moreover, Turkey hates the Kurds in northern Syria and Iraq, despite the fact that these Kurds have been the most effective ground force against ISIL. It is extraordinarily difficult to negotiate with so many different nations, each with their own prejudices and agenda. The large number of meddlers will make the Syrian problem impossible to solve to everyone's satisfaction, because some meddlers seek opposite goals.

In comparison with Syria, the situation in Iraq has fewer foreign meddlers. However, the Iraqi government is corrupt, incompetent, and dysfunctional. The Iraqi army is either unable or unwilling to liberate cities controlled by ISIL. Some of the Shiite majority in the Iraqi government is aligned with neighboring Iran, which is controlled by a Shiite theocracy, an enemy of the USA since 1979.

While Obama's policy was floundering in both Iraq and Syria, Russia suddenly militarily intervened in Syria in September 2015, blindsiding Obama. It appears that Russia may also conduct airstrikes in Iraq in the near future. It is possible that Russia may dominate the fight against ISIL in both Syria and Iraq, pushing the U.S.-led Coalition aside.

Against this backdrop of failures by Obama, Condoleezza Rice and Robert M. Gates wrote an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* for 8 October. There these two academics with experience as U.S. Secretary of State (2005-2009) and U.S. Secretary of Defense (2006-2011) recommended:

1. Recognize that Russia is responding to weak U.S. policy, and that Russia is *not* "the defender of international stability".
2. They advocate "no-fly zones and safe harbors for populations".
3. "[W]e must 'de-conflict' our military activities with those of the Russians. This is distasteful, and we should never have gotten to a place where the Russians are warning us to stay out of their way."

4. Recognize that the Russia objective is "secure their interests in the Middle East by any means necessary."

Rice's and Gates' proposed "no-fly zones and safe harbors" probably apply to Syria, where Assad — and now Russia — have been bombing civilians and U.S.-supported rebels. But the USA has *no* legal authority to establish "no-fly zones" inside Syria. Russia would surely veto any attempt by the United Nations Security Council to grant such legal authority.

The fight against ISIL *should not* be purely military. As I urge [above](#), we need to kill the ideology of Islamic terrorism. We are spending billions of dollars/year on a military solution, and neglecting defeating the ideology of Islamic terrorism.

Obama needs to abandon his obsession with deposing Assad. Then it *may* be possible to cooperate with Syria, Russia, and Iran in fighting ISIL in Syria. Assad, Russia, and Iran will also want to fight against the Free Syrian Army, and it is not clear what — if anything — the USA can do about that. The U.S. Government should be loath to intervene in the Syrian civil war between Assad and the Free Syrian Army, which is largely a sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis. Indeed, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Qatar's support for the Free Syrian Army has prolonged the civil war in Syria.

Since September 2014, Obama has been violating the sovereignty of Syria with airstrikes against ISIL inside Syria. That legal problem can only be solved with an invitation from Assad's government. Further, Obama lacks an Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) from the U.S. Congress to conduct military operations in Iraq and Syria. Clearly, Congress needs to enact an AUMF, as explained in my essay for [Feb 2015](#).

While I have been critical of Obama's policy in Syria and Iraq, I believe that Obama is absolutely correct *not* to send U.S. Military troops to fight on the ground in Iraq or Syria. In this context, note that Obama's term as president ends in Jan 2017. The leading Democratic candidate (i.e., Hillary Clinton) and most of the Republican candidates favor increased U.S. military involvement in Syria. These candidates espouse an idealistic "pro-democracy" dogma and ignore being dragged into a sectarian civil war in which many regional nations (e.g., Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey) are already heavily involved. It seems likely that the Syrian civil war will continue in 2016 and 2017, so the possible increased involvement of the USA under the next president is worrisome.

Zamili in the Iraqi parliament, and also prime minister Abadi, may soon approve Russian airstrikes inside Iraq. That would greatly complicate the U.S. military operations in Iraq, to say the least. It is not clear how much influence the U.S. Government currently has in Iraq, but the relationship seems more fragile than is publicly acknowledged.

If the Iraqi government invites Russian airstrikes inside Iraq, then it may be time to shut down the military operations of the U.S.-led Coalition in both Iraq and Syria. If the Iraqi government — which invited U.S. airstrikes — makes it too difficult for the U.S.-led Coalition to operate effectively in Iraq, then we should depart from Iraq. Let the Russians have the burden of the expensive military campaign against ISIL, while the U.S. and its allies focus on defeating the ideology of Islamic terrorism.

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. In the end, a frustrated Russia will depart, just as the Russians departed from Afghanistan in 1989.

On 9 October 2015, Josh Rogin and Eli Lake at [Bloomberg](#) reported: "A week into Russia's military intervention in Syria, some top White House advisers and National Security Council staffers are trying to persuade President Barack Obama to scale back U.S. engagement there, to focus on lessening the violence and, for now, to give up on toppling the Syrian regime."

[RIA-Novosti](#) crowed that on 8 Oct, Russia had conducted 67 sorties in Syria, while the U.S. conducted only 2 airstrikes. However, comparing the number of airstrikes on *one day* is *not* an appropriate comparison. From 22 Sep 2014 to 1 Oct, the U.S.-led Coalition had 2580 airstrikes in Syria during 374 days, or a long-term average of 7/day. While 7/day is fewer than the recent daily number of Russian airstrikes, most of the Russian airstrikes have been in western Syria, far from ISIL locations. Airstrikes by the U.S.-led Coalition in Syria, together with Kurdish fighters on the ground, are having an effect on ISIL.

Obama interviewed by Kroft

Obama was interviewed by Steve Kroft of CBS News on 6 Oct, and parts of the interview were shown on the "60 Minutes" program for 11 Oct 2015. Kroft gave an aggressive interview about Obama's failure to defeat ISIL in Syria and Iraq. I want to focus on one little snippet of the interview, in which Obama graciously *<sarcastic smirk>* refuses to be blamed for the ignominious failure of the train-and-equip program in Syria. (The failed train-and-equip program is discussed [above](#).)

Steve Kroft: You have been talking about the moderate opposition in Syria. It seems very hard to identify. And you talked about the frustrations of trying to find some and train them. You got a half a billion dollars from Congress to train and equip 5,000, and at the end, according to the commander CENTCOM, you got 50 people, most of whom are dead or deserted. He said four or five left?

President Barack Obama: Steve, this is why I've been skeptical from the get go about the notion that we were going to effectively create this proxy army inside of Syria. My goal has been to try to test the proposition, can we be able to train and equip a moderate opposition that's willing to fight ISIL? And what we've learned is that as long as Assad remains in power, it is very difficult to get those folks to focus their attention on ISIL.

Steve Kroft: If you were skeptical of the program to find and identify, train and equip moderate Syrians, why did you go through the program?

President Barack Obama: Well, because part of what we have to do here, Steve, is to

try different things. Because we also have partners on the ground that are invested and interested in seeing some sort of resolution to this problem. I think it is important for us to make sure that we explore all the various options that are available. And —

Steve Kroft: And they wanted you to do it.

President Barack Obama: Well, no. That's not what I said. I think it is important for us to make sure that we explore all the various options that are available.

....

President Barack Obama: Look, there's no doubt that [the train-and-equip program] did not work. And, one of the challenges that I've had throughout this heartbreaking situation inside of Syria is, is that — you'll have people insist that, you know, all you have to do is send in a few — you know, truckloads full of arms and people are ready to fight. And then, when you start a train-and-equip program and it doesn't work, then people say, "Well, why didn't it work?" Or, "If it had just started three months earlier it would've worked."

"President Obama," [CBS News](#), 11 Oct 2015.

My comment is that Obama now claims "I've been skeptical from the get go about the notion that we were going to effectively create this proxy army inside of Syria." If that were true, why did Obama agree to waste a year of time in what Obama believed was a futile attempt to create trained rebels to fight ISIL? (I won't mention the waste of \$300 million.) That is *not* leadership to allow subordinates to make a colossal mistake that ends in an ignominious failure, just to — in Obama's words — "try different things."

And Obama did *not* try different things — note the plural. Obama had *only* the *one* train-and-equip program to develop a ground force in Syria to fight ISIL. Separately, Obama continued a CIA program to aid the Free Syrian Army that was fighting against Assad. When Obama's train-and-equip program was finally canceled on 9 Oct 2015, Obama had no ground force to fight ISIL in Syria. Given Obama's skepticism about the train-and-equip program, it was reckless for Obama not to have concurrently pursued alternative programs to develop a ground force to fight ISIL in Syria.

But the reality is that Obama did approve the train-and-equip program. A good leader would personally take responsibility for approving a mistake. (There is no doubt that Obama would boast of any success by the U.S. Military.) But Obama now claims he was "skeptical" that the train-and-equip program would succeed, a position that makes Obama correct and the U.S. Military wrong.

Obama also said "it is important for us to make sure that we explore all the various options that are available." The process of "exploring" sounds like something that a president should do in a discussion of possible options, before making a decision. But here we have a train-and-equip program that was authorized by Congress, endorsed by the president, and operated for 12 months before collapsing in an ignominious failure. Obama's mistake was *not* that he failed to explore options, but that he decided to pursue *one* stupid program when he was "skeptical" that it would succeed. And, as I said above, it was reckless for Obama not to have

concurrently pursued alternative programs to develop a ground force to fight ISIL in Syria.

I have been saying in the conclusion to my essays, beginning in Oct 2014, that "a glaring defect in Obama's strategy" was that he *planned* to have 15,000 trained rebels at the end of 2017, when he needed all of those trained rebels in Sep 2014.

Obama said: "... as long as Assad remains in power, it is very difficult to get those folks to focus their attention on ISIL." Since mid-2011, Obama has had an obsession with removing Assad from power, so, in Obama's opinion, *everything* — even the failed U.S. train-and-equip program — is the fault of Assad. But *if* Obama had cooperated with Assad in 2011 and 2012, it is possible that the civil war would have ended quickly, and the Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL and Nusra Front) would *not* have hijacked the Syrian civil war. If Obama had cooperated with Assad, and if Islamic terrorists appeared in Syria, Obama could have contributed massive airstrikes against the terrorists, and in support of Assad's army. But those things did not happen, because of Obama's obsession with removing Assad from power.

A few days after this interview by CBS, Obama finally agreed to supply weapons and ammunition to the Syrian Kurds, who have proven to be the most effective fighters against ISIL on the ground in Syria. It remains to be seen how Turkey will react to the U.S. arming the Syrian Kurds, who the Turkish government regards as terrorists.

There was general agreement that the Kroft interview was a disaster for Obama. A media commentator, Howard Kurtz, wrote on [Fox News](#) that Obama "is presiding over an unmitigated mess in the Middle East." Ruben Navarrette wrote in the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) that "Obama has trouble admitting when he's wrong." Referring to Obama's assertion that the "community of nations" would eventually defeat ISIL, Dr. Charles Krauthammer said: "The tooth fairy has a stronger reality than the community of nations." [National Review](#). My reaction is that Obama in the interview behaves like a bad student who is arguing for more credit after having failed an examination.

Another aspect of Obama's failure in Syria, is Obama's failure to use facts to refute Russian propaganda (big lies, [above](#)), especially about Russian airstrikes only against ISIL, when the Russians were really bombing the Free Syrian Army. Surely the Pentagon knows (e.g., by using satellite reconnaissance images) where Russia is bombing. And the Pentagon generally knows where ISIL is located, and what towns are controlled by ISIL. This information could be shown on a map to refute the Russian propaganda.

Pentagon gives options to Obama

Everyone recognizes the U.S. war against ISIL is going badly. In Iraq, the Iraqi army has proven unable or unwilling to liberate Fallujah, Mosul, Ramadi, and other towns from ISIL. The Iraqi government remains corrupt and dysfunctional, as explained [above](#). In Syria, for the past year, we had no competent army on the ground who can coordinate with U.S. airstrikes. However, we are beginning to coordinate with the Syrian Kurds, despite Turkey's hatred of the Kurds.

During 23-28 October, the Iraqi parliament is poised to vote to request [Russian](#) airstrikes in Iraq. Russian airstrikes will make it extraordinarily difficult for the U.S.-led Coalition to continue its airstrikes in Iraq. Kerry and Obama probably see some urgency in convincing the Iraqi government not to boot the U.S. Military from Iraq, and thereby avoiding Iraq falling completely into the Iranian and Russia spheres of influence.

Against this backdrop, on 27 October, *The Washington Post* reported:

The recommendations that went to Obama in a memo last week reflect the president's conflicting impulses. The proposal would put a small number of U.S. advisers on the ground in Syria for the first time since the United States began military operations against the Islamic State last year. The Pentagon has sent small Special Operations teams into Syria for lightning-quick missions several times since the war began in 2011. The newly proposed Special Operations forces would work with moderate Syrian Arab rebels and possibly some Kurdish groups, such as the People's Protection Units, or YPG, that have scored some recent victories against the Islamic State.

These groups, backed by American air power, are expected to mount a military offensive on Raqqa, the Islamic State's de facto capital in Syria, in the near future. The push against Raqqa, if it proves effective, would mark a significant setback for the Islamic State, U.S. officials said.

As for the Iraq side of the border, the president's top advisers have recommended embedding U.S. advisers at the brigade level for specific operations such as the attack to retake Ramadi, a key western Iraqi city that Islamic State forces seized this past spring. Such a move would position U.S. troops, now largely assigned to training bases, closer to the front lines, where they could help Iraqi commanders plan and prosecute the day-to-day fight against the Islamic State in Ramadi.

....

The changes would represent a significant escalation of the American role in Iraq and Syria. They still require formal approval from Obama, who could make a decision as soon as this week and could decide not to alter the current course, said U.S. officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the discussions are still ongoing. It's unclear how many additional troops would be required to implement the changes being considered by the president, but the number for now is likely to be relatively small, these officials said.

The recommendations came at Obama's request and reflect the president's and his top advisers' concern that the battle in Iraq and Syria is largely stalemated and in need of new ideas to generate momentum against Islamic State forces.

Missy Ryan & Greg Jaffe, "Obama weighs moving U.S. troops closer to front lines in Syria, Iraq," [Washington Post](#) 16:45 EDT, 27 Oct 2015. [paragraphs reordered, to put the specific recommendations first]

The Wall Street Journal reported:

The White House is seriously considering deploying a small squadron of Apache attack

helicopters to Iraq as part of a package of new assistance programs to counter Islamic State, according to U.S. officials.

....

Pentagon officials have recommended to the White House that the U.S. deploy as many as eight Apache helicopters and their crews to Iraq. The helicopters, known for their targeting prowess, could work in conjunction with as many as two dozen ground spotters who would embed with local ground forces to call in strikes against Islamic State targets.

Another proposal, which is less likely, would insert small numbers of combat advisers on the front lines with Iraqi forces and possibly with moderate rebels inside Syria.

....

Ground spotters [for the Apache helicopters] would require support and security personnel. Combined with the Apache air crews, the security to protect those assets, and support and maintenance personnel, Mr. Obama could be considering deploying hundreds more U.S. military personnel in addition to the roughly 3,500 there now.

....

In both Syria and Iraq, military officials have long said Kurdish fighters are the most effective warriors against Islamic State, compared with moderate Sunnis or Shiites. Political sensitivities about supporting the Kurds directly in both Iraq and Syria have derailed efforts. The Turkish government fears that bolstering Kurdish forces could embolden them in their push for greater autonomy. The need to find a new approach has outweighed those concerns, U.S. officials said.

Gordon Lubold & Carol E. Lee, "U.S. Looks at Proposals to Step Up Fight Against Islamic State," [WSJ](#), 18:35 EDT, 27 Oct 2015.

Reuters reported that the Pentagon has recommended to Obama two new options for the war against ISIL.

1. Syria: "temporarily deploying some U.S. special operations forces inside of Syria to advise moderate Syrian opposition fighters for the first time and, potentially, to help call in U.S. air strikes".

2. Iraq: sending "Apache attack helicopters, and U.S. forces to operate them, to Iraq".

Phil Stewart & Jeff Mason, "U.S. weighs special forces in Syria, helicopters in Iraq," [Reuters](#), 15:02 GMT, 28 Oct 2015. (original version on 27 Oct)

The New York Times began its editorial with:

Frustrated by the resilience of the Islamic State terrorist organization, the Obama administration is taking steps to [expand](#) a military campaign that remains untethered to any coherent strategy. Instead of challenging an escalation of American military forces

in the Syrian war, several prominent members of Congress are irresponsibly demanding even more hawkish approaches.

....

But before contemplating a more forceful military plan, Congress and the administration must confront the fact that the current one, which includes airstrikes and support for select bands of rebels, lacks a legal framework and an attainable goal. The first problem could be fixed if the White House and congressional leaders were willing to work together to set clear limits on what the Pentagon is allowed to do. Preposterously, the military campaign that [began](#) more than a year ago, and has cost more than \$4 billion, is still being waged under the authority of the congressional authorization passed to pursue the perpetrators of the Sept. 11 [2001] attacks.

....

Taking on Mr. Assad, a murderous leader who has lost all legitimacy, has obvious appeal in principle. But doing so would almost certainly be catastrophic because it would put the United States directly at war with Russia and Iran, which aid him militarily. Even if Washington were to prevail in forcing him from power, that could serve to embolden the Islamic State, which would only lead to more carnage. "The Military Escalation in Iraq and Syria," [NY Times](#), 28 Oct 2015. [Links in original]

My comment is that the USA needs more than an Congressional Authorization to Use Military Force in Syria. The USA *also* needs approval from the United Nations Security Council to drop bombs inside Syria, which is a sovereign nation and a member of the United Nations. Neither Assad's government nor ISIL in Syria is a real threat to the USA, so the current "self-defense" justification used by Obama is a fiction. Like it or not, Assad has invited Russia to help defeat ISIL. There is *no way* that the United Nations will authorize U.S. military action in Syria (because of the Russian veto) and it is highly unlikely that Assad would invite U.S. airstrikes in Syria. The USA is an unwanted intruder in Syria, one of the foreign meddlers who are perpetuating the Syrian civil war.

I agree with the final paragraph of *The New York Times* editorial. Assad has probably committed war crimes, but he is still better than ISIL, Nusra Front, the jihadists, and the disorganized Free Syrian Army. Obama's obsession with deposing Assad has prevented U.S. foreign policy from clearly dealing with the realities in Syria since the year 2013.

Putting U.S. troops on the ground in Syria is not only an unlawful invasion of Syria, but also those troops would be at risk of being attacked by Russian or Syrian airstrikes.

Obama decides

On Friday, 30 October 2015, Josh Earnest — Obama's press secretary — announced that the U.S. would send special operations troops to Syria to "advise and assist" insurgents who were fighting against ISIL:

QUESTION [by Kathleen]: So the White House is saying fewer than 50 forces going to — there's initial reaction calling this tinkering around the edges, a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. What exactly do you think 50 Special Forces can accomplish?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I certainly wouldn't underestimate the capability and capacity of our U.S. Special Operations Forces to be an important force multiplier anywhere around the world they're deployed. And the President does expect that they can have an impact in intensifying our strategy for building the capacity of local forces inside of Syria to take the fight on the ground to ISIL in their own country.

That has been the core element of the military component of our strategy from the beginning: building the capacity of local forces on the ground. That was the essence of the call that the President just completed with Prime Minister Abadi. The United States and our coalition partners have worked effectively with the central government of Iraq. They've got command and control of Iraqi security forces in that country. And because of training and advice and assistance that the United States and our coalition partners have been able to offer to those Iraqi Security Forces we built up the capacity of Iraqi Security Forces to be more effective on the battlefield inside of Iraq.

The situation in Syria is quite different. The United States and our coalition partners do not have a central government with whom we can partner. The Assad regime has lost legitimacy to lead that country for a variety of reasons. In fact, they have actually used the military of that country to attack innocent civilians. So what the United States and our coalition partners have been focused on doing is enhancing the capacity of moderate opposition forces on the ground inside of Syria.

There are already a variety of ways that you already know about that the United States and our coalition partners have offered assistance to those forces. Some of those efforts have included carrying out military airstrikes in support of their operations on the ground. In some cases, those local fighting forces have been enhanced through decisions that the President has made to resupply them, offering them military equipment and ammunition that they have used to effectively make progress against ISIL.

When it comes to northern Syria, in particular, we have seen moderate opposition forces inside of Syria who have driven ISIL out of Kobane. You'll recall that a few months ago that some of these opposition forces were under siege in Kobane. After being resupplied by the United States military these forces didn't just drive ISIL out of Kobane, they drove them out of the broader region. And now there's a 500-mile-long border between Turkey and Syria — all but 90 kilometers of that border is now secure.

We've also seen these opposition forces make progress in the direction of Raqqa — this is the self-declared capital of the Islamic State. There are now moderate opposition forces that are 45 kilometers outside of Raqqa.

So there's been important progress that's been made in this area, and the decision that the President has made is to further intensify our support for those forces that have

made that progress against ISIL. And all along we have indicated that the President is prepared to intensify those elements of our strategy that are showing promise. Obviously our support for moderate opposition forces in northern Syria have made progress against ISIL. They've shown promise, and that progress would not have been possible without our support.

We've also demonstrated a willingness to scale back our investment in those aspects of the strategy that have not yielded progress. There was a lot of discussion in this room a couple of weeks ago about the train-and-equip program that wasn't yielding the kind of results that we would like, and the President announced a significant change to that element of our strategy.

So that is a long answer, but I just want to give you the full context of this latest decision that the President has made to intensify this element of our strategy that has already shown some promise.

QUESTION: And so just to be clear, so you said you think it will have an impact. Is that a significant impact? It doesn't sound like you're selling this as a game-changer or anything.

MR. EARNEST: No, I think you are astute to make that observation. I think the President has been quite clear that there is no military solution to the problems that are plaguing Iraq and Syria. There is a diplomatic one. The President has put in place a multifaceted strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL, and this military component of that strategy is an important part of the President's top priority, which is the safety and security of the American public.

And because of this strategy, we have taken extremists off the battlefield inside of Syria who were hoping to use a safe haven inside of Syria to attack the United States and our interests. So we know that we need a political transition inside of Syria in order to address the root causes — the root cause of so many of the problems that we've seen in Syria. And those problems range from hundreds of thousands of Syrians who've lost their lives in the civil war in that country, millions of Syrians who have had to flee their homes to escape violence. Some of those Syrians have, unfortunately, died trying to flee their country.

....

QUESTION [by Julia]: Josh, I just wanted to flesh out some details here. We've heard that the President has authorized fewer than 50 Special Operations Forces. How many exactly? If this has already been authorized, can you tell us the exact number of forces that will be going into northern Syria?

MR. EARNEST: The less-than-50 number is accurate. I cannot be more specific than that, primarily for reasons related to operational security. There are a number of details about this decision that I'm not in a position to discuss in this public setting, primarily to ensure that our special operators can do their work as safely as possible,

acknowledging that this is a very dangerous region of the world.

....

QUESTION [by Justin?]: I guess I just want to look back on the question one more time, because the President didn't say there wouldn't be a large-scale, long-term ground mission. He said that there would not be a ground operation in Syria — a ground combat operation in Syria. And so I'm trying to figure out how can we measure that point. What are soldiers in combat doing that these train, advise and assist soldiers aren't doing? Because it looks and smells and sounds like a combat mission. And soldiers are dying. The Pentagon has described some of these as combat —

MR. EARNEST: Well, let me say that this — what I'm trying to do is to be as specific as possible with you about the specific responsibilities that these Special Operations personnel have. This is not in any way an attempt to diminish the risk that they will face or the bravery that they will need to summon to carry out these operations. This is a dangerous place on the globe and they are at risk, and there's no denying that. And that is, once again, a reason for us to remember the significant sacrifices that our men and women in the military make for our safety and security. And nobody is more keenly aware of that than the Commander-in-Chief.

At the same time, the responsibilities that they have there are different. First of all, I think if we were envisioning a combat operation, we probably would be contemplating more than 50 troops on the ground. But because the responsibility that they have is not to lead the charge to take a hill but rather to offer advice and assistance to those local forces about the best way they can organize their efforts to take the fight to ISIL or to take the hill inside of Syria — that is the role that they will be playing.

Again, it still means that they're in a dangerous situation. It still means that they will have all of the equipment that they need to protect themselves if necessary. I'm confident that the Department of Defense has contingency plans in place to try to make it as safe as possible for those forces to operate there. But, again, I don't want to diminish the significance of the risk that they are taking in pursuit of this objective that the President has identified.

....

QUESTION [by Kristen]: Josh, thanks. I want to be very specific about what the President has said in terms of putting boots on the ground in Syria, and he actually didn't even use the word combat. He said on September 10, 2013, "I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria." So with this announcement today, isn't he effectively breaking that promise to the American people?

MR. EARNEST: Kristen, in September of 2013, the President was receiving questions about what the United States was prepared to do, given our insistence that President Assad had to go, that he'd lost legitimacy to lead. And the President was making the point that he was not prepared to put boots on the ground to take down the Assad

regime. Again, that is precisely the mistake that the previous administration made in implementing a regime change policy against Iraq and putting U.S. forces in a large-scale, long-term ground combat operation to try to take down Saddam Hussein. That did not serve the interests of the United States and, in some ways, we're still paying the price for that mistake.

So the quote that you pulled there is a very different situation.

....

QUESTION: But these U.S. forces could be in combat roles. Their lives could be at risk, correct?

MR. EARNEST: They will not be in a combat mission. Their mission is —

QUESTION: I understand that's not their mission, but they could find themselves in a combat situation, just as we saw with the rescue mission.

MR. EARNEST: There is no denying the amount of risk that they are taking on here, and they will be equipped to defend themselves if necessary. I'm confident the Department of Defense has contingency plans to try to make them as safe as possible in a very dangerous part of the world, and it is a good reminder of the appreciation that we need to have for our men and women in uniform.

QUESTION: I want to ask you one more question, Josh. Does the President have the legal authority to put U.S. forces in Syria? Senator Angus King said earlier today, "The war is not authorized," making the point that the AUMF still has yet to pass through Congress. Do you need to redouble your efforts to try to get that passed in Congress?

MR. EARNEST: That's a great question, Kristen, and here's the answer to it. The answer simply is that Congress, in 2001, did give the executive branch authorization to take this action, and there's no debating that. What the President has said he would welcome is Congress passing an authorization to use military force to be more specific about what exactly they're authorizing.

So it's not just that the President would welcome Congress taking that step, the administration actually wrote the bill for them. We wrote our own piece of legislation that Congress could pass that would give the administration more specific authority to carry out our counter-ISIL campaign. But we didn't stop there. The President of the United States sent some of his top foreign policy advisors, national security advisors to Congress to testify under oath in open hearings to explain to Congress what was included in the legislation and why they should pass it.

And after all those efforts — the President saying he would welcome Congress's voice in this debate, saying that the administration — having the administration actually write the legislation, to send it up to Congress so that Congress could pass it; sending the Secretary of State, his Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff to testify before Congress about why they should pass this legislation — and what has Congress done? Nothing.

So I don't know when Congress is going to meet again. I know they often take Fridays off and they often take Mondays off, so maybe on Tuesday they can have a meeting and a discussion about what should be on their agenda. And I've got an idea about what should be at the top of it.

....

MR. EARNEST: [These Special Operations Forces] are not being deployed to Syria with a combat mission. They're being deployed to Syria with a train, advising and assist mission. And that is not an effort to downplay the serious risk that they are facing. It is just an effort to be as specific and as clear as possible exactly — about what exactly they're being asked to do.

"Daily Press Briefing by the Press Secretary Josh Earnest 10/30/15," [White House](#), 30 Oct 2015.

Also on 30 October, an anonymous "senior defense official" gave a background briefing and said, in part:

... the [Defense] Department really looked hard at — at five main objectives for what we think the next year of the counter-ISIL campaign really requires, and these five objectives working in concert are really where we think we can have strategic success. ["strategic" means "nothing just simply temporary."]

So I want to go through those so you can capture them.

1. Number one, in Iraq, assisting the government of Iraq to take back Ramadi and Baiji, and setting the conditions for Mosul.
2. Number two, in Syria, enabling new and additional local forces to pressure, take and ultimately hold ISIL's declared stronghold of Raqqa — capital of Raqqa.
3. Number three, secure the border between Syria and Turkey to drastically reduce the foreign fighter flow, the flow of materiel and money making its way to ISIL.
4. Number four, across both Iraq and Syria, degrading ISIL's internal lines of communication, (LOCs) and supply.
5. And number five, finally, reinforcing Jordan and Lebanese defenses as ISIL is pushed south and west under greater pressure.

As I mentioned, these objectives are meant to be pursued concurrently in order to maximize pressure on ISIL. So some of the announcements you saw coming out of the White House today fit directly under those five objectives. Or, all of them do.

....

[on the U.S. Special Operations forces in Syria]

... continuing raids and joint operations in both Iraq and Syria, and then now, newly, today, a small complement of U.S. SOF — special operations forces — deploying to northern Syria to help coordinate with local ground forces.

Just because I know it's a topic of great interest here, those forces will be doing strictly an advise and assist mission — those forces going to Syria. They will coordinate with local groups on things like tactics, operational planning, logistics.

They will be located at by the quasi-headquarters element of the local forces in Syria. They will not be going out and — and doing joint operations with those forces.

....

On the — the SOF forces, again, we're talking about, essentially, less than 50 individuals. And certainly, for the time being, they will remain singularly at the headquarter's element.

They are not going to be out and about in advise and assist the way we are, in some cases, in Iraq. And the point is to get some guys on the ground, get eyes on, work with the units that are — that are there fighting ISIL and see what more is possible.

This is a start to gauge what's possible, and in the meantime, help them with operational planning. Again, tactics, logistics, key elements to being able to take and hold territory. But for the foreseeable future, they will not be accompanying on any operations that these forces partake in.

....

QUESTION: I'm talking about Syria. Will they have — will they have the ability to call in airstrikes on ISIS positions?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Right now we are — our plan is not to have those special operators based in Syria act as JTACs [Joint Terminal Attack Controllers, forward air controllers, who direct airstrikes to support ground forces] or call in airstrikes as you're — as you're referring to.

They will certainly help the forces there, but as you know, the forces on the ground in Syria have already been assisting in the — the placement of airstrikes — coalition airstrikes for nearly a year now. So they don't — I'm not sure that they — how much support they actually need in that particular mission. But no, we're not envisioning them acting as JTACs.

....

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: So the Russians coming in, obviously, complicated the overall — the already complicated situation that existed in Syria. But to be clear,

we — we set, and we have not changed, the scope or scale of our counter-ISIL efforts in Syria since they've come in. They just have not.

We have created safety procedures with them, but we — and we have made clear to them, in multiple — in multiple avenues, that we are — we expect them to keep a significant and safe distance away from us.

And to be honest with you, the area where we're placing — we're planning to place these SOF is not an area that they have struck, nor would they need to strike. It's not ISIL and it's not — it's — it is not regime-controlled.

"Department of Defense Background Briefing on Enhancing Counter-ISIL Operations," [Pentagon](#), 30 Oct 2015.

The Associated Press reported this significant escalation of U.S. Military involvement in Syria, including details leaked by anonymous officials:

Although the number of troops is small, it marks an escalation of U.S. involvement in the fight against the Islamic State, which controls a large part of northern Syria and has its self-proclaimed capital in the Syrian city of Raqqa. The move comes after weeks of deliberation on how to revive the struggling effort in Syria and the failed training and equipping mission there, and follows a visit to the region last week by Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

One senior official said that a first group of forces — possibly a couple of dozen — will go relatively soon to assess the situation and determine which groups on the ground the U.S. can best work with, including moderate Kurdish and Arab fighters. More special operations forces would follow once the U.S. better determines what the needs are.

....

The addition of special operations forces, however, marks a shift for Obama who has steadfastly said he would not put U.S. boots on the ground in Syria.

....

The officials were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly so spoke on condition of anonymity.

....

U.S. officials made it clear that there is no plan now to coordinate with the Russians or tell Moscow where U.S. troops may be in Syria. They said the troops would not be near any locations being bombed by the Russians, but a senior defense official did not rule out the possibility of talking with Moscow if it becomes necessary in order to guarantee the safety of the U.S. troops.

Vivian Salama & Lolita C. Baldor, "US commandos heading into Syria, White House says," [Associated Press](#), 15:55 EDT, 30 Oct 2015.

On 31 October, the Associated Press journalist at the White House wrote a commentary: Even when President Barack Obama sent U.S. troops back to Iraq and ordered the military to stay in Afghanistan, he insisted Syria would remain off limits for American ground forces. Now he's crossed his own red line.

Obama's announcement Friday that he was deploying up to 50 U.S. special operations troops into northern Syria to assist in the fight against the Islamic State group is the kind of incremental move that has defined his second-term Mideast strategy.

The U.S. military footprint in the region is growing. But each step is on a small scale, so as to reassure Americans that Obama isn't plunging their country into another large, open-ended conflict.

While the strategy may help ease them back into the realities of war, experts and some of Obama's political allies say his slow ramp-up may not be enough to defeat the fast-moving militants.

....

Despite killing as many as 12,000 militants, the [U.S.] bombing has not significantly weakened the IS' capacity to hold territory, and foreign fighters and others have replenished the group's ranks.

Julie Pace, "Analysis: Obama crosses own red line with Syrian deployment," [Associated Press](#), 12:15 EDT, 31 Oct 2015.

The [Associated Press](#) reports that Democrats in the U.S. Congress criticized Obama for both (1) violating his promises of 10 and 17 Sep 2014 of no boots on the ground and (2) acting without a Congressional AUMF. The Associated Press also quotes two Republicans in the U.S. Congress who criticized Obama for an "insufficient step" and "too little, too late".

My comments: First of all, the fact that Obama sends only a small number of troops does not make this act legal. Obama does *not* have the authority under U.S. law to send troops into a foreign nation, because there is no Congressional Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) for U.S. military action in Syria. (See my essays for [Feb 2015](#) and [Mar 2015](#).) Further, if the troops in Syria get into trouble, Obama will be tempted to send more troops (in for a penny, in for a pound). But if the troops in Syria are successful, Obama will be tempted to improve the performance by sending more troops. So there is a concern that Obama's decision is not only an escalation of U.S. Military involvement, but also the beginning of more and more U.S. troops fighting against ISIL. History teaches us that Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy sent a small number of "advisers" to Vietnam, and then President Johnson sent a half-million U.S. Military personnel to Vietnam.

Second, sending military personnel into a foreign nation without their request is a violation of their sovereignty. While Obama does *not* approve of the way that Assad's government has largely abandoned the fight against ISIL in northern and eastern Syria, it is *not* appropriate for Obama to act in Syria.

Third, the White House emphasizes that the U.S. troops in Syria will not have a combat role. That is specious. By sending U.S. troops to "advise" in battles against ISIL, the U.S. troops will be in harm's way, which Earnest admitted on 30 October. Not only can U.S. troops be shot at by ISIL, but also the U.S. troops could be victims of Russian or Syrian airstrikes. Further, U.S. troops could be captured and tortured by ISIL. The risk to U.S. troops, in my opinion, outweighs any benefit to the USA.

Fourth, this escalation may be Obama's response to Russia's massive program of airstrikes in Syria that began on 30 September. But there is a significant difference — Russia was invited by the lawful government of Syria, while the U.S. is violating the sovereignty of Syria. The USA should *not* be in a contest with Russia to see who can most influence Syria — such a contest is expensive, *might* lead to a war between Russia and the USA, and the Russians have already decisively won the contest by continually supporting Assad.

Fifth, the timing of the White House announcement was really poor. The White House made the announcement while John Kerry — the U.S. Secretary of State — was in Vienna at a peace [conference](#) on Syria. Kerry was pushed into the uncomfortable position of simultaneously talking about both peace and the escalation of U.S. Military involvement in Syria. The White House *should* have delayed their announcement one day.

On 2 November, Obama claimed the U.S. "advisers" in Syria did *not* violate his "no boots on the ground" pledge, because they were not on the front lines fighting against ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

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 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 30, 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 and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, one airstrike destroyed two ISIL excavators.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, seven airstrikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and an area of interest and destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL light machine gun, eight ISIL fighting positions, suppressed ISIL mortar fire, and denied ISIL terrain.
- Near Bayji, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Fallujah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Habbaniyah, one airstrike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL rocket system.
- Near Kirkuk, four airstrikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL cache, two ISIL heavy machine guns, seven ISIL light machine guns, 22 ISIL fighting positions, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, two airstrikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two airstrikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one airstrike 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](#), 1 Oct 2015.

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

An Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman in Baghdad said that the U.S.-led Coalition will *not* change its airstrikes in Syria in response to Russian airstrikes that began on 30 Sep.

Over the 24 hours since Russia began carrying out airstrikes in Syria, the coalition has not and will not change its operations in Syria to accommodate new players on the battlefield, the Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman said today.

Army Col. Steve Warren spoke with press here via live video conference from Baghdad, noting that the Russians were very clear publicly that their independent airstrikes, uncoordinated with coalition operations, would target the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Syria.

“I’m not going to get into exactly who [the Russians] hit,” Warren said, “but we don’t believe that they struck ISIL targets. ... The Russians have said that they’re going to do one thing, and here they are doing something different.”

Warren added, “Secretary Carter talked about this a little bit yesterday [during a Pentagon press conference], in that if there’s going to be other participation, it needs to be against ISIL. That’s what’s important here.”

Coalition Airstrikes

Over the past 24 hours, Warren said the coalition has conducted several sorties and executed an airstrike that destroyed two enemy excavators in northwestern Syria.

“Our average has only been eight strikes per day,” he said. “So it was lower than our average but that’s only because these are dynamic targeting processes and there weren’t any targets.”

The presence of the Russians in the skies over Syria, Warren said, “have nothing to do with our pace, our tempo, or on the focus of our airstrikes.”

The potential always exists for miscalculation and accidents, he added, but there are many square miles of Syrian air space.

“Most of these strikes are two or four aircraft, [and] they fly in, they strike, they depart. And ... there is no set of pilots on Earth who are as good as our [coalition pilots].”

Warren said steps are being taken here in Washington to help deconflict the airstrikes.

....

On airstrikes, as of today the coalition has executed 7,184 airstrikes, 4,604 in Iraq and 2,580 in Syria, he said.

Cheryl Pellerin, "Coalition Operations in Syria Unchanged Despite Russian Airstrikes, Spokesman Says," [Pentagon](#) and [CENTCOM](#), 1 Oct 2015. [All ellipses and brackets in the original.]

2 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near AL Hasakah, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL crude oil collection point and destroyed an ISIL excavator, ISIL building, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, and ISIL two anti-air artillery platform

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL ammunition cache, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL VBIED assembly area, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 17 ISIL tactical fighting positions and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and one ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

3 October 2015: airstrikes

CENTCOM again failed to post press releases on a Saturday. But [Reuters](#) reported 10 airstrikes in Syria and 17 airstrikes in Iraq by the U.S.-led Coalition.

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

On Oct. 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted ten strikes using fighter, bomber, ground-attack and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL headquarters building, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL fighting position, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Kobani, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL headquarters building and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL bunker complex.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and two ISIL tactical vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck two ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, suppressed an ISIL mortar position and wounded three ISIL fighters.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL homemade explosive cache.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three heavy machine guns and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL buildings, an ISIL tunnel, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL bunker, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL obstacles and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three heavy machine guns and four ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

4 October 2015: airstrikes

CENTCOM again failed to post press releases on a Sunday. But [Reuters](#) reported 6 airstrikes in Syria and 10 airstrikes in Iraq by the U.S.-led Coalition.

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

On Oct. 3, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using fighter, bomber, ground-attack and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted ten strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, and fighter-attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL structures, two ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL motorcycle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Washiyah, one strike damaged an ISIL excavator.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL pontoon bridge.
- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes suppressed ISIL mortar fire and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL RPG.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL tactical vehicle, six ISIL fighting positions, breached two ISIL obstacles, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

5 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 4, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using bomber and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, six strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Palmyra, one strike produced inconclusive results.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL structure.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed four ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position and wounded one ISIL fighter.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL buildings, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL anti-tank weapon, two ISIL mortar positions, and five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns and four ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

6 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes 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 Al Hasakah, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), five ISIL buildings, and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, nine strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL VBIED, four ISIL buildings, ten ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL excavator, two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL IED compound, three ISIL homemade explosive (HME) facilities, an ISIL house

borne improvised explosive device, an ISIL HME cache, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed six ISIL bunkers.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

7 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 6, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, three strikes struck two separate ISIL crude oil collection points.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniya, one strike destroyed two ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, three strikes suppressed two ISIL rocket positions, an ISIL mortar position, and an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Makhmur, one strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns and three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL rocket position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL weapons caches, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL bunker, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL trench, and an ISIL berm and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tikrit, one strike destroyed four ISIL obstacles.

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

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

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

8 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 7, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, fighter-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two strikes destroyed an ISIL crude oil collection point and an ISIL oil pump.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings, two ISIL tunnels, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL sniper position, and six ISIL home-made explosive facilities.
- Near Sinjar, six strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed three separate ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device facilities, an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL weapons cache, and two ISIL trench systems.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

9 October 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 9 October, CENTCOM failed to post any press releases. On Tuesday morning, 13 Oct, CENTCOM finally posted the following press release.

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

On Oct. 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq.

In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes 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 Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL training camp.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL home-made explosives (HME) cache and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL HME resupply truck and an ISIL HME cache.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL trench and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL building, suppressed an ISIL mortar position, denied ISIL access to tactical terrain, and damaged two ISIL obstacles.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.

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

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

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

10 October 2015: airstrikes

CENTCOM again failed to post press releases on a Saturday. But [Reuters](#) reported 5 airstrikes in Syria and 20 airstrikes in Iraq by the U.S.-led Coalition. On Tuesday morning, 13 Oct, CENTCOM finally posted the following press release.

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

On Oct. 9, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, fighter-attack, and ground-attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL tactical vehicles.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed an ISIL front end loader and damaged an ISIL front end loader.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL tactical vehicles and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL building, and three ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL home-made explosives cache.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and two separate ISIL staging areas.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL staging area, an ISIL front end loader, an ISIL heavy machine gun, six ISIL fighting positions and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes destroyed an ISIL VBIED storage facility, an ISIL VBIED factory, and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

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

[Central Command](#), 10 Oct 2015.

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

11 October 2015: airstrikes

CENTCOM again failed to post press releases on a Sunday. But [Reuters](#) reported 7 airstrikes in Syria and 17 airstrikes in Iraq by the U.S.-led Coalition. On Tuesday morning, 13 Oct, CENTCOM finally posted the following press release.

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

On Oct. 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and

Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed an ISIL front end loader and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Washiya, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL building, an ISIL rocket rail, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL up-armored VBIED, three VBIEDs, three home-made explosive facilities, four ISIL buildings, and denied ISIL access to tactical terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL light machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near, Tal Afar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL bunkers, three ISIL fighting positions, and wounded two ISIL fighters.

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

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

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

12 October 2015: airstrikes

CENTCOM failed for the fourth consecutive day to post a press release at its website. But [Reuters](#) reported 2 airstrikes in Syria and 18 airstrikes in Iraq by the U.S.-led Coalition. On Tuesday morning, 13 Oct, CENTCOM finally posted the following press release.

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

On Oct. 11, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, remotely piloted aircraft, and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Washiya, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, destroyed an ISIL fighting position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL trench, three separate ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices, two ISIL front-end loaders, an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL home-made explosives cache, denied ISIL access to terrain and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck and destroyed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Waleed, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

On 12 October, the U.S. Military announced that the U.S. had made an air drop of 50 tons of ammunition to the Syrian Arab Coalition, about 4500 fighters who are concentrating on attacking ISIL. [Al-Arabiya](#); [CNN](#) (mentions "50 tons"); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

While 50 tons may sound like a lot of ammunition, it is only 11 kg per fighter. Automatic weapons, like an AK-47 assault rifle or a machine gun, can rapidly consume ammunition.

13 October 2015: airstrikes

CENTCOM failed to post a press release for Tuesday, 13 October.

On Tuesday, 13 October 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:
Bomber aircraft conducted three strikes in Syria:

- Near Hawl, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Abu Kamal, a strike destroyed an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, a strike destroyed an ISIL crude oil collection point.

Bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 11 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of the Iraqi government:

- Near Huwayjah, two strikes struck two separate tactical units and destroyed six ISIL bunkers and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Beiji, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Mosul, a strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL buildings, an ISIL sniper position, two separate ISIL command and control nodes, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, a strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

[Pentagon](#), 13 Oct 2015.

A [Pentagon](#) briefing said "the U.S.-led coalition has conducted a total of 7,440 airstrikes, with 4,798 in Iraq, 2,642 in Syria."

14 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using remotely piloted and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, ground attack, remotely piloted aircraft, and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives cache.
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL resupply vehicle, and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tactical vehicle, two ISIL improvised explosive clusters used as minefields, and denied ISIL terrain at three separate locations.
- Near Samarra, one strike destroyed two ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, ten ISIL bunkers, and two ISIL tunnel systems.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

15 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 14, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using remotely piloted and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, ground-attack, remotely piloted aircraft, and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Bab, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and damaged an ISIL excavator.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes destroyed an ISIL crude oil collection point and an ISIL oil pump.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Tal Jibbin , one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Washiyah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and an ISIL artillery piece.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and denied ISIL access to tactical terrain.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL home-made explosives cache.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position, an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL fighting position, and two ISIL tactical vehicles.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 21 ISIL fighting positions and five ISIL staging areas.

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

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

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

16 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using remotely piloted and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, ground-attack, remotely piloted aircraft, and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Aleppo, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Washiyah, one strike struck an ISIL improvised explosive device cluster.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL motorcycle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and damaged an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, three ISIL fighting positions, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed two separate ISIL VBIED facilities.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL improvised explosive device cluster, four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL supply pile, two ISIL boats, and breached two ISIL obstacles and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, 49 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL cache, and wounded an ISIL fighter.

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

[Central Command](#), 16 Oct 2015.

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

CENTCOM posted a rare report on one of their airstrikes that will be in tomorrow's summary:

Coalition aircraft struck elements of the Qayyarah Oil Refinery in Iraq just after midnight Oct. 16 local time, as part of the Coalition's effort to disrupt Daesh, the Arabic acronym for ISIL, financing from illegally-gained oil revenue. This strike was conducted in coordination with and in support of the Government of Iraq.

The Qayyarah Oil Refinery was used by Daesh to produce oil for the black market to fund their terrorist activities. This site was also used to store weapons and as a base of operations to facilitate attacks in the area.

"The Coalition recognizes that a significant portion of Daesh's financing results from illicit oil revenues," said Col. Christopher Garver, Public Affairs Officer for CJTF-OIR. "This airstrike is aimed at reducing Daesh's ability to fund their terrorist activities

with oil stolen from the people of Iraq. It also demonstrates the Coalition's commitment to attack Daesh across all aspects in order to dismantle and ultimately defeat Daesh." "Oct. 16: Coalition airstrikes target key ISIL revenue source," [CENTCOM](#), 16 Oct 2015.

The airstrike near Aleppo, Syria killed the leader of the Khorasan Group, as explained in the press release for 19 Oct, quoted below.

17 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using remotely piloted and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings, three ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL mortar positions, two ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL staging area, two ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and denied ISIL access to two separate terrain locations.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, seven ISIL fighting positions, 14 ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL supply caches, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Waleed, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and wounded three ISIL fighters.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 17 Oct 2015.

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

18 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using remotely piloted and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, ground-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed two separate ISIL crude oil collection points.
- Near Aleppo, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, and neutralized an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes damaged an ISIL artillery piece.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker, an ISIL heavy machine gun, three ISIL weapons caches, and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kisik, two strikes suppressed an ISIL sniper position and an ISIL light machine gun position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, six ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL improvised explosive device and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes destroyed an ISIL supply cache and denied ISIL access to two separate terrain locations.
- Near Sinjar, five strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL cache, an ISIL assembly area, 26 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL improvised explosive device factory, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

19 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft [against] ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed three ISIL tactical vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL building, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL buildings, four ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL vehicles, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 17 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL assembly area, and two ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Tal Afar, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, four ISIL fighting positions, and wounded an ISIL fighter.

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

Separately, on October 15 near Aleppo, Syria, U.S. military forces conducted one airstrike against a network of veteran al Qaeda operatives, sometimes called the "Khorasan Group," who are plotting external attacks against the United States and our allies. The airstrike destroyed a vehicle. This strike was previously reported as an ISIL strike.

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

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

On 19 October, CENTCOM posted a copy of the 18 Oct Pentagon press release about splatting the Khorasan Group leader on 15 October:

An Oct. 15 coalition airstrike in northwest Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh, also known as Sanafi al-Nasr, a Saudi national and the highest

ranking leader of the network of veteran al-Qaida operatives sometimes called the "Khorasan Group," according to a Defense Department statement issued today [18 Oct].

"The United States will not relent in its mission to degrade, disrupt and destroy al-Qaida and its remnants," Defense Secretary Ash Carter said in the statement. "This operation deals a significant blow to the Khorasan Group's plans to attack the United States and our allies, and once again proves that those who seek to do us harm are not beyond our reach."

The statement called Al-Nasr "a long-time jihadist experienced in funneling money and fighters for al-Qaida." He moved funds from donors in the Gulf region into Iraq and then to al-Qaida leaders from Pakistan to Syria; he organized and maintained routes for new recruits to travel from Pakistan to Syria through Turkey; and he assisted al-Qaida's external operations in the West, the statement said.

Al-Nasr previously worked for al-Qaida's Iran-based facilitation network, and in 2012, he took charge of al-Qaida's core finances before relocating to Syria in 2013, the statement said. Al-Nasr is the fifth senior Khorasan Group leader killed in the last four months.

[Central Command](#).

Original posted at the [Pentagon](#), 18 Oct 2015.

20 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 19, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strike using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters building.
- Near Tal Jibbin, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL staging area, and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL trench.
- Near Mosul, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings, an ISIL sniper position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Sinjar, eight strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 26 ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL vehicles, 10 ISIL assembly areas, and three ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

In Canadian elections, the Liberal candidate (Justin Trudeau) defeated the incumbent Conservative Prime Minister. Trudeau immediately announced he would end Canadian airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria. Canada will continue training Iraqi soldiers. [Reuters](#); [Globe&Mail](#); [Associated Press](#); [CBC](#); [CNN](#). My comment is that the U.S.-led Coalition just lost six aircraft to a rational foreign policy in Canada.

21 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 20, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL structures, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL resupply point.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, six strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility and destroyed five separate ISIL staging areas.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL IED, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 14 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL light machine gun, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed ISIL mortar fire.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed 16 ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

The [Pentagon](#) reported: "As of today [21 Oct], we have conducted 7,603 airstrikes, 4,933 in Iraq, 2,670 in Syria."

22 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 21, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, ground-attack, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Washiyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL building.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, five strikes struck two ISIL crude oil collection points, an ISIL maintenance and storage yard, an ISIL main petroleum station, and an ISIL cash distribution site.

Iraq

- Near Kirkuk, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL building, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, seven strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL IED facility, an ISIL VBIED facility, five ISIL vehicles, two ISIL bunkers, 31 ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL supply caches.

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

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

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

See 26 October, for report of destruction of an ISIL prison in Iraq.

On 15 October, the [Financial Times](#) newspaper reported that ISIL in Syria is earning an average of US\$ 1,500,000/day from sale of oil. [Iraqi News](#). The *Financial Times* says most of the ISIL oil is consumed inside Syria and Iraq, including by insurgents in Syria. United

Nations Security Council Resolution S/RES/2199 (Feb 2015) condemned the sale of oil by ISIL, but that Resolution is *not* enforced inside Syria and Iraq. (I assume — but do not know — that this news led to the U.S. airstrikes on ISIL's oil field in Syria.)

The [Associated Press](#) reported on the large number of airstrikes (26 targets) on the oil field near Dayr Az Zawr in Syria.

23 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 22, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL mortar tube.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Makhmur, one strike destroyed two ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL heavy machine guns, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and suppressed ISIL mortar fire.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL mobility obstacles, two ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) clusters, two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle-borne IED, an ISIL anti-tank guided missile system, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes destroyed 15 ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL IED facilities.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 23 Oct 2015.

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

24 October 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 26 Oct, at 16:00 EDT, CENTCOM had not yet posted the press release for Saturday, so I used the Pentagon's version of the press release. Note there were zero airstrikes

in Syria by the U.S-led Coalition.

On Saturday, 24 October 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

Attack, bomber, fighter, ground-attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 21 airstrikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq:

- Near Baghdadi, one strike denied ISIL access to tactical terrain.
- Near Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL logistical facility.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed ISIL mortar fire.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL improvised explosive device cluster, two ISIL vehicle bombs, an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL weapon caches, an ISIL building, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL structure and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL staging area and destroyed an ISIL headquarters building and seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL vehicle bomb facility and destroyed 19 ISIL fighting positions.

[Pentagon](#), 24 Oct 2015.

Eventually posted at [Central Command](#).

25 October 2015: airstrikes

On Monday, 26 Oct, at 16:00 EDT, CENTCOM had not yet posted the press release for Sunday, so I used the Pentagon's version of the press release. Note there were zero airstrikes in Syria by the U.S-led Coalition.

On Sunday, 25 October 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 22 airstrikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq:

- Near Beiji, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed five ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Kisik, eight strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, four separate ISIL staging areas, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed ten ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL sniper positions, an ISIL vehicle, and an

- ISIL weapons cache, and denied ISIL access to tactical terrain.
- Near Sinjar, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 16 ISIL fighting positions, seven ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL cache.

[Pentagon](#), 25 Oct 2015.

Eventually posted at [Central Command](#).

26 October 2015: airstrikes

There were zero airstrikes in Syria on 23-24-25 October.

On Monday, 26 October 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: On Oct. 25, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, attack, bomber, ground attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL cave entrance.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL weapon caches, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL building, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 18 ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Additionally, on 22 Oct., in conjunction with an operation to free 70 hostages, the following targets were struck in Iraq:

- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL prison camp and denied ISIL forces an avenue of approach.

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

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

The version of this press release at the Pentagon contains more text about the destruction of the ISIL prison:

Task force officials provided an update to the Oct. 22 prison raid near Huwayjah, Iraq,

noting the prison was destroyed by two airstrikes from coalition aircraft following the successful rescue of Iraqi hostages. The rescue operation was conducted by Iraqi special operations forces [actually Kurdish Peshmerga] supported by U.S. forces in an advise-and-assist role.

[Pentagon](#), 26 Oct 2015.

27 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 26, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed two ISIL machine gun positions.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), four ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL artillery piece, suppressed an ISIL cannon, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, six strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL checkpoint, and suppressed an ISIL machine gun position.

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

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

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

28 October 2015: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 28 October 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

On Oct. 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL light machine guns.
- Near Samarra, one strike destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, four strikes destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL weapons storage area, an ISIL logistical facility, and an ISIL staging area.

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

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

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

A press briefing at the [Pentagon](#) said, as of 28 Oct, "we have conducted 7,712 airstrikes with 5,032 in Iraq and 2,680 in Syria."

29 October 2015: airstrikes

On both 28 and 29 October, CENTCOM reported *zero* airstrikes in Syria.

On Thursday, 29 October 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

On Oct. 28, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL weapons and staging areas.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL recoilless rifle, two ISIL rocket rails, eight ISIL boats, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes destroyed 33 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, three strikes suppressed two ISIL mortar positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

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

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

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

30 October 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike suppressed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes suppressed an ISIL mortar position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, seven ISIL bed down locations, 15 ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL command and control node, three ISIL caches, and four ISIL staging areas.
- Near Tal Afar, three strikes destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL assembly areas.

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

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

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

31 October 2015: airstrikes

Neither CENTCOM nor the Pentagon posted news on Saturday, but [Reuters](#) worked on Saturday, and reports 7 airstrikes in Syria and 14 in Iraq.

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

On Oct. 30, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using fighter, attack, and bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, ground-attack, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL fighting complex.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters building.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, four strikes struck an ISIL crude oil collection point, an ISIL petroleum pump, an ISIL pump station, and destroyed an ISIL crane and an ISIL mobile pump.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL logistical facility.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL weapons cache, three command and control nodes, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL bunkers.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL checkpoint and wounded two ISIL fighters.

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

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

Included in the Pentagon press release on 1 Nov 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.

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions a 15 y old girl in Denmark who stabbed her mother to death after repeatedly watching on the Internet (YouTube) videos of ISIL executions with her 29 y old boyfriend who was a so-called "refugee" from Iraq. That essay also mentions an Iraqi terrorist in Berlin who was killed by police in an attack on 17 Sep 2015.

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.

In mid-September 2015, I wrote that some "migrants will become disenchanted with their new home". This has already happened. On 19 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Syrians who arrived in Uruguay in November 2014 have complained, and "many Uruguayans ... have come to see the refugees more as rude, ungrateful guests."

On 27 Sep 2015, there was a riot by Albanians and Pakistanis in a migrant camp in Calden,

Germany. On 30 Sep 2015 there was a brawl between Syrian and Afghans in a migrant camp in Hamburg, Germany.

See:

- "German president warns of limits to number of refugees," [Reuters](#), 28 Sep 2015.
- "Germany quells migrant mass brawl at camp in Calden," [BBC](#), 28 Sep 2015.
- "A refugee riot puts a German town on edge," [Washington Post](#), 1 Oct 2015.
- "Syrians, Afghans clash in German refugee center riot," [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP), 1 Oct 2015.
- "Clash breaks out among refugees in Hamburg," [Deutsche Welle](#), 1 Oct 2015.

If these riots continue, I would expect many Germans to regret allowing these barbarians to enter Germany, because of strong law-and-order values amongst Germans.

On 1 October, the [Washington Post](#) quoted the director of a migrant camp in Greiz, Germany: "I do not have any skilled workers living here. I know the labor market in this region; it is not so simple to find work here." That foreshadows the migrants being unable to find work in Germany.

During the migration crisis in September 2015, accurate numbers were sparse. Instead, politicians and journalists spoke of "tens of thousands" per day, and "hundreds of thousands" per week. On 7 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "An Austrian Interior Ministry official says nearly 200,000 migrants transited Austria" during September 2015. The actual number was higher, because some migrants boarded trains outside of Austria and then traveled through Austria. Also the Associated Press reported: "German authorities say 164,000" migrants arrived in Germany during September 2015.

Conclusions

I still agree with what I said in my Conclusion to my [eighth essay](#) on Syria that was written during June 2014.

The capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL on 10 June 2014 — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — changed the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.

Western View of Insurgency in Syria Before 10 June 2014

Before 10 June 2014, the conventional wisdom in the London11 nations — including the USA — was that Assad was Evil, and the removal of Assad was the Nr. 1 goal in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition has a consistent and intransigent demand that Assad resign. The intransigence of the Syrian National Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Kerry, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian government.

Obama's foreign policy on Syria is essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. (See my [document](#) that collects quotations from Obama and two U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary

Clinton and John Kerry.) When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012 or 2013, Obama's foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality.

One can summarize a series of events that exposed the futility of the plans of the London11 group of nations and the United Nations negotiations in Geneva:

1. The reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, Assad is winning the civil war in heavily populated western Syria, and the insurgents are unable to force Assad to resign.
2. Assad did *not* resign, and the Geneva peace negotiations ended in failure on 15 Feb 2014. The Coalition's intransigent demand that Assad resign, and Assad's insistence on remaining in power, are *impossible* for compromise.
3. Not only are there no plans to resume Syrian peace negotiations in the foreseeable future, but also the United Nations negotiator (Brahimi) resigned in frustration on 13 May 2014.
4. Assad was re-elected for another seven-year term on 3 June 2014.
5. It is now obvious that neither side in the Geneva negotiations genuinely wanted to negotiate. The U.S. Government essentially forced the Coalition to attend the Geneva negotiations, and Russia forced Assad's government to attend.

Not all of these facts or events were known on 15 Feb 2014, when the Geneva negotiations ended. But all of these facts are known at the end of June 2014, and were documented in my previous essays. A more detailed analysis of the failure of the Geneva negotiations is found in my separate [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).

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 31 October 2015, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

ISIL has had effective fighters in Syria since mid-2013. The Syrian Kurds are the only ground forces in Syria that can defeat ISIL. Obama has been reluctant to cooperate with Syrian Kurds, because the Turkish government considers the Kurds to be terrorists. Instead, Obama planned to train and equip the so-called "moderate rebels" in Syria, an effort that *planned* to train 15,000 rebels by January 2018. Meanwhile, effective troops on the ground were needed in Syria in January 2014 to prevent ISIL from capturing cities and infrastructure, and were needed in Syria beginning in September 2014 to complement the U.S. airstrikes. 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. On 9 October 2015, the U.S. finally ended the training of moderate rebels to fight against ISIL in Syria. This lack of competent ground forces in Syria is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

Beginning in 2013, Obama and Kerry, along with the United Nations Secretary General, have repeatedly uttered the slogan that there is "*no* military solution" in Syria. But what the foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, USA, etc.) have actually done is pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military solution. The situation dramatically worsened on 30 Sep 2015, with the beginning of massive Russian airstrikes on the Free Syrian Army and Nusra Front in western Syria. There is an incredible amount of hypocrisy by the foreign meddlers in *talking* about a political solution according to the Geneva Communiqué of 2012, while actively engaging in continuing — and escalating — warfare.

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 250,000 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, Mosul, or Ramadi 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/syria26.pdf>
begun 1 Oct 2015, last modified 3 Nov 2015.

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

[my homepage](#)