

Syria & Iraq: November 2015

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 24 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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 Standard Time in Boston is -5 hours from GMT. Beginning 1 November, the USA was on Standard Time.

The U.K. went on standard time a few days before the USA. Damascus and Ankara are each +2 hours from GMT. Baghdad and Moscow are each +3 hours from GMT.

Every day, I checked the websites of

- [All Iraq News](#) and [Iraqi News](#),
- [Rudaw](#) in Kurdish Iraq,
- [Al-Arabiya](#) middle east section,
- the Pentagon and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM),
- the Associated Press,
- Reuters in the United Kingdom,
- *The Washington Post*, and
- news sources in Russia (e.g., TASS, RIA-Novosti, Russia Today)

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. I have looked at the homepage of *Iraqi News* every day, in an attempt to fill the gap.

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 Syria 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 at the United Nations Security Council.

Chemical Weapons in Syria

History

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.

November 2015: Investigation of Mustard in Syria on 21 August

On 5 November, Reuters had an exclusive report about the use of mustard gas at Marea:
Chemical weapons experts have determined that mustard gas was used during fighting in Syria in August, according to a report by an international watchdog seen by Reuters.

....

The confidential Oct. 29 report by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), a summary of which was shown to Reuters, concluded "with the utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulphur mustard" in the town of Marea, north of Aleppo, on Aug. 21.

....

Also "it raises the major question of where the sulphur mustard came from", one source said. "Either they (IS) gained the ability to make it themselves, or it may have come from an undeclared stockpile overtaken by IS. Both are worrying options."

The finding, which will be formally presented to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon later this month, adds to a growing body of evidence that the Islamic State group has obtained, and is using, chemical weapons in both Iraq and Syria.

Anthony Deutsch, "Exclusive: Chemical weapons used in Syrian fighting — watchdog," [Reuters](#), 18:49 GMT, 5 Nov 2015.

Later the Associated Press posted a similar report:

A source at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons said Thursday [5 Nov] that inspectors from the international watchdog have found evidence that mustard gas was used during fighting between insurgent groups in the Syrian town of Marea in August.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because a report on the findings had not yet been published, said OPCW inspectors discovered "evidence that mustard (gas) was indeed used there."

Mike Corder, "Source: OPCW believes Syrian insurgents used mustard gas," [Associated Press](#), 23:17 GMT, 5 Nov 2015.

On 6 November, OPCW issued a terse press release about three reports from the OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria. Here is what the press release says about the alleged use of mustard in Marea, Syria.

The OPCW FFM has also investigated an incident on 21 August [2015] in which a non-state actor had allegedly used a chemical weapon in the town of Marea, close to Aleppo [sic]. The FFM collected samples and interviewed two individuals affected by exposure, and the treating physicians. In this case, the team was able to confirm with utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulfur mustard, and that it is very likely that the effects of this chemical weapon resulted in the death of an infant.

The FFM might conduct further deployments to look into any additional credible information made available by the Syrian government or others.

In accordance with the established practice, the Director-General will attach these FFM reports to his next monthly report to be submitted to the UN Security Council through the Secretary-General.

"Director-General circulates OPCW FFM Reports to States Parties," [OPCW](#), 6 Nov 2015.

On 3 December 2015, the monthly report for November — with the three fact-finding mission reports — was posted at neither the OPCW nor the United Nations Security Council websites. During January 2015 through October 2015, the U.N. Secretary General released monthly OPCW reports sometime between the 24th and 29th day of each month, so the November report is late.

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.

In his 26 October letter transmitting to the U.N. Security Council the monthly report from OPCW on chemical weapons in Syria, the U.N. Secretary General reported:

Preparations are ongoing for the OPCW-United Nations joint investigative mechanism, established under Security Council resolution 2235 (2015), to become operational as soon as all core staff have been recruited and enough funds raised through voluntary contributions to support the material and technical needs of the mechanism. The leadership panel of the mechanism, which is composed of the head of the mechanism and her two deputies, began its work on 24 September 2015.

The identification of those responsible for the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic is of the utmost importance. Those responsible for their use must be held accountable. Those who would consider making use of such weapons in the future must be deterred by the certain knowledge that such acts will not be overlooked and that such actors will be held accountable by the international community.

Paragraph 13 of the OPCW report says tersely:

The OPCW is actively supporting the commencement of the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism established under United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 (2015). The Organization is providing specific technical and analytical expertise to the Mechanism, which is expected to become operational in early November 2015. Ban, "Letter dated 26 October 2015 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council" *and* OPCW, "Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme," [S/2015/820](#), 26 Oct 2015.

On 13 November, the [United Nations](#) announced that the JIM is "fully operational".

Strangely, as of 22 Nov, OPCW has issued *no* press releases about the JIM. The last OPCW press release about Syria is dated 22 June 2015, months before the JIM mission was authorized.

ISIL Releases Chemical Weapons in Iraq

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.

**Introduction:
ISIL used mustard in Iraq
on 11 August 2015**

On 11 August, ISIL allegedly fired mortar shells containing mustard against the Kurdish Peshmerga in Makhmur, Iraq. My essay for [August 2015](#) cited 12 news articles on that incident. My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions speculation that either (1) ISIL manufactured the mustard (at the University of Mosul?), (2) ISIL stole the mustard from Assad's warehouses in Syria, or (3) ISIL stole the mustard from old Iraqi stockpiles produced under Saddam Hussein's rule.

From 31 July to 4 Sep 2015, General Kevin J. Killea — chief of staff, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve — gave a few press briefings at the Pentagon. In his [21 Aug 2015](#) briefing, General Killea said: "[we] were able to take the fragments from some of those mortar rounds and do a field test, a presumptive field test on those [mortar shell] fragments and they showed the presence of HD, or what is known as sulfur mustard."

In Killea's next — and final — briefing, on [4 Sep 2015](#) Laurent Barthelemy from Agence France Presse (AFP) asked General Killea about the alleged use of mustard gas at Makhmur, Iraq, and specifically what were the results of laboratory tests. General Killea responded that there had been a "field test" of evidence collected at the site, and "those materials have now been packaged up, and they have been shipped to what we call a gold-level laboratory. It's an internationally recognized laboratory for complete and thorough analysis so that we can ultimately get to conclusive results on what — what that material was." The results were supposed to be available in "a couple of more weeks" after the 4 Sep press briefing. But General Killea did no further briefings, and when Col. Warren resumed the briefings on 1 Oct, journalists failed to ask about the results of the laboratory tests on the evidence from Makhmur.

My 10 November search of press releases and briefing transcripts at the Pentagon website for the query "Mustard Makhmur" found only the two briefings by General Killea that were cited above.

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."

Investigation continues in November 2015

On 19 November 2015, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL had established a chemical weapons research & development program.

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 1 November 2015, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll of 4215 people killed during October 2015.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 4215 people in October 2015. The death toll is as follows:

- 960 civilians, including 191 children and 135 women, distributed as follows:
 - 495 civilians, including 130 children and 70 women, killed by airstrikes

carried out by the regime and Russian air forces.

- 30 civilians, includes a child, executed by IS.
- 2 civilians killed by US-led coalition airstrikes.
- 51 civilians tortured to death inside the regime jails.
- 39 civilians, including 8 children and 9 women, killed by shells launched by YPG, Jabhat al-Nusra, IS, the rebels and Islamist factions.
- 13 civilians, including 10 children and a woman died due to the poor healthy conditions and lack of medicines.
- 330 civilians, including 42 children and 45 women, killed in shelling by the regime forces, firing by the Turkish border guards, explosions, snipers and unknown circumstances.

- Syrian fighters of YPG, Rebel and Islamist factions: 612.
- Non-Syrian fighters of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaysh al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army and the Islamist factions: 1252.
- Defected soldiers: 3.
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 663.
- Militiamen of the People's Committees and NDF as well as informers: 594.
- Hezbollah militiamen: 16.
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 85.
- Unidentified victims: 30

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion and pro-regime militants is approximately 500 soldiers and fighters more than the documented number because of reticence about casualties by all parties, the difficulties of reaching to the outback and the difficulties to investigate about those who have died inside the regime or IS jails.

SOHR is not going to stop to calls upon the members of the UN Security Council to issue a binding resolution that prohibits targeting the civilians in Syria, where massacres committed against them every day under the nose of the international community which do not make any step to stop the ongoing violations committed against the Syrian people who dream of establishing the state of democracy, justice, freedom and equality.

"More than 4200 people killed in October, 2015," [SOHR](#), 1 Nov 2015.

Note that Russian and Syrian airstrikes killed 495 civilians, while US-led coalition airstrikes killed only 2 civilians.

Since this SOHR press release concerns October, why was it not included in my essay for October? When SOHR issued this press release on 1 November, I was away from my computer on a business trip. When I returned to my office on 3 November and finalized my October essay, this press release had already been removed from the English-language homepage of SOHR. I found this press release late in November, during a search of the SOHR website.

On 1 December, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll of 4182 people killed during November 2015.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 4182 people in November 2015.

The death toll is as follows:

- 1053 civilians, including 198 children and 116 women, killed by airstrikes carried out by the regime and Russian air forces, "Islamic State", US-led coalition airstrikes, inside the regime jails, shells launched by YPG, Jabhat al-Nusra, IS, the rebels and Islamist factions, shelling by the regime forces, firing by the Turkish border guards, explosions, snipers, in unknown circumstances and due to the poor healthy conditions and lack of medicines.
- Syrian fighters of YPG, Rebel and Islamist factions: 618.
- Non-Syrian fighters of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaysh al Muhajereen and al-Ansra Army and the Islamist factions: 1209.
- Defected soldiers: 4.
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 641.
- Militiamen of the People's Committees and NDF as well as informers: 515.
- Hezbollah militiamen: 9.
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 99.
- Unidentified victims: 34.

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

SOHR is not going to stop to calls upon the members of the UN Security Council to issue a binding resolution that prohibits targeting the civilians in Syria, where massacres committed against them every day under the nose of the international community which do not make any step to stop the ongoing violations committed against the Syrian people who dream of establishing the state of democracy, justice, freedom and equality.

"At least 4182 people killed in November 2015," [SOHR](#), 1 Dec 2015.

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of death tolls announced by SOHR, beginning 31 Aug 2013, including the average death rate per 30 days. The total number of people killed in the Syrian civil war from 18 March 2011 to 30 November 2015 is *more than* 257,047.

U.S. troops in Syria

My essay for [October 2015](#) chronicles Obama's decision on 30 October to send fewer than 50 U.S. "advisers" into Syria.

On 27 November, Agence France-Presse reports that U.S. soldiers arrived during the past two days in Kobane, Syria to assist the Kurds in the battles against ISIL. [Al-Arabiya](#).

Free Syrian Army is Leaderless since June 2015

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 19 November 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. It is astounding that the SNC — which purports to be the legitimate government of Syria that will replace Assad — takes more than 5 months to choose a leader for the Free Syrian Army, during an existential war.

See my essay for [October 2015](#) for the end to the U.S. program of training moderate rebels to fight against ISIL in Syria.

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.

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. In my July essay (see end of section "U.S. Reaction to Turkey"), I listed 5 reasons why "Turkey is an ally from Hell."

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 essays for [September 2015](#) and [October 2015](#) mentions Turkey's apparent lack of interest in fighting ISIL — *only four* airstrikes against ISIL from 24 July to 31 Oct.

November 2015

After Erdogan began a civil war against Kurds, and after Erdogan began an appalling campaign of censorship and arrests of journalists, Erdogan's party won a majority in the elections on 1 Nov.

On 17 November, journalists report that Turkey is now working with the U.S. to seal the remaining 98 km of border with Syria. [Reuters](#); [Today's Zaman](#). Sealing the border is something that Turkey *promised* to do at the end of July 2015.

My essay for [July 2015](#) mentions that the Turkish government may have supplied weapons to ISIL in January 2014. On 25 November, [Today's Zaman](#) reports what may be a tacit admission by Erdogan that the Turkish government was sending weapons to Syria. Government officials who investigated the trucks carrying weapons to Syria were arrested and are being tried in criminal court. On 26 November, two journalists who reported on those trucks were arrested and will be tried in criminal court. [Hurriyet](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 24 November, Turkey shot down a Russian aircraft that made a brief, transient flight over Turkey. For details, see [below](#).

The arrests of journalists and reckless shooting down a Russian airplane are more reasons why Turkey is an ally from Hell.

On 27 November, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that the U.S. Government had asked Turkey to use an additional 30,000 soldiers to seal the border with Syria.

On 29 November, Turkey extorted 3 billion Euros (US\$3.2 billion) from the European Union and visa-free travel to Europe, in exchange for Turkey promising to stop the flow of migrants to Europe. Wisely, the Europeans will pay the money to Turkey in installments over two years, if Turkey actually stops the flow of migrants. [Anadolu Agency](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is this is a hell of a way to reward Turkey for

imprisoning journalists who criticize the government, supplying weapons to ISIL, attacking Kurds, shooting down a Russian bomber over Syria, etc. On the other hand, Europe had little choice, since the flow of migrants was overwhelming Europe, and Europe was unable to refuse entry to the migrants.

Recognition that Assad is 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". Further, in a rare speech on 26 July 2015, Assad admitted a shortage of soldiers in the Syrian army. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

From December 2014 through September 2015, I no longer believed 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.

November 2015

The massive Russian airstrikes in Syria that began on 30 Sep 2015 was a game changer, which swung the balance of power in favor of Assad. See, e.g.,

- "Russian Cruise Missiles Help Syrians Go on the Offensive" [New York Times](#), 7 Oct 2015 ("For Mr. Assad's supporters and opponents alike, regionally and internationally, Russia's increasing willingness to throw its full military power behind him is a game-changer.").
- "Is Russia trumping US in Syria? Pentagon is of two minds."

[Christian Science Monitor](#), 9 Oct 2015 ("The Russian move into Syria, says [Christopher] Harmer, [former deputy director of operations for the US Navy's Fifth Fleet,] 'has more or less guaranteed that [Syrian dictator Bashar] Assad will be in place for the foreseeable future.'").

- "Syria conflict: Assad forces make 'significant gains'," [BBC](#), 11 Oct 2015.
- "EU calls on Russia to halt airstrikes in Syria," [The Guardian](#), 12 Oct 2015 ("Federica Mogherini, the [European] Union's foreign policy chief, called the Russian intervention a 'gamechanger' that has 'some very worrying elements'").
- "Foreign Ministers Agree to Back U.N.-Led Diplomatic Process for Syria," [WSJ](#), 30 Oct 2015 ("The U.S. and a host of international powers agreed Friday to resume United Nations-backed peace talks on Syria, but with a recognition that President Bashar al-Assad will remain in power for the foreseeable future.").

In the spring of 2014, ISIL surrounded a Syrian air base at Kweiras in Aleppo province, and ISIL then continuously besieged that air base. On 10 Nov 2015, after 40 days of Russian airstrikes, the Syrian army broke the siege of that air base. Both Reuters and the Associated Press agree this was the biggest victory for Syria since the Russian airstrikes began on 30 Sep 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [RIA-Novosti](#).

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 12 October, the SNC declared that the SNC would boycott de Mistura's working groups, because of the Russian military intervention in Syria.

On 29 November 2015, there were still no publicly announced plans to have a meeting of one or more working groups. One might expect some urgency, given that people are dying at the rate of more than 4000/month in the Syrian civil war and there currently is an unprecedented flood of migrants from Syria to Europe.

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 in October 2015 that the Russian government is *not* interested in a negotiated end to the Syrian civil war.

Meetings in Vienna

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.

On 30 October, there was another meeting in Vienna, this time with foreign ministers of 17 nations, plus the EU and UN: European Union (Federica Mogherini), U.N. Special Envoy to Syria (Staffan de Mistura), China, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom (i.e., Britain), and the USA. My essay for [October 2015](#) quotes the entire Communiqué issued at this 30 Oct meeting.

On 31 October, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, indirectly criticized the obsession of Obama — and also indirectly criticized leaders of Western Europe, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, etc. — about the removal of Assad. Ban in Geneva said: “I believe that the future of Syria, or the future of all these peace talks, the Syrian-led negotiation, should not be held up by an issue of the future of one man. Basically I believe that it is up to the Syrian people who have to decide the future of President Assad.” [Reuters](#). Agence France-Presse reported that Ban in Madrid said: “It is totally unfair and unreasonable that the fate of one person takes the whole political negotiation process hostage. It is unacceptable. The future of Assad must be decided by the Syrian people.” [Al-Arabiya](#). See also [Voice of America](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

On 10 November, Russia proposed that Syria write a new constitution within the next 18 months, then have a presidential election. Assad would be allowed as a candidate in the election. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is what Syria *really* needs is a ceasefire, following by rebuilding infrastructure destroyed in the war. A new constitution and another presidential election are — by comparison with a ceasefire and rebuilding — only cosmetic changes. Apparently, Russia is following the flawed Geneva1 Communiqué with its unneeded transitional government.

On 11 November, [Reuters](#) reported that a member of the Syrian National Coalition and "Gulf commentators" rejected the Russian proposal, because it could keep Assad in power. Also on

11 Nov, the [Associated Press](#) reported a member of Assad's party in the Syrian legislature rejected the Russian proposal, because Assad was elected to serve until the year 2021. The AP also quotes a different member of the Syrian National Coalition as opposing the Russian proposal.

The second big meeting on Syria was in Vienna on Saturday, 14 November. This meeting was overshadowed by the Islamic attacks in [Paris](#) on the previous night. At the meeting in Vienna, the following statement was issued:

Statement of the International Syria Support Group

Vienna, Austria, 14 November 2015

[¶ 1] Meeting in Vienna on November 14, 2015 as the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), the Arab League, 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 to discuss how to accelerate an end to the Syrian conflict. The participants began with a moment of silence for the victims of the heinous terrorist attacks of November 13 in Paris and the recent attacks in Beirut, Iraq, Ankara, and Egypt. The members unanimously condemned in the strongest terms these brutal attacks against innocent civilians and stood with the people of France.

[¶ 2] Subsequently, the participants engaged in a constructive dialogue to build upon the progress made in the October 30 gathering. The members of the ISSG expressed a unanimous sense of urgency to end the suffering of the Syrian people, the physical destruction of Syria, the destabilization of the region, and the resulting increase in terrorists drawn to the fighting in Syria.

[¶ 3] The ISSG acknowledged the close linkage between a ceasefire and a parallel political process pursuant to the 2012 Geneva Communique, and that both initiatives should move ahead expeditiously. They stated their commitment to ensure a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition based on the Geneva Communique in its entirety. The group reached a common understanding on several key issues.

[¶ 4] The group agreed to support and work to implement a nationwide ceasefire in Syria to come into effect as soon as the representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition have begun initial steps towards the transition under UN auspices on the basis of the Geneva Communique. The five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council pledged to support a UNSC resolution to empower a UN-endorsed ceasefire monitoring mission in those parts of the country where monitors would not come under threat of attacks from terrorists, and to support a political transition process in accordance with the Geneva Communique.

[¶ 5] All members of the ISSG also pledged as individual countries and supporters of various belligerents to take all possible steps to require adherence to the ceasefire by these groups or individuals they support, supply or influence. The ceasefire would not apply to offensive or defensive actions against Da'esh or Nusra or any other group the

ISSG agrees to deem terrorist.

[¶ 6] The participants welcomed UN Secretary General Ban's statement that he has ordered the UN to accelerate planning for supporting the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire. The group agreed that the UN should lead the effort, in consultation with interested parties, to determine the requirements and modalities of a ceasefire.

[¶ 7] The ISSG expressed willingness to take immediate steps to encourage confidence-building measures that would contribute to the viability of the political process and to pave the way for the nationwide ceasefire. In this context, and pursuant to clause 5 of the Vienna Communique, the ISSG discussed the need to take steps to ensure expeditious humanitarian access throughout the territory of Syria pursuant to UNSCR 2165 and called for the granting of the UN's pending requests for humanitarian deliveries. The ISSG expressed concern for the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons and the imperative of building conditions for their safe return in accordance with the norms of international humanitarian law and taking into account the interests of host countries. The resolution of the refugee issue is important to the final settlement of the Syrian conflict. The ISSG also reaffirmed the devastating effects of the use of indiscriminate weapons on the civilian population and humanitarian access, as stated in UNSCR 2139. The ISSG agreed to press the parties to end immediately any use of such indiscriminate weapons.

[¶ 8] The ISSG reaffirmed the importance of abiding by all relevant UN Security Council resolutions, including UNSCR 2199 on stopping the illegal trade in oil, antiquities and hostages, from which terrorists benefit.

[¶ 9] Pursuant to the 2012 Geneva Communique, incorporated by reference in the Vienna statement of October 30, and in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2118, the ISSG agreed on the need to convene Syrian government and opposition representatives in formal negotiations under UN auspices, as soon as possible, with a target date of January 1. The group welcomed efforts, working with United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura and others, to bring together the broadest possible spectrum of the opposition, chosen by Syrians, who will decide their negotiating representatives and define their negotiating positions, so as to enable the political process to begin. All the parties to the political process should adhere to the guiding principles identified at the October 30 meeting, including a commitment to Syria's unity, independence, territorial integrity, and non-sectarian character; to ensuring that State institutions remain intact; and to protecting the rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination. ISSG members agreed that these principles are fundamental.

[¶ 10] The ISSG members reaffirmed their support for the transition process contained in the 2012 Geneva Communique. In this respect they affirmed their support for a ceasefire as described above and for a Syrian-led process that will, within a target of six months, establish credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, and set a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution. Free and fair elections would be

held pursuant to the new constitution within 18 months. These elections must be administered under UN supervision to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate.

[¶ 11] Regarding the fight against terrorism, and pursuant to clause 6 of the Vienna Communiqué, the ISSG reiterated that Da'esh, Nusra, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the UN Security Council, and further, as agreed by the participants and endorsed by the UN Security Council, must be defeated. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan agreed to help develop among intelligence and military community representatives a common understanding of groups and individuals for possible determination as terrorists, with a target of completion by the beginning of the political process under UN auspices.

[¶ 12] The participants expect to meet in approximately one month in order to review progress towards implementation of a ceasefire and the beginning of the political process.

"Note to Correspondents: Statement of the International Syria Support Group," [United Nations](#), 14 Nov 2015. [Paragraph numbers added by Standler.]

Other copies are at the [U.S. State Dept](#); [French Foreign Ministry](#); [German Foreign Ministry](#); and [Relief Web](#). A copy of both the 30 Oct and 14 Nov Vienna statements is at [rbs0.com](#)

There was a press conference by Kerry, Lavrov, and de Mistura after the meeting in Vienna, and the U.S. State Department posted a [transcript](#) of that press conference. Kerry has now stopped demanding that Assad *not* be a part of the future of Syria.

In the first paragraph of the Vienna statement, the references to Beirut and Ankara are to a 12 Nov 2015 bombing in Beirut that killed 43 people and to a 10 Oct 2015 bombing in Ankara that killed at least 95 people. The reference to the 13 Nov attacks in Paris is discussed in detail below, in the section on Islamic [terrorism](#) in Europe.

Note that Paragraph 10 adopts the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 (section II, "Clear Steps in the Transition") that calls for a new constitution, followed by elections. The Russian proposal of 10 Nov 2015 did the same, which guaranteed the acceptance of that part of the Russian proposal.

The Vienna statement establishes a timeline, but is vague on some dates:

- [in ¶ 6:] "accelerate planning for supporting the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire". [in ¶ 12:] The ISSG will meet in Dec 2015 "to review progress towards implementation of a ceasefire". Paragraph 12 implies there will be progress during the next month.

So when will this ceasefire become effective? [in ¶ 4:] "as soon as the representatives

of the Syrian government and the opposition have begun initial steps towards the transition", which is presumedly sometime in the first few months of 2016.

Who will stop shooting at whom? [in ¶ 5:] During the ceasefire, anyone can shoot at ISIL (i.e., "Da'esh") or Nusra Front.

- [in ¶ 9:] 1 Jan 2016, "convene Syrian government and opposition representatives in formal negotiations under UN auspices".
- [in ¶ 10:] "within a target of six months ... and set a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution." Six months from when? From 14 Nov 2015, from 1 Jan 2016, ...?
- [in ¶ 10:] "elections would be held pursuant to the new constitution within 18 months." Eighteen months from when? From 14 Nov 2015, from 1 Jan 2016, from when the constitution is approved in a referendum, ...?

Vague deadlines make it impossible for the parties to fail, but also make this statement only a bunch of good intentions.

On 17 November, Kerry told journalists that the ceasefire envisioned in Vienna means "We're weeks away, conceivably, from the possibility of a big transition for Syria, and I don't think enough people necessarily notice that." [State Dept](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is that, after spending so much time traveling and in meetings, Kerry is delusional. Kerry needs to go to his house in Boston, unplug the telephone and television, and sleep 12 hours/day, to recover his sense of perspective.

On 18 November, Assad told Italian television channel RAI that a transition government could begin only *after* all terrorists had been defeated.

QUESTION 13: Let me see if I understood well. Which is the real timetable, which is exactly your timetable, I mean the realistic timetable to get out of this crisis?

President Assad: The timetable, if you want to talk about schedule, this timetable starts after starting defeating terrorism. Before that, there will be no point in deciding any timetable, because you cannot achieve anything politically while you have the terrorists taking over many areas in Syria, and they're going to be — they are already they main obstacle of any real political advancement. If we talk after that, one year and a half to two years is enough for any transition. It's enough. I mean if you want to talk about first of all having a new constitution, then referendum, then parliamentary elections, then any kind of other procedure, whether presidential or any other thing, doesn't matter. It won't take more than two years.

"President Bashar al-Assad interview with Italian TV channel RAI UNO," [Syrian TV](#), 18 Nov 2015.

Assad is not the only person trying to sabotage the plan from the Vienna conferences. On 19 November, Obama again said: "I do not foresee a situation in which we can end the civil war in Syria while Assad remains in power." [Arab News](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). And Obama wants to send more munitions to the rebels in Syria, who are fighting against

Assad. [Reuters](#). Sending more munitions to the rebels will frustrate any ceasefire in the Syrian civil war. And on 24 November, [Turkey](#) shot down a Russian bomber, which spoilt the good mood after the Vienna conferences.

On 19 November, Saudi Arabia announced it will convene a meeting of the Syrian opposition on 15 December 2015. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#). The fragmented opposition — and their absence of any detailed political plan — has been a big potential problem in past negotiations. I say "potential" problem, because finding an opposition delegation that would sit in the same room with a delegation from Assad's government was an even bigger problem.

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.

Hannah Allam at McClatchy newspapers wrote an insightful article on why the Syrian National Coalition was *not* invited to any of the meetings in Vienna during October.

Leaving out opposition leaders and their ironclad preconditions that Assad must go was the only way to save Vienna from the fate of previous failed talks in Geneva, analysts and diplomats explained. But the decision also exposed the Achilles heel of the whole endeavor: Who would implement any eventual agreement hatched at the summit?

....

The Obama administration was less clear on what it did not want the opposition coalition to be: a transitional governing body that would rule on an interim basis should Assad be removed. Obama and his top advisers were determined not to repeat the mistakes of Iraq, where Saddam Hussein's Baath Party was dismantled overnight, collapsing all mechanisms of the state and creating legions of disaffected, unemployed men who would go on to form the backbone of the insurgency. Many of the same men, intelligence officials and diplomats say, went on to fight alongside al Qaida in Iraq and, now, the Islamic State.

On Syria, the administration's hope was that Assad could exit in a way that left a rump regime intact — there was never a desire for the opposition and Arab allies' goal of

full regime collapse, according to interviews with current and former U.S. policymakers, some of whom were interviewed on the record and others who requested anonymity because the matter involves sensitive diplomatic and security matters.

....

But [Obama's] firm noninterventionist stance appeared to soften as the war ground on and Obama's Syria advisers pushed for greater U.S. involvement, resulting in a confused, often ad hoc policy that's indecipherable to Americans as well as Syrians.

....

The mission statement of the [Syrian National] Coalition calls for replacing not only Assad but "its symbols and pillars of support" and "dismantling the security services" — goals that sound identical to the doomed de-Baathification project in Iraq.

That's why excluding opposition figures at this stage is what [Faysal] Itani, [a Syria specialist with the Washington-based Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East], called "the right thing to do" from a purely pragmatic standpoint. With four years of unchecked bloodshed, he and other analysts said, it's time to hash out a more realistic plan for what a transitional government might look like. The dream of the Syrian opposition coalition moving in as interim authority has evaporated.

"To have included them at this stage would've meant that the thing would've never happened or collapsed immediately," Itani said. "It's humiliating, of course, but this whole Vienna thing is a test."

Hannah Allam, "Why were no Syrians invited to the peace talks in Vienna?," [McClatchy](#), 30 Oct 2015.

Amongst the six "principles" of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) is "Not to engage in any dialogue or negotiations with the regime". [SNC](#). That one principle makes the SNC unable to negotiate with Assad's regime.

Obama's so-called policy on Syria has included recognition of the Syrian National Coalition as the lawful government of Syria. For example, the 12 Dec 2012 Friends of the Syrian People meeting declared in ¶13 of the Chairman's Conclusions: "Participants acknowledged the National Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people". The 22 Oct 2013 Communiqué of the London11 at ¶16 declared "... the Syrian National Coalition should be the heart and lead, as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people." Obama met the SNC president in the White House on 13 May 2014. Obama's policy during 2012-2014 established the expectation that the SNC would become the interim government of Syria, during the transition specified in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. But now — without repudiating the past policy that the SNC is the lawful government of Syria — Obama seems to ignore the SNC and favor a transitional government composed of internal opposition in Syria. The details may become clearer after negotiations in Vienna, or after meetings of de Mistura's working groups.

I have been highly critical of the SNC. (See, e.g., my essays for [Oct-Dec 2013](#), [Jan 2014](#),

and my [review](#) in June 2014.) Nevertheless, it was inconsistent of Obama to publicly praise the SNC during 2013-2014 and then in 2015 discontinue support for the SNC, without any public explanation of *why* the change in policy. Surely, the SNC must feel betrayed by Obama.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2249

After the 13 November 2015 attacks in [Paris](#), France proposed a United Nations Security Council Resolution that calls on all nations to "take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law" to fight against ISIL, as well as Nusra Front and other Al-Qaeda groups. However, Resolution 2249 does *not* authorize military action against ISIL. The Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 2249 on the evening of 20 November. [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Resolution 2249 specifically mentions the following recent attacks by ISIL that motivated this Resolution:

1. "26 June 2015 in Sousse" (ISIL attack on beach in Tunisia kills 38 people)
2. "10 October 2015 in Ankara" (Two suicide bombers at peace rally killed at least 95 people)
3. "31 October 2015 over Sina " (ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian passenger jet, killing 224 people)
4. "12 November 2015 in Beirut" (ISIL bomb killed at least 43 people)
5. "and on 13 November 2015 in Paris" (130 dead in attacks, see [below](#))

The text of Resolution 2249 is available from the United Nations, see the [link](#) at my webpage.

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 Ki-moon, 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.

During March 2014 through October 2015, I posted a copy of each of the Secretary General's monthly reports at my personal website, for the convenience of students and historians. On 27 Nov 2015, the most popular of those reports at my website had a total of only 573 hits. Many of those hits were probably by robots that crawl the web for search engines, so few people found my copies useful. Accordingly, I discontinued posting copies of the Secretary

General's monthly reports at my website.

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.

Debate 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.
-

November 2015: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 13 November, an ISIL suicide bomber exploded at a funeral in a Baghdad mosque, killing at least 21 people. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#).

On 14 November, a mass grave of 78 Yazidi women was discovered near Sinjar, more

evidence of genocide by ISIL. [Rudaw](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

On 15 November, two days after the liberation of Sinjar, a total of three mass graves have been located, containing a total of 148 Yazidis. [Associated Press](#); [Iraqi News](#).

On 20 November, an ISIL bombing at a Shiite mosque in Baghdad killed 10 people. First a roadside bomb detonated, and then — as rescuers arrived — a suicide bomber exploded inside that mosque. Five more people died from two roadside bombs in southeastern Baghdad. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 24 November, [All Iraq News](#) reports Kadhimal-Sayadi — a member of parliament in the State of Law Coalition — was interviewed on television by "an official at the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council". Kadhimal-Sayadi apparently objected to a question, because he pulled out his pistol and shot the interviewer. Two days later, [Gulf News](#)(AFP) reported this story, but spelled the MP's name as "Kadhim Al Sayadi", said the target was a Citizen's Bloc spokesman, and reported that the MP's bodyguard fired shots in the air. What I find astounding is that this news story was reported by few other sources. Apparently it is *not* remarkable that a member of the Iraqi parliament is involved in a shooting.

On 28 November, [Rudaw](#) reports that another ISIL mass grave was found in Sinjar, containing between 110 and 123 bodies. This gravesite was booby-trapped with explosives by ISIL. See also [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Iraqi News](#); [Associated Press](#).

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.

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.

On 29 November 2015, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Mosul" after 21 August, but I found no news 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.

On 29 November 2015, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Ramadi"

after 21 August, but I found 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.

My essay for [October 2015](#) mentions Iraq cancelled its bond issue, because potential investors demanded a high interest rate. That essay also mentions arrest warrants were issued for one former and one current Iraqi ministers who were accused of corruption, but both ministers have disappeared. Also, Abadi's reforms proposed in August stalled in October.

November 2015

On 5 November, former Iraqi minister of environment, Sargon Lazar Slewah, was sentenced to two years in prison and fined US\$ 285,000 for corruption. [Reuters](#); [BASnews](#). [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP) reports this judgment and adds: "And while officials such as Slewa are periodically punished for graft, more powerful politicians who have allegedly engaged in far greater corruption remain at large."

On 6 November, the United Nations announced that the cholera epidemic that began in Iraq in September has now spread to Kuwait and Bahrain. At least 2200 people have been infected in Iraq, of whom 6 died. [Reuters](#).

On 27 November, *The Washington Post* published a news article with the title: "In the fight against the Islamic State, Iraq's leader begins to look shaky". A simplistic interpretation is that Abadi is weak. I think Abadi is ok, but the Iraqi parliament is corrupt and dysfunctional, and some members of parliament are sabotaging Abadi's attempts at reforms. *The Post* says Abadi's predecessor, "Maliki, who vehemently objected to being removed [as Vice-President of Iraq during Abadi's reforms on 9 August 2015], remains the secretary general of the Dawa party and since his ouster [as vice-president of Iraq] is widely said to have worked to sabotage his rival [Abadi], splitting loyalties within the party."

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.

November 2015

My essay for [Feb 2015](#) mentioned that Obama refused to identify the problem as "Islamic terrorism". Obama, like other liberals, could say the word "terrorism". But Obama's tongue would burst into flame if he said the word "Islamic" together with either "terrorism" or any other pejorative word. My February essay quotes Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn as saying "You cannot defeat an enemy you do not admit exists". General Flynn was correct. Obviously, we can not defeat the ideology of Islamic terrorism if we can not identify the Islamic component.

On the night of 13 November 2015, a group of Islamic terrorists attacked multiple locations in Paris, and killed at least 130 people, as described [below](#). On 17 November, [euronews](#) interviewed Claude Moniquet, a former intelligence agent, who said: "There has been too much tolerance [of jihadis in Europe] for too long".

Respect for different religions, and the idea of religious freedom, does *not* imply toleration of Islamic terrorists who intend to kill innocent people!

On 19 November, Rudaw in Kurdistan published an article by a professor in Missouri on different lies about the war against ISIL. Here is one paragraph:

First the “good” lies. These are the lies good people tell with the best of intentions. The first that comes to mind is probably U.S. President Obama’s mantra that ISIS “has nothing to do with Islam” and “is not Islamic.” Clearly the group has something to do with Islam, and its various names do start with the word “Islamic.” This is true in the same way that the Ku Klux Klan, a Christian terrorist group in the United States, is Christian in its make-up and ideology — just not mainstream Christianity. Similarly, ISIS represents a very radical and very minority interpretation of Islam. Western leaders repeat that the group is not Islamic so that their people do not blame average Muslims or their religion for the terrorism and atrocities that ISIS commits, and so that the conflict is less easily framed as a clash of civilizations. That’s a good lie if I ever heard one, uttered for all the right reasons.

David Romano, "ISIS, the Kurds and the Lies We Tell," [Rudaw](#), 19 Nov 2015.

I do not agree that this is a "good lie", just because it protects mainstream Muslims. This lie apparently prevents us from condemning the ideology of Islamic terrorism. We need to criticize the dogma of Islamic terrorism, because it is not only killing innocent people, but also spreading across the world. Criticizing Islamic terrorism — and criticizing the theology of ISIL and Al-Qaeda — should *not* offend mainstream Muslims, just as criticizing the KKK does not offend mainstream Christians.

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 2015, 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](#).
- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [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 launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahrum](#) 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. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See [below](#).

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. I suggest the holy concept of jihad resonates with terrorists, while it is difficult for soldiers and policemen to be enthusiastic about working for a corrupt, dysfunctional government.

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 9 Nov 2015, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of Oct. 31, 2015, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on Aug. 8, 2014, is \$5 billion and the average daily cost is \$11 million for 450 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#). "Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 13 Nov 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.

November 2015: ISIL *not* contained

Obama, like all politicians, likes to boast of victories and achievements. One of Obama's less fortunate boasts was to declare that ISIL had been contained to Syria and Iraq, just a day before ISIL masterminded a bombing in Paris France that killed at least 130 people. That boast was in an interview with ABC News:

"I don't think they're gaining strength," the president told Stephanopoulos in an interview at the White House Thursday [12 Nov]. "From the start our goal has been first to contain, and we have contained them. They have not gained ground in Iraq. And in Syria it — they'll come in, they'll leave."

"But you don't see this systematic march by ISIL across the terrain," he added, using the government's acronym for ISIS.

Arlette Saenz, "President Obama Vows to 'Completely Decapitate' ISIS Operations," [ABC News](#), 07:31 EST, 13 Nov 2015.

The daily press briefing at the White House on 13 Nov contained the following:

QUESTION: And speaking of interviews, the President in an interview yesterday [12 Nov] with ABC said that ISIS had been contained. And just the armchair point of

view of the average American who sees the possibility that ISIS blew up a plane over the Sinai, or contributed to a big bombing in Beirut is signs that ISIS is not contained. What does the President mean by “contained”?

MR. EARNEST: I think the President was referring very specifically to the situation on the ground in Iraq and in Syria; that the significant response that was mobilized by the United States and the international community was a reaction to ISIL not just establishing a toehold and a safe haven inside of Syria, but actually spreading rapidly across the deserts of Iraq and taking over large territories there, and advancing on some of the larger population centers inside of Iraq.

"Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 11/13/2015," [White House](#), 13 Nov 2015.

There was widespread criticism of Obama's boast that ISIL was "contained". Here is a small sample of some articles in the news:

- "Obama Criticized for Claim That ISIS Is 'Contained'," [ABC News](#), 09:48 EST, 14 Nov 2015.
- "Why did Obama declare ISIS 'contained' the day before Paris attack?" [CNN](#), 14 Nov 2015, updated 09:14 EST, 16 Nov.
- "Paris attacks came hours after Obama declared Islamic State ‘contained’," [Washington Times](#), 14 Nov 2015.
- "Clinton plays defense on Iraq, Wall Street at Democratic debate," [Reuters](#), 15:37 EST, 15 Nov 2015. ("[Hillary] Clinton struck a sharp contrast to Obama's comments in an interview aired on Friday [13 Nov] that ISIS had been contained, saying it 'cannot be contained, it must be defeated.' ")

Aside from the Islamic terror attacks in Paris on the night of 13 Nov 2015, ISIL has *not* been contained because, during late 2014 ISIL spread to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.

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](#).

On 7 November, journalists reported that ISIL released 37 elderly Assyrian Christians who were abducted by ISIL in February 2015. AINA reports that ISIL continues to hold 168 hostages from the original group of 253. Reuters says ISIL continues to hold 124 hostages. SOHR reports the 37 were released in exchange "for considerable amount of money." [Reuters](#); [AINA](#); [SOHR](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

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](#).

On 7 November, [AINA](#) reports that ISIL continues to hold "185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain."

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. My essay for [October 2015](#) mentions that Iraq declared victory in Baiji on 24 October.

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.

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](#), [September 2015](#), and [October 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](#).

8. On 10 November, "Iraqi Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi claimed Tuesday [10 Nov] that Iraqi joint forces have made massive advances from all directions around the Islamic State-held city of Ramadi in Anbar province, and the provincial capital would soon be liberated from the extremist group." [Rudaw](#). "The commander of Anbar Operations Maj. Gen. Ismail Mahlawi announced on Tuesday [10 Nov] 'our last battle is storming the city of Ramadi, which will be launched in the next few days after the completion of all preparations.' " [Iraqi News](#).
9. On 17 November, [Rudaw](#) reported: "Iraqi army and security forces are reviewing their final plans to retake the city of Ramadi from the Islamic State and have the Anbar provincial capital surrounded, unnamed security sources told Rudaw Tuesday [17 Nov]."

As explained above, during May-October 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.

November 2015: Ramadi

On 4 November, Col. Steve Warren — Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman in Baghdad — gave a press briefing at the Pentagon.

COL. WARREN: Continuing east to Ramadi, after several days of bad weather, Iraqi forces have re-started offensive operations there. CTS forces along the western access have advanced several kilometers, and as we speak, they are fighting inside (inaudible). All forces continue to encounter small arms fire and IED clusters, but have held the line in the south and the east, while advancing in the west and the north. Coalition forces have conducted 18 strikes in Ramadi since we last spoke on the 28th [October].

....

COL. WARREN: So, yeah, what we've — what we're seeing is, again, a tough fight. The enemy has established complex and in many cases sophisticated defenses, barriers along the various avenues of approach into Ramadi. So, ISIL's primary line of

communication [and resupply] right now is the Euphrates River, right? So we have not been able to cut the Euphrates River yet.

....

QUESTION [by Carla]: Last week, you had said that Ramadi was surrounded on four sides and that they were squeezing in. So what's the difference now? Is it just that they're squeezing, but they haven't squeezed in enough to shut out the Euphrates? Is that what you're — is that how I should interpret this?

COL. WARREN: Yeah, that's exactly right. So, this encirclement that we're — that the Iraqi security forces are — are attempting to complete — I mean, they've got the south essentially locked up. They've got the west essentially locked up. The east is blocked. To the north, there's movement, you know, south and west.

But you've still got this — this kind of space towards the top of your map there that remains open. So when they're able to complete this encirclement, we'll be able to substantially reduce the enemy's ability to resupply itself.

That doesn't mean, you know, there's no way to, you know, to create an impermeable barrier around the city, right? There's ratlines and smuggling routes, et cetera. So the enemy will still have the opportunity and the ability to resupply itself to some extent. But once we've — once that Euphrates River line of communication [and resupply] is cut, we'll see I think a really significant reduction in ISIL's ability to, you know, resupply itself with weapons, resupply itself with fighters.

And, you know, then it's on to the really hard part, which is urban fighting. You know, ISIL has had, you know, the enemy here has had months to prepare complex defenses inside the urban center of the city. And that is going to be a difficult, hot, dangerous, scary fight. And it will take — it will take a while.

QUESTION: Hi, it's Andrew [Tilghman] again. Just a quick follow-up. When you say that the river is their primary line of communication, are they bringing supplies in by boat? Is that what you're saying? The river is navigable and that's how they're bringing supplies in?

COL. WARREN: Yes. That's exactly what I'm saying. And, you know, we do our best to keep an eye, and every now and then you'll see on our strike — (inaudible) — that we struck a boat. But that river is — I mean, it's full of traffic, right? I mean, it's a highway. It's a water-borne highway. So you can't — obviously, you're not going to strike every single vessel that we see. So we have to have the proper intelligence, you know, which is very stringent; civilian casualty reduction measures, right?

We're not in this to — to accidentally strike civilians. So we go to great lengths to ensure that we don't do that. But yeah, that's the primary — that's the primary line of communication right now.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad,

Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 4 Nov 2015.

I remind the reader that on 1 October, Col. Warren told journalists: "... we are all urging [the Iraqi military] to begin with the utmost haste to finish this fight in Ramadi." On 13 October, Col. Warren told journalists: "... we believe that now is the time for a final push into Ramadi." And now, on 4 November, the Iraqi security forces have *not* yet begun the assault on Ramadi, to liberate the city that ISIL has held since 17 May 2015.

On 9 November, Mitchell Prothero of [McClatchy](#) newspapers reported: "Iraqi forces' hopes of recapturing the city of Ramadi from the Islamic State have stalled, largely because their efforts to cut resupply routes into the city of nearly 1 million have failed."

On 13 November 2015, [The Telegraph](#) reported: "The Iraqi government said its military was beginning an operation to 'clear Ramadi', after effectively surrounding it, though it has made similar claims before."

On 18 November, Col. Warren gave another press briefing, in which the word "Ramadi" was mentioned only four times.

QUESTION [by Tom Bowman]: I wonder if you could give us an update on Ramadi. I think last time we talked, you said they'd almost encircled the city, except for the bridge over the Euphrates and I think trouble with the river itself. And if they have completely encircled it, why haven't they gone in yet?

COL. WARREN: So the western access has seen some fairly good activity. I think I mentioned that Camp Warar has not only been seized, but now cleared of nearly 30 — I think it was 24, 26 IEDs that have been discovered buried at Camp Warar, which is right on the west bank of the river and overlooks the main city.

The CPS then kind of looped around and now they're working up through the — there's a neighborhood that runs parallel to Camp Warhar. They're working their way up through that.

The northern access has met with some very stiff resistance, frankly. The enemy has put up a good fight here in the last couple of days, so they're continuing — I think it was about a 200-meter movement here yesterday. So this is — this is slow and sometimes incremental work, but you know, they're continuing.

We believe that all the pieces are in place, you know? We've — Iraq has asked for some additional enablers, additional air, et cetera. We're providing that. So we believe that all the pieces are in place and that the Iraqis have a plan that's — that's a good plan and workable and it's time for them to execute it.

....

You know, the enemy, as I've described, I think — once or twice before has put in some fairly complex obstacles and then they are fanatical defenders of Ramadi.

Now, that said, we — we've provided some very substantial air power, some very good

training and some specialized equipment to help with these problems — you know, with — with this — with the problem of this integrated defense.

So, again, we believe all the pieces are in place, and that it — it's time for the Iraqis to — to make this final move and — and get Ramadi cleared. We do believe that. "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via DVIDS from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 18 Nov 2015.

On 24 November, Col. Warren gave another press briefing, which included a few terse mentions of Ramadi:

COL. WARREN: In Ramadi, which is star one on the map, in addition to movement on all axes, Iraqi engineer teams have made significant contributions to the fight. Iraqi explosive ordnance disposal teams continue to destroy IEDs, including a controlled detonation of an IED factory which destroyed 60 IEDs and a VBIED.

....

COL. WARREN: I've got two pieces of video that I want to show you today. I'll set up the first one here a little bit. As we talked about just a few minutes ago, VBIEDs are an ISIL weapon of choice. On November 18th in Ramadi, we struck a bridge which had been the primary route used by ISIL to send VBIEDs to attack ISF forces along the southern axes. As you'll see here in a moment, ISIL can no longer use this road to attack the ISF.

So that's an amazing depiction of the accuracy that we're capable of here. It's also a good example of terrain denial. Sometimes you'll see in our press releases where it says "terrain denial." This is an example of terrain denial. ISIL will no longer be able to use that bridge to send VBIEDs against ISF.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 24 Nov 2015.

Note that Col. Warren did *not* say anything about when the Iraqi army would liberate Ramadi.

On 26 November, [Reuters](#) reported that the Iraqi army "cut Islamic State's last supply line into the western city of Ramadi by seizing a key bridge", so that there would be no more supplies to ISIL. "The capture of Palestine Bridge, straddling the Euphrates river in northwestern Ramadi, means Iraqi forces have the city surrounded."

Iraq attempts to liberate Fallujah

ISIL captured Fallujah on 4 Jan 2014, the first major city in Iraq to be captured by ISIL. Amongst other reasons, Fallujah is important because it is only 70 km from Baghdad, the capital of Iraq.

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.

Col. Steve Warren — Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman in Baghdad — gives weekly briefings to journalists. His briefings for 1, 13, 21, 28 October do *not* mention progress in liberating Fallujah. (There was *no* briefing around 7-8 October 2015.) His briefings for 4, 13, 18, 24 November also do *not* mention progress in liberating Fallujah. This gives me the impression that the liberation of Fallujah is *not* important to the U.S.-led Coalition. That may be because most of the forces surrounding Fallujah are Shiite militias, who are advised by Iran, and who generally refuse airstrikes from the U.S.-led Coalition.

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, September, and October 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." That deadlock may have ended on 24 October, when Iraq declared victory in Baiji.

November 2015: Mosul

On 2 September 2015, the government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the U.S.-led Coalition established a Joint Coordination Center near Erbil, to plan operations in northern Iraq, including future operations in Mosul.

On 11 November, the Kurdistan government decided that their Peshmerga would participate in the liberation of Mosul, "because Mosul is the main stronghold of the organization (ISIS)". [Iraqi News](#); My comment is that the Kurds hope the capture of the ISIL headquarters in Mosul will weaken ISIL, but that is *not* the way guerrilla wars operate.

AUMF stalled in U.S. Congress

The USA has been bombing ISIL in Iraq since August 2014. This program continues without the required Congressional Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF). Congressional approval of *all* wars is required in the U.S. Constitution, Article I, § 8, clause 11. See also War Powers Act, 50 U.S.C. § 1541, et. seq. (enacted 1973).

In December 2014, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee drafted an Authorization For Use Military Force (AUMF), but the full Senate failed to consider that draft, as described in my essay for [Dec 2014](#).

Obama delivered a draft AUMF to Congress on 11 Feb 2015, which was quoted and criticized in my essay for [Feb 2015](#).

My essays for [March](#), [April](#), and [May 2015](#) explained why the AUMF stalled in Congress.

On 30 October 2015, Obama once more escalated the U.S. involvement in the war against ISIL in Syria. When journalists asked the White House press secretary if the president has legal authority to send U.S. troops into Syria, the press secretary blamed Congress for their failure to pass an AUMF, as quoted in my essay for [Oct 2015](#).

That 30 Oct 2015 remark by the White House press secretary got some Senators excited

about passing an AUMF, but there was still no consensus on what Congress should authorize. And there was a general lack of courage of many Senators and Representatives to take a firm position on the war against ISIL.

On 8 Nov, Deb Riechmann of the Associated Press wrote a hard-hitting article about the failure of Congress to pass an AUMF:

In the battle against the Islamic State group, members of Congress talk tough against extremism, but many want to run for cover when it comes to voting on new war powers to fight the militants, preferring to let the president own the battle.

....

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., a leading force in the Senate for a new authorization, said the reluctance to vote runs deep and that many in Congress prefer to criticize President Barack Obama's policy in Iraq and Syria without either authorizing or stopping the fight.

"There is sort of this belief that if we do not vote, we cannot be held politically accountable. We can just blame the president," Kaine said.

"We are forcing people to be deployed far from home in a theater of war, and risking their lives and losing their lives and members of Congress are like 'I'm afraid of this vote because somebody might try to hold me accountable for it.'"

....

Generally, conservatives want Congress to approve broad authorities for the president to fight IS militants with no limits on ground troops. They say banning U.S. combat troops or restricting the fight to just Iraq and Syria only emboldens the militants, who would seek safe haven elsewhere. Other lawmakers want to give the president authority to train and equip local forces and conduct airstrikes but not launch a combat mission on the ground.

Deb Riechmann, "Congress dodging war powers despite US mission in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 12:22 EST, 8 Nov 2015.

Ms. Riechmann quoted Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee, for saying Obama sent a "nonsense" draft of an AUMF to Congress last February, when Obama knew Congress would not pass that draft. My comment is that may have been smart politics by Obama, because now everyone is waiting for Congress to do something. But, in my opinion, it also showed a lack of leadership by Obama, when Obama can not create a consensus in support of his strategy in Iraq and Syria.

On 3 November, [The Hill](#) reported that it would be extremely difficult for Congress to pass an AUMF, and passing an AUMF that Obama would sign would be even more difficult.

On 14 November, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders criticized former U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton for her vote on an AUMF in 2003 that authorized the invasion of Iraq. [Washington Post](#). This criticism shows that a vote on an AUMF can haunt a politician

12 years later, which should terrify career politicians whose number one goal is to stay in power.

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. My essay for [October 2015](#) cites the Russian claims of the daily number of airstrikes and the provinces hit by Russian airstrikes during October 2015.

On 1-2-3 November 2015, I looked at the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters, but there were no reports of daily Russian airstrikes in Syria. However, on 2 November, [TASS](#) reported Russian airstrikes during "the past two days" hit 237 targets in "Hama, Latakia, Homs, Damascus, Aleppo, and Raqqah" provinces.

On 3 November, the Russian defense ministry claimed airstrikes on a total of 2084 targets belonging to either Nusra Front or ISIL, beginning 30 Sep 2015. [TASS](#); [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

After declaring during October that the Free Syrian Army was a "phantom" that did *not* exist (see my essay for October 2015), on 3 November the Russians claimed to have used coordinates supplied by "the opposition" to strike 24 ISIL targets near Tamdor (Palmyra), Deir Ezzor, Itria (Ithriya), and east of Aleppo. [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 4 November, the Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Anne Patterson, told the House Foreign Affairs Committee: "so far 85 to 90 percent of [Russian] strikes [in Syria] have hit the moderate Syrian opposition". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 4-5 November 2015, I looked at the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters, but there were no reports of daily Russian airstrikes in Syria. However, on 5 November, Russia claimed it hit 263 targets in Syria in the past two days. The targets were located in Aleppo, Damascus, Deir Ezzor, Idlib, Latakia, Raqqa, Hama, and Homs provinces. [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 6-7-8 November 2015, I looked at the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters, but there were no reports of daily Russian airstrikes in Syria.

On 9 November, Russia claimed their airstrikes in Syria hit a total of 448 targets during the past 3 days. The Russian defense ministry claims airstrikes in Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, Raqqa, Hama, and Homs provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 10 November 2015, I looked at the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters, but there were no reports of daily Russian airstrikes in Syria.

On 11 November 2015, Russia claimed it hit 277 targets in Syria in the past two days. The

targets were located in Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia, Hama, Homs, and Idlib provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 12 November 2015, 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 13 November 2015, Russia claimed it hit 289 targets in Syria in the past two days (i.e., 11-12 Nov). The targets were located in Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, Hama, Daraa, Homs, and Deir Ezzor provinces. [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 14-15-16 November 2015, 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 17 November 2015, Russia claimed 34 cruise missiles had destroyed 14 ISIL targets in Idlib and Aleppo provinces. A second claim is Russian airstrikes that destroyed 140 targets on an unspecified date and locations. A third claim is that Russian bomber aircraft hit ISIL targets in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor. [RIA-Novosti](#).

As one example of the totally absurd propaganda released by Russia, on 17 Nov, [Russia Today](#) reported that the Syrian ambassador to the United Nations said the Russian airstrikes that began on 30 Sep have “allowed 1 million internally displaced persons to return safely to their homes.”

On 18 November, Russia claimed it hit 206 ISIL targets in Syria on 17 Nov, in retaliation for ISIL putting a bomb aboard a Russian passenger airplane on 31 October. [Russia Today](#); [TASS](#) (claims 206 targets hit on 18 Nov). Furthermore, Russian airstrikes in the past few days destroyed approximately 500 fuel trucks that transported ISIL oil from Syria to Iraq. [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#). Incidentally, on 15 Nov, U.S. airstrikes destroyed 116 fuel trucks in Syria.

I am interrupting this collection of terse paragraphs to present a quotation that has been overlooked by the mainstream media in the USA. On 18 November 2015, Col. Steve Warren — Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman in Baghdad — talked about the crude bombing campaign by Russia in Syria and the high probability of civilian casualties.

QUESTION: And getting back to Raqqa, as we all know, the Russians are not using precision munitions. Any sense of any increased civilian casualties in Raqqa as a result of that?

COL. WARREN: We don't have a great read on the civilian casualty piece now. It — it would come as no surprise.

As you noted, you know, the Russians are using dumb bombs. Their history has been both reckless and irresponsible.

You know, I know there was some discussion that the Russians had a large air armada flying into Raqqa to conduct these operations. And it was notable to us that, you know, those are antiquated tactics. We don't even use those type of tactics anymore.

The idea of putting, you know, ten ships in the air at one time, or 12 or even more, are very old fashioned. And those are the type of tactics needed only if you don't possess the technology, the skills and the capabilities to conduct the type of precision strikes that our coalition conducts.

So, uncertain on the civilian casualty piece at this point. We are, of course, continuing to monitor it closely.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via DVIDS from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 18 Nov 2015.

On 24 November 2015, Col. Warren said:

COL. WARREN: [The Russians] are just using old-fashioned, mid-20th century technology and accuracy to sling lead around the battlefield.

....

Civilian casualties, you know, what we've seen is — is possibly upwards of 1,000 civilian casualties caused by the Russians. Now, this isn't our count. I want to caveat that. This is counts that we've observed from — from third parties, from nongovernmental organizations. But — but we think those counts are probably fairly accurate, including over 100 kids.

So again, this is sloppy military work. This is the reckless and irresponsible, imprecise and frankly uncaring approach to operations in Syria that the Russians have taken on.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 24 Nov 2015.

On 20 November, Russia claimed it hit 731 targets in Syria in the past three days (i.e., 17-18-19 Nov). The targets were located in Aleppo and Idlib provinces, and outside Palmyra.

[Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 19, 21, and 22 November, I searched the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters for the query "Syria" or "Syria airstrikes". I found no reports of Russian airstrikes in Syria. Instead of reports of airstrikes each day, Russia has apparently chosen to report a huge number of airstrikes over a two- or three-day period. I continue to check these four sources every day, but only mention when I find a report of Russian airstrikes in Syria.

On 20 November, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that Russian airstrikes had killed "403 civilians, including 97 children and 69 women", in Syria. [SOHR](#). The Russians have been bombing since 30 Sep, a total of 52 days.

On 20 November, the Turkish government summoned the Russian ambassador, and the Turks complained about Russian airstrikes on Turkmen in Syria on 19 Nov. [Anadolu Agency](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Reuters](#). On 22 November, Agence France-Presse reported that 1500 Turkmen had fled from Syria to Turkey, because of Russian airstrikes and fighting on the ground. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On the morning of 23 November, Russia claimed it hit 472 targets in Syria during the past

two days (21-22 Nov) in the provinces of Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, Hama, Homs, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzor. During the past five days, Russia claims to have destroyed more than 1000 crude oil tank trucks used by ISIL in Syria. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

On 24 November, Turkey shot down a Russian aircraft that made a brief, transient flight over Turkey. For details, see [below](#).

On 24 November, Col. Warren held a press briefing at the [Pentagon](#), in which he criticized the Russian claim of destroying 500 fuel trucks (see 18 Nov, above). Col. Warren said the claim of 500 was "exaggerated", and the correct number was "under 100".

On 25 November, [Reuters](#) reports that heavy civilian casualties from Russian airstrikes in Syria "dim chances of U.S.-Russia alliance in Syria".

On 26 November, Russia claimed it hit 449 targets in the past three days (23-24-25 Nov). The targets were in Aleppo, Damascus, Idlib, Latakia, Hama, Homs, Raqqa, and Deir Ezzor provinces. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 27 November, [Anadolu Agency](#) in Turkey reports: "Almost 7,000 Turkmen have recently been displaced due to repeated air and ground assaults by Syrian regime forces and Russian warplanes in Syria's predominantly-Turkmen Bayirbucak region Over the last several days, approximately 2,000 Syrian Turkmen, fleeing the violence in their home country, have reportedly arrived in southern Turkey." They also report that ISIL has "no presence" in the province of Latakia where Russia and Syria are attacking the Turkmen.

On the night of 27 November, [Reuters](#) reported "Russian air strikes in northwest Syria have heavily targeted ethnic Turkmen areas, according to a Reuters data analysis that helps explain rising tensions between Moscow and Ankara in the weeks before Turkey shot down a Russian warplane." On 30 November, [Reuters](#) updated their previous story.

On 24-30 November, I searched the websites of Russia Today, RIA-Novosti, TASS, and Reuters for the query "Syria" or "Syria airstrikes". I found no reports of Russian airstrikes in Syria, except for the 26 Nov report mentioned above.

On 29 November, [Anadolu Agency](#) reported that Russia had bombed a bakery in the city of Idlib, Syria. The bakery was built just 16 months ago by a Turkish charity organization, the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation. The bakery "produced about 65,000 loafs of bread per day serving about 40,000 people".

Russian intervention in Iraq?

My essay for [October 2015](#) discusses the history of members of the Iraqi parliament wanting Russian airstrikes in Iraq.

On 5 November, [TASS](#) reported that Iraq had *not* requested "military assistance" from

Russia.

At the end of October, it appeared that the Iraqi parliament was going to request Russian airstrikes, but then journalists suddenly stopped reporting on that possibility.

Turkey shoots down Russian airplane in Syria

On 24 November at 09:20 local time, a Russian Su-24 aircraft was warned 10 times in 5 minutes, briefly strayed into Turkish airspace, and then a Turkish F-16 shot down the Russian aircraft. [Anadolu Agency](#).

An image from Turkish radar that was posted by [Anadolu Agency](#) shows how the incident occurred. The Russian airplane was flying on an approximately straight line in Syria, when it briefly flew over a tiny "peninsula" of Turkey that juts into Syria. The image from Turkish radar clearly shows the Russian airplane was over Syria when it was shot down. The text from the Turkish news agency stressed that the Turks had "repeatedly warned" the Russian airplane.

After a missile from a Turkish F-16 hit the Russian airplane, the Russian pilot and navigator ejected. Turkmen rebels on the ground shot and killed the Russian pilot. When Russia sent two helicopters to rescue its personnel, rebels shot down one helicopter, killing one Russian involved in the rescue. In the early morning of 25 November, the Syrian army rescued the Russian navigator.

The trivial nature of the airspace incursion is clear from the following Associated Press news report:

.... In a letter to the U.N. Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press, it said the planes disregarded warnings and violated Turkish airspace "to a depth of 1.36 miles [2.19 km] and 1.15 miles [1.85 km] in length for 17 seconds" just after 9:24 a.m.

It said one of the planes then left Turkish airspace and the other one was fired at by Turkish F-16s "in accordance with the rules of engagement" and crashed on the Syrian side of the border.

....

A U.S. defense official in Washington confirmed the Russian plane entered Turkish airspace before Turkey shot it down. The official, who was not authorized to discuss details of U.S. knowledge about the incident and spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Russian plane flew across a 2-mile section of Turkish airspace, meaning it was in Turkish airspace only for a matter of seconds.

....

The Russian plane was supporting Syrian troops which have been on the offensive in

an area controlled by several insurgent groups including al-Qaida's branch in Syria, the Nusra Front, and the 2nd Coastal Division and the 10th Coast Division that include local Turkmen fighters.

Suzan Fraser & Nataliya Vasilyeva, "Turkey downs Russian jet it says violated its territory," [Associated Press](#), 19:06 GMT, 24 Nov 2015.

The Telegraph in London, England reported that the U.S.-led Coalition spokesman said this incident was "between Russia and Turkey", as if the U.S. did *not* want to be involved.

The US has sought to keep itself on the sidelines by saying that the event does not involve its coalition operations and is between Turkey and Russia.

US Army Colonel Steve Warren, a spokesman for the US-led military campaign against ISIL, said their coalition operations would remain "as planned".

This is an incident between the Russian and the Turkish governments. It is not an issue that involves the (U.S.-led coalition operations)," Col Warren told a Pentagon [briefing](#), speaking via video-conference from Baghdad, [Reuters](#) reports.

[Warren:] "Our combat operations against ISIL continue as planned and we are striking in both Iraq and Syria."

"Russian jet shot down by Turkey — as it happened November 24," [The Telegraph](#), 15:43 GMT, 24 Nov 2015. [Two links added by Standler.]

Because of its importance, I am quoting the relevant parts of Col. Warren's press briefing:

COL. WARREN: I'll start with today's news. The Turkish government announced that two of its F-16s on border patrol engaged two Russian SU-24s and one aircraft — one Russian aircraft was shot down. The Russian Ministry of Defense has announced an investigation into the crash.

This is an incident between the Russian and the Turkish governments. It is not an issue that involves the Combined Joint Task Force or Operation Inherent Resolve. Our combat operations against ISIL continue as planned and we are striking both Iraq and Syria.

....

This was purely an action that took place between the Russians and the Turks.

QUESTION: Would the agreement — the understanding with the Russians in the skies over Syria and the communications now that have been set up with the Russians — would that apply to the border of Turkey if U.S. warplanes were flying there?

COL. WARREN: The agreement that's set up applies to CJTF operations, right? So if — if the F-15s that are helping with the Turks, which belong to U.S. European Command and are not associated with CJTF. So, there are some lines there. So, I think that answers the question.

....

QUESTION: Can you confirm that there were 10 warnings issued by the Turkish pilots to the Russian pilots? And the Turks claim the Russians did not respond. Can you confirm that?

COL. WARREN: Yeah, I can confirm that. Yes.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Colonel Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 24 Nov 2015.

On 25 November, Russia reacted by announcing it would:

1. deploy a battery of S-400 ground-to-air anti-aircraft missiles to the Russian airbase in Latakia, Syria.
2. deploy its cruiser Moskva, which is armed with a battery of S-300 ground-to-air missiles, off the shore of Syria.
3. send fighter aircraft along with each bomber sortie over Syria.

The Telegraph in London reported:

With a range of 250 miles, the S-400 [anti-aircraft missiles] would easily be able to destroy any hostile aircraft operating in the border areas of Turkey and Syria where the Russian SU-24 was shot down.

....

Mr Shoigu [Russia's defence minister] also said all future bombing missions would be accompanied by fighter escorts, and ordered the country's most powerful missile cruiser, the Moskva, to patrol in-shore waters near the Turkish-Syrian border.

....

The pilot, Lt Col Oleg Peshkov, was shot dead by rebels as he parachuted to earth. The navigator, Capt Konstanin Murakhin, survived, despite initial reports that he too had been killed.

He was rescued from behind rebel lines by a Russian-Syrian mission. Speaking publicly for the first time this evening (see video below), Capt Murakhin denied that his aircraft had entered Turkish airspace "even for a single second."

He also rejected the Turkish claim that its F-16 had repeatedly warned the Russian jet before opening fire.

"There have been no warnings whatsoever," said Capt Murakhin,

In response, the Turkish authorities released what they said was a recording of the warnings being issued.

....

The [Russian] defence ministry has already announced other counter measures, including fighter escorts for bombing missions, and the deployment of the missile cruiser Moskva, which carries S-300s, to an air defence role in coastal waters of Latakia region. The defence ministry said on Tuesday night that the ship had been ordered to engage "any target that appears to be a threat."

Isabelle Fraser & Raziye Akkoc, "Turkey shooting down plane was 'planned provocation' says Russia, as rescued pilot claims he had no warning — latest" [The Telegraph](#), 19:44 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.

On 26 November, the dispute between Turkey and Russia evolved into a childish situation in which each demanded an apology from the other. Russia imposed some economic sanctions on Turkey. I refuse to waste my time chronicling this petty bickering over Turkey's reckless act.

Early in the morning of 27 November, [Hurriyet](#) reported that Turkey had decided to "suspend" flying missions against ISIL inside Syria. Hurriyet did *not* specify a reason, but I wonder if Turkey is worried about Syria/Russia shooting down Turkish airplanes that violate Syrian airspace.

Beginning at 20:30 GMT on 24 November, I made the following list of major news articles.

News from Turkey

- "Experts: Downing of Russian jet 'in line with international law'," [Anadolu Agency](#), 24 Nov 2015.
- "Turkey has right to protect its border, says Erdogan," [Anadolu Agency](#), 24 Nov 2015. ("Putin alleged that Russian warplanes had been launching an operation against Daesh north of Latakia. ... Erdogan said that the region where Bayirbucak Turkmen live was not an area where Daesh is present.")
- "Turkey shoots down Russian jet for airspace violation near Syrian border," [Hurriyet](#), 24 Nov 2015. (Falsely claims jets "remaining in Turkish airspace for five minutes".) (Has maps showing how Turkey's southern province of Hatay juts into Syria.)
- "Turkey downs Russian fighter jet near Syrian border after violation of airspace," [Daily Sabah](#), 15:00 GMT, 24 Nov 2015.
- "Nationality of jet was unknown before downed: Turkish military," [Daily Sabah](#), 03:00 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.
- "Russia deploys largest air defense ships near Turkish waters," [Hurriyet](#), 25 Nov 2015.
- "Russian plane: Turkish radar, legal rights confirmed," [Anadolu Agency](#), 26 Nov 2015.
- "'Putin has not returned my call', Turkey's Erdogan tells FRANCE 24," [France24](#),

26 Nov 2015. (FRANCE24 interviews Erdogan. Erdogan: "Had we known it was a Russian plane we may have acted differently." "No sovereign state can be expected to give up its right to protect [its airspace].")

- "Erdogan on downed jet: Had we known it was Russian, we may have acted differently," [Today's Zaman](#), 19:48 GMT, 26 Nov 2015. (FRANCE24 interview)
- "Turkey would act differently if it knew the jet was Russian: President Erdogan," [Daily Sabah](#), 02:00 GMT, 27 Nov 2015. (FRANCE24 interview)
- "Regime, Russian attacks displacing Syrian Turkmen: Group," [Anadolu Agency](#), 27 Nov 2015. ("Almost 7,000 Turkmen have recently been displaced due to repeated air and ground assaults by Syrian regime forces and Russian warplanes in Syria's predominantly-Turkmen Bayirbucak region Over the last several days, approximately 2,000 Syrian Turkmen, fleeing the violence in their home country, have reportedly arrived in southern Turkey. ...the Daesh militant group has no presence in the area.")
- "Erdogan says Putin 'playing with fire'," [Anadolu Agency](#), 27 Nov 2015. ("Turkish president accuses Moscow of striking opposition groups in Syria under pretext of fighting Daesh.")
- "Turkey hands over body of Russian pilot to Russia," [Hurriyet](#), 29 Nov 2015. (Clearly, Turkey has good relations with the Turkmen rebels who killed the pilot.)
- "Body of SU-24 pilot flown to Russia," [Anadolu Agency](#), 30 Nov 2015.
- "Turkey ready to talk to Russia, not apologize," [Anadolu Agency](#), 30 Nov 2015. (Turkish prime minister still defiant 6 days after shooting down Russian bomber.)
- "NATO supports Turkey in downed Russian jet incident, Turkish PM says no apology," [Hurriyet](#), 30 Nov 2015.

News from Russia

I am listing the Russian news articles to show their viewpoint, but *not* as evidence of what actually happened in Turkey/Syria. Many of the Russian "facts" are false. For example, the Russians claim their airplane *never* entered Turkish airspace, when the airplane was inside Turkey for 17 seconds. For example, the Russians claim there were no warnings from Turkey, but warnings were heard by a pilot of a Middle East Airlines passenger jet, and also heard by the U.S. Military. And Russia claims to be fighting against ISIL, but most of the Russian airstrikes are in provinces where ISIL is *not* active.

- "Putin: Downing of Russian jet over Syria 'stab in the back' by terrorist accomplices," [Russia Today](#), 09:58 GMT, 24 Nov 2015.
- "Turkish F16 fighter shot down Russian Su-24 jet over Syria, MoD confirms,"

[Russia Today](#), 10:17 GMT, 24 Nov 2015. (identifies Su-24 aircraft, but falsely claims "the downed SU-24 jet did not violate Turkish air space.")

- "Turkey Committed Act of War By Shooting Russian Plane in Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 17:18 GMT, 24 Nov 2015. ("... shooting down a Russian warplane in Syrian airspace is an act of war by Turkey")
- "Russian Defense Ministry Video Proves Su-24 Never Entered Turkish Airspace," [RIA-Novosti](#), 23:40 GMT, 24 Nov 2015. ("But flight data released by Russian Ministry of Defense shows that the Su-24s never entered Turkey, and were attacked while performing legitimate maneuvers over Syria.")
- "Moscow to deploy S-400 defense missile system to Khmeimim airbase in Syria," [Russia Today](#), 05:37 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.
- "'Turkish jets gave us no warning before shooting' — rescued pilot of downed Russian Su-24," [Russia Today](#), 11:33 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.
- "Russia FM points to gross violation of Syria flight safety memorandum," [TASS](#), 18:06 GMT, 25 Nov 2015. (This so-called "violation" is wrong, because the memorandum only applies to flights over Syria by the U.S.-led Coalition. The Turkish jets were engaged in combat air patrols along the Turkish border, which is *not* a Coalition mission.)
- "Erdogan's Mistake: Russia May Now Initiate Own 'No-Fly Zone' Over Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 14:33 GMT, 27 Nov 2015. (Ironically, Erdogan may get a "no-fly zone" inside Syria, along the border with Turkey, but the zone will be enforced by Russian military airplanes and anti-aircraft missiles.)
- "Leaked Coordinates: Is Washington to Blame for Downing of Russian Su-24?" [RIA-Novosti](#), 16:29 GMT, 28 Nov 2015. (Example of inflammatory Russian propaganda that blames the U.S. Military for Turkish actions. Below, Reuters reports that the U.S. did *not* receive the flight path of the Russian bomber in advance, so it was not possible that the U.S. "leaked" information to Turkey.)
- "Remains of Su-24 pilot killed in Syria arrive in Russia escorted by fighter jets," [Russia Today](#), 07:47 GMT, 30 Nov 2015.

Reliable News

- "Russia says one pilot, rescuer killed in downing of fighter jet — agencies" [Reuters](#), 18:32 GMT, 24 Nov 2015. ("A Russian pilot was shot dead from the ground after Turkey downed a Russian fighter jet in Syria and another soldier died during the rescue operation, Russia's military general staff said on Tuesday [24 Nov].")
- "The Latest: Russia pilot killed by groundfire in Syria" [Associated Press](#), blog begins at 11:30 GMT and ends at 18:50 GMT, 24 Nov 2015.

- "UPDATE 10 — Turkey downs Russian warplane near Syria border, Putin warns of 'serious consequences'," [Reuters](#), 19:06 GMT, 24 Nov 2015.
- "Turkey shoots down Russian jet it says violated its airspace," [Associated Press](#), 22:40 GMT, 24 Nov 2015.
- "Russian jet hit inside Syria after incursion into Turkey: U.S. official," [Reuters](#), 01:51 GMT, 25 Nov 2015. ("The United States believes that the Russian jet shot down by Turkey on Tuesday was hit inside Syrian airspace after a brief incursion into Turkish airspace, [an anonymous] U.S. official told Reuters")
- "Russian, Syrian special forces rescue Russian pilot - Syrian media," [Reuters](#), 12:57 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.
- "'I knew it was going to happen': MEA pilot recalls downing of Russian jet," [Al-Arabiya](#), 15:14 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.
- "Turkey shooting down plane was 'planned provocation' says Russia, as rescued pilot claims he had no warning — latest," [The Telegraph](#), 17:21 GMT, 25 Nov 2015. (Mentions *Al-Arabiya* news article about "... civilian pilot for Lebanese airline MEA in the sky at the time" who heard warning issued by Turkey.)
- "The Latest: UK envoy: Jet downing must spur end to Syria war," [Associated Press](#), blog begins at 07:10 GMT and ends at 20:20 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.
- "Putin sends air-defense missiles to Syria to deter Turkey," [Associated Press](#), 21:05 GMT, 25 Nov 2015.
- "Turkey-Russia spat over downed Russian warplane escalates," [Associated Press](#), 21:14 GMT, 26 Nov 2015.
- "The Latest: Russia supports closing of Turkish-Syria border," [Associated Press](#), blog begins at 08:15 GMT and ends at 14:45 GMT, 27 Nov 2015. ("Lavrov told reporters on Friday [27 Nov] that Hollande has suggested 'concrete steps' in order to shut the Turkish-Syrian border, which, Lavrov said, should 'solve the problem of terrorism on Syrian territory.' ")
- "U.N. Syria envoy says downing of Russian jet 'did not help' peace process" [Reuters](#), 14:26 GMT, 27 Nov 2015. (de Mistura: "It certainly did not help... there is a likelihood of it complicating this.")
- "Turkish president says wishes plane downing had not happened," [Associated Press](#), 14:02 GMT, 28 Nov 2015. ("It was the first expression of regret by [Erdogan] since Tuesday's [24 Nov] incident.... 'We are truly saddened by this incident,' Erdogan said. 'We wish it hadn't happened as such, but unfortunately such a thing has happened. I hope that something like this doesn't occur again.'") Copy at [Today's Zaman](#) in

Turkey.

- "Russia didn't give downed jet's flight plan to U.S.: U.S. officials," [Reuters](#), 01:09 GMT, 28 Nov 2015. ("Russia did not inform the U.S. military of its jet's flight plan before Turkey shot it down on Tuesday [24 Nov], ... two U.S. officials told Reuters on Friday [27 Nov]").)
- "Turkey recovers body of pilot from downed Russian jet," [Reuters](#), 03:15 GMT, 30 Nov 2015.
- "Moscow: Russian plane crash complicates Syria talks," [Associated Press](#), 14:41 GMT, 1 Dec 2015.

My Comments

I conclude that this event is a gross overreaction by Turkey to a trivial incident that caused *no* harm to Turkey. This is like shooting and killing a neighbor because he accidentally stepped inside the shooter's lawn (a trespass) while the neighbor was mowing his lawn. Equally bad is the reaction of NATO and Obama that Turkey has the right to defend itself from Russian aggression. There was *no* aggression in this incident, and *no* harm that required a defense.

Turkey loudly proclaimed its legal rights under international law. One of the basic legal maxims is "De minimis non curat lex." (The law does *not* concern itself with trivial injuries.) Turkey's invocation of law is unavailing.

This overreaction by Turkey, and the bellicose rhetoric from NATO, could lead to a third World War. Turkey and NATO need to stop this rhetoric.

Ironically, the U.S.-led Coalition airplanes have repeatedly and deliberately violated Syrian airspace nearly every day since 22 Sep 2014, including dropping bombs in Syria. If we apply Turkey's legal argument, we conclude that Syria can shoot down U.S. airplanes that enter Syrian airspace. That should be a sobering thought for those who believe Turkey was legally justified in shooting a Russian airplane because it (briefly) entered Turkish airspace.

The reaction of Russia on 25 November to send more anti-aircraft missiles to Syria will make the airstrike missions much more dangerous. Note that because of the Russian reaction to Turkey's reckless shooting down of a Russian aircraft, Turkey's military aircraft will be *less* secure than before.

On 20 November, Turkey complained to Russia about Russian airstrikes against Turkmen in Syria. (See [above](#).) Did the continuing Russian airstrikes against Turkmen motivate Turkey to shoot down the Russian airplane, in an attempt to discourage Russian airstrikes on the Turkmen? Turkey now claims it did *not* know that the target was a Russian airplane, but that claim may be false. The only reasonable possibilities are that the target was either a Russian or a Syrian airplane.

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 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Oct. 31, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using fighter, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, attack, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mar'a, six strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and wounded two ISIL fighters.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL artillery pieces.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate tactical units and destroyed two ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL trench, 10 ISIL fighting positions, eight ISIL buildings, suppressed an ISIL fighting position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, seven strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL homemade explosives cache, an ISIL assembly area, wounded an ISIL fighter and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 1 Nov 2015. (Pentagon version includes airstrikes reported by CENTCOM on both 31 Oct and 1 Nov.)

2 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using fighter, 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, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL rocket, two ISIL vehicles, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and wounded three ISIL fighters.
- Near Mar'a, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL ammo cache, an ISIL staging area, and three ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Makhmur, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL fighting positions, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL VBIED, two ISIL command and control nodes, four ISIL buildings, two ISIL fighting positions, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL weapons cache, and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 2 Nov 2015.

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

3 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 2, 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 15 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, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL structure.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck an ISIL oil pump and destroyed two ISIL front end loaders, three ISIL cranes, and an ISIL pump truck.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike suppressed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility, an ISIL IED facility, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL staging areas, two ISIL headquarters, two ISIL weapons caches, and one ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes destroyed two ISIL buildings, two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL VBIED storage area, damaged an ISIL building, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

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

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

4 November 2015: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 4 November 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in

Iraq and Syria:

On Nov. 3, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack, ground-attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 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 Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed three ISIL cranes, four ISIL rigs, two ISIL excavators, an ISIL front end loader, and two ISIL pipefitters.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes struck two separate large ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL building, and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bayji, one strike wounded an ISIL fighter.
- 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 seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL building and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, nine strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed ISIL IED facility, an ISIL staging facility, three ISIL staging areas, four ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL headquarters location, an ISIL bed down location, 10 ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL vehicles.

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

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

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

5 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 4, 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, attack, and remotely

piloted aircraft, and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck a large tactical unit and two ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL building, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL bunkers and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed 18 ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL motorcycle, two ISIL resupply warehouses, and damaged three ISIL buildings.
- Near Sinjar, eight strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL weapons caches, two ISIL assembly areas, eight ISIL fighting positions, and six ISIL staging areas.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

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

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

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

6 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, attack, and ground-attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and

destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Abu Kamal, four strikes struck four ISIL crude oil collection points.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL heavy machine guns, seven ISIL fighting positions, and wounded ISIL fighters.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL sniper positions, four ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL bunkers, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building, an ISIL weapons cache, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL bunkers, three ISIL assembly areas, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

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

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

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

7 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 6, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, seven ISIL structures, and three ISIL trenches.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL petroleum storage tank.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL logistical facility.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket propelled grenade position, an ISIL weapons cache, four ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices, six ISIL heavy machine guns, 11 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tunnel, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL anti-tank weapon, two ISIL buildings, damaged one ISIL building, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL light machine gun, an ISIL weapons cache and suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

8 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 7, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes using bomber, fighter, attack, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 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 Al Hasakah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Hawl, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 16 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Washiya, one strike destroyed an ISIL supply cache and damaged an ISIL cave.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL buildings and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL

checkpoint.

- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL building, suppressed movement of five ISIL tactical vehicles, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, eleven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, 21 ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL light machine guns, and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

9 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes using bomber, fighter, attack, ground-attack, and remotely piloted 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 Abu Kamal, three strikes struck an ISIL petroleum junction point and two ISIL gas and oil separation plants.
- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL building, three ISIL fighting positions, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Al Hawl, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed another fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes destroyed two ISIL command and control nodes, 12

ISIL fighting positions, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

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

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

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

10 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 9, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes using bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Al Hawl, six strikes destroyed 22 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL structure, and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, six strikes struck three ISIL gas and oil separation plants, two ISIL pump stations, and an ISIL crude oil main pump station.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives cache, two ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL boat.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, 15 ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL mortar, an ISIL building, damaged another ISIL building, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, seven strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 30 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL light machine guns, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL light machine gun position.

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

[Central Command](#), 10 Nov 2015.

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

11 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes using bomber, fighter, 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 and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Al Hawl, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building, and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck an ISIL gas oil separation plant and destroyed three ISIL front end loaders and damaged two ISIL cranes.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and damaged a separate ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL excavator, two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL buildings, and an ISIL 23mm anti-aircraft artillery piece.
- Near Sinjar, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL command and control nodes, three ISIL vehicles, and 18 ISIL staging areas.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Huwayjah, four strikes struck an ISIL headquarters, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL logistical facility, and an ISIL security headquarters.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed two ISIL buildings, three ISIL weapons caches, and three ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

12 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 11, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and

Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 40 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 Hawl, eight strikes struck eight separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL buildings and wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike, struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL command and control node and two ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck two separate ISIL staging areas.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL buildings, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL excavator, two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL improvised explosive device clusters, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, 24 strikes struck nine separate ISIL tactical units, nine ISIL staging areas, and destroyed 27 fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL improvised explosive device, six ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices, two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL bunker, two ISIL caches, four ISIL staging areas, and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, six strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, three ISIL staging areas, an ISIL bridge, and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL observation post, and two ISIL bunkers.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 Nov 2015.

Central Command also posted a press release about the 24 airstrikes on Sinjar:

Coalition airstrikes are supporting a major Peshmerga offensive operation in northwestern Iraq, announced by the Kurdistan Region Security Council Nov. 12, 2015. During "Operation Free Sinjar," the Peshmerga intend to clear Sinjar of Daesh (an Arabic acronym for ISIL) terrorists from the town and seize portions of Highway 47, a significant Daesh supply route between Ar Raqqa, Syria, and Mosul, Iraq.

By controlling Highway 47, which is used by Daesh to transport weapons, fighters, illicit oil, and other commodities that fund their operations, the Coalition intends to increase pressure on Da'ish and isolate their components from each other.

Coalition aircraft have conducted more than 250 airstrikes over the past month across northern Iraq. Strikes destroyed Daesh fighting positions, command and control facilities, weapon storage facilities, improvised explosive device factories, and staging

areas.

The ground assault began in the early morning hours of Nov. 12, when Peshmerga units successfully established blocking positions along Highway 47 and began clearing Sinjar. The Peshmerga will continue operations to re-establish government control over key portions of the area.

"The Iraqi Security Forces, including the Peshmerga, continue to put pressure on Da'ish across Iraq, including in Ramadi, Bayji, and now Sinjar and along Highway 47," said Col. Christopher C. Garver, Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve Public Affairs Officer. "This operation will degrade Daesh's resupply efforts, disrupt funding to the terrorist group's operations, stem the flow of Daesh fighters into Iraq, and further isolate Mosul from Ar Raqqa."

Coalition airstrikes will continue to target Daesh's leaders, revenue sources, supply routes, command facilities, and weapons caches to dismantle their operations in Iraq and Syria.

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 Nov 2015.

At 22:26 GMT on 12 Nov, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the Peshmerga today "seized part of" Highway 47 between Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq.

13 November 2015: airstrikes Sinjar liberated

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

On Nov. 12, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using fighter, attack, 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 and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, seven strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tunnel, an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL mortar position, and

- an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, twelve strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 27 ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL heavy machine guns, five ISIL vehicles, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), 11 ISIL staging areas, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
 - Near Tal Afar, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL VBIED, and an ISIL fighting position.
 - Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
 - Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

ISIL captured Sinjar in August 2014. On 13 Nov 2015, journalists reported the liberation of Sinjar by Kurdish peshmerga, with some Yazidi militia:

- "LIVE BLOG: Battle updates from the Shingal front," [Rudaw](#), from 21:00 local time on 11 Nov to 21:00 on 13 Nov.
- "KRG: ISIS 'defeated and on the run' in Shingal," [Rudaw](#), 11:00 GMT on 13 Nov.
- "Barzani Inside Sinjar Declares Victory," [BASnews](#), 15:00 GMT on 13 Nov.
- "Kurdish Fighters Retake Iraqi City of Sinjar From ISIS," [New York Times](#).
- "Kurdish forces raise flag over Sinjar as Islamic State control crumbles," [Washington Post](#), 15:10 GMT.
- "Kurdish forces seize control of Sinjar from Isil," [The Telegraph](#), 16:03 GMT.
- "Kurdish forces seize Iraq's Sinjar town from Islamic State," [Reuters](#), 18:11 GMT on 13 Nov.
- "Kurdish forces recapture militant-held towns in Iraq, Syria," [Associated Press](#), 22:11 GMT on 13 Nov.

Unlike the ungrateful Iraqi government, the Kurdish government thanked the USA for the airstrikes near Sinjar. Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said: "I express my utmost appreciation for the government and the people of the United States for their vital support to the Peshmergas during the Sinjar liberation operation." [Rudaw](#).

On 13 November, the Kurdish liberators raised the Kurdish flag over Sinjar. [Rudaw](#); [NY Times](#). But Sinjar was formerly in Iraq, before ISIL captured Sinjar in August 2014, so on 14 Nov the Iraqi prime minister had his knickers in a twist about the apparent annexation

of Sinjar by the Kurds. [Rudaw](#); [Kuwait News Agency](#); [BASnews](#); My comment is that *if* Iraq wanted Sinjar, then Iraq *should* have prevented ISIL from capturing Sinjar, or at least sent the Iraqi army to liberate Sinjar in Sep 2014. But Iraq abandoned Sinjar — like abandoning last week's garbage — and it is silly for Iraq to assert ownership now that the Kurds have liberated Sinjar.

After Iraq falsely claimed the Iraqi army assisted in the liberation of Sinjar, the Peshmerga refuted that claim. [BASnews](#).

14 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using bomber, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, ground-attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Ramadi, nine strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 16 ISIL buildings, two ISIL weapons caches, two ISIL tunnels, six ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL light machine guns, an ISIL rocket rail, two ISIL sniper positions, five ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL staging area, two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL tactical vehicle, three ISIL bed down locations, suppressed an ISIL fighting position, cratered three ISIL controlled roads, denied ISIL access to terrain, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Sinjar, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL light machine gun, seven ISIL vehicles, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed four ISIL weapons caches.

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

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

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

15 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 14, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL improvised explosive device cluster, an ISIL fighting position and two ISIL defensive berms.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL cash distribution site.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL mortar system, suppressed an ISIL light machine gun, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mosul, one strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL cache, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device, an ISIL command and control node, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, and wounded an ISIL fighter.

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

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

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

16 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and

Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, remotely piloted aircraft, and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed 116 ISIL fuel trucks.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.
- Ar Raqqah, one strike struck an ISIL storage depot.
- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL fighting positions, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL home-made explosives cache.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes destroyed six separate ISIL command and control nodes, damaged an ISIL building, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL vehicles.

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

[Central Command](#), 16 Nov 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 16 Nov 2015.

More detail about the U.S. airstrike that destroyed 116 fuel trucks belonging to ISIL in Syria is found at [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#) and [WSJ](#).

On Sunday night, 15 Nov, France dropped 20 bombs on ISIL targets in Raqqa Syria in retaliation for ISIL's attack on [Paris](#) on the night of 13 Nov. [Washington Post](#); [France24](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters); [Associated Press](#). This French bombing run is reported by CENTCOM as "one strike" "Near Ar Raqqah". The 18 Nov CENTCOM press release quoted below corrected this to "two strikes", the second strike was "against an ISIL command and control node".

17 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings, one ISIL sniper position, an ISIL machine gun position, and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation point.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes struck three ISIL controlled oil facilities.

Iraq

- Near Kirkuk, one strike suppressed an ISIL machine gun position.
- Near Kisik, five strikes struck three separate tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL light machine gun, and suppressed three ISIL machine gun positions.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL sniper positions, four ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL artillery position, two ISIL- used roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL headquarters, two ISIL fighting positions, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL machine gun position.

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

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

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

18 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes using attack, fighter, and

bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes struck two ISIL oil and gas separation plants.
- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 13 ISIL buildings, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, four strikes struck three ISIL headquarters and an ISIL bivouac.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL bunkers, two ISIL weapons caches, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), 29 ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL vehicles, 16 ISIL machine gun positions, three ISIL tactical vehicles, four ISIL VBIED staging areas, an ISIL bulldozer, five ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL building, an ISIL staging area, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes suppressed an ISIL rocket position and an ISIL mortar position.

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

The strike release published on Nov. 16 includes a French strike listed as "Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL storage depot." After further coordination with the French Ministry of Defense, we have determined that France conducted two separate strikes on two different targets. The first target was an ISIL storage depot and the second strike against an ISIL command and control node.

A strike, as defined in the CJTF releases, means one or more kinetic events that occur in roughly the same geographic location to produce a single, sometimes cumulative effect for that location. So having a single aircraft deliver a single weapon against a lone ISIL vehicle is one strike, but so is multiple aircraft delivering dozens of weapons against a group of buildings and vehicles and weapon systems in a compound, for example, having the cumulative effect of making that facility (or facilities) harder or impossible to use. Accordingly, CJTF-OIR does not report the number or type of aircraft employed in a strike, the number of munitions dropped in each strike, or the number of individual munition impact points against a target.

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

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

19 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL crane.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL buildings.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL storage facility.

Iraq

- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL weapons caches, 12 ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL tunnel, seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL-controlled bridge, an ISIL vehicle borne explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL bed down location, an ISIL staging area, and cratered two ISIL roads.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

20 November 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 20 November 2015, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: On Nov. 19, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria [sic] and Iraq. In Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL anti-air artillery pieces, two ISIL heavy machine guns, and two ISIL buildings.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL light machine guns, four ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL supply caches, and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL weapons vehicle borne improvised explosive device manufacturing facility.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck two ISIL gas and oil separation plants and an ISIL petroleum refinement facility.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL boat, an ISIL VBIED, two ISIL staging areas, damaged an ISIL headquarters building, suppressed an ISIL VBIED, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL light machine gun.

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

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

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

I notice that Russia is winning a propaganda campaign about the number of airstrikes in Syria. On 20 November, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that Russian aircraft "carried out 394 sorties" and hit 731 targets in Syria during the past three days. The Russians never defined what they meant by "sortie", so I ignore that claim. Hitting 731 targets in the past three days is an average of 244 targets/day. Compare that with 21 airstrikes in Syria on 17-18-19 Nov by the USA. A casual reader of the news will find 244 more impressive than 21.

On the night of 15 Nov, France dropped 20 bombs on ISIL in Syria, but only received credit for 2 airstrikes. Clearly, reporting the number of airstrikes minimizes the accomplishments of the U.S.-led Coalition.

We do *not* know how many targets the U.S. Military destroyed in Syria during those three days. We also do not know how many innocent civilians were killed by Russian or U.S. airstrikes in Syria, although I suspect that the Russians kill more innocent civilians than the U.S.

21 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 20, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes using attack, ground-attack, 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, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle borne explosive device (VBIED), and four ISIL vehicles.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Ar Raqqah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Dayr Ar Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mar'a, 13 strikes struck 12 separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL staging area, damaged an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL building, and wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL command and control facility, 15 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, five ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL IED facility, an ISIL resupply warehouse, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 21 Nov 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 21 Nov 2015.

22 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 21, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, bomber and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, three ISIL structures, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), damaged an ISIL structure, and wounded ISIL fighters.
- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and wounded ISIL fighters.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Hit, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL IED obstacles, two ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL heavy machine gun positions, two ISIL vehicles, three ISIL weapon caches, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL VBIED, cratered an ISIL road, suppressed an ISIL rocket position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tikrit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and four ISIL vehicles.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 22 Nov 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 22 Nov 2015.

See 23 November report for two additional airstrikes on Syria.

23 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 22, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using attack, ground-attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, two strikes destroyed an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL mortar tube, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and destroyed an ISIL earthen bridge.
- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL structures and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ayn Isa, four strikes struck four separate tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and six ISIL structures.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL house borne improvised explosive device (HBIED), two ISIL recoilless rifles, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL building, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, 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 Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.

Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL bridge section.

Additionally on Nov. 21, two strikes occurred in Syria that were previously unreported:

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Al Hasakah and Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed 283 ISIL vehicles.

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

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

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

24 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 23, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 9 strikes using attack, 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 rocket artillery and bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL tactical vehicle, and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle staging area.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL artillery piece, and an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area and an ISIL building.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, eight strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL excavator, an ISIL bunker, five ISIL weapons caches, five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL IED, an ISIL staging area, damaged three ISIL entrenchments, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed one ISIL fighting position and an ISIL supply cache.

- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun and three ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

25 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five 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, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL building.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL building, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL sniper position, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL home-made explosives (HME) cache, five ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL building, and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and five ISIL bunkers.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.

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

[Central Command](#), 25 Nov 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 Nov 2015.

26 November 2015: airstrikes

Thursday, 26 November, was a federal holiday in the USA, which began a four-day weekend for most federal workers. Naturally, CENTCOM did *not* post any press release during the four days (26-29 Nov). So I used the version at the Pentagon website.

On Thursday, 26 November 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Bomber and remotely piloted aircraft conducted four strikes in Syria:

- Near Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Raqqah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL vehicle staging area and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Bomber, fighter, attack, ground attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 23 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government:

- Near Baghdadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL rocket positions.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and five ISIL bunkers.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL checkpoint and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL building.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar, two ISIL structures, an ISIL boat, an ISIL front-end loader, cratered an ISIL road, suppressed an ISIL vehicle's movement, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, damaged an ISIL vehicle, suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.

[Pentagon](#), 26 Nov 2015.

Posted at [Central Command](#) on 30 Nov.

27 November 2015: airstrikes

On Friday, 27 November 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq:

Bomber, fighter, attack, ground attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 18 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government:

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL bomb cache, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL buildings, two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, seven ISIL boats, an ISIL bed-down location, an ISIL out post, cratered an ISIL used road, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle bomb facility.

[Pentagon](#), 27 Nov 2015.

Posted at [Central Command](#) on 30 Nov.

28 November 2015: airstrikes

On Saturday, 28 November 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted three strikes near Ayn Isa [in Syria], striking an ISIL tactical unit and destroying an ISIL tactical vehicle.

Bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 17 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government:

- Near Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed two ISIL rocket rails and damaged a third ISIL rocket rail and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL home-made explosives cache, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL boat, an ISIL vehicle-borne bomb, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL ammo cache, two ISIL weapons caches, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck three separate tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL vehicles.

[Pentagon](#), 28 Nov 2015.

Posted at [Central Command](#) on 30 Nov.

29 November 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 29 November 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Remotely piloted aircraft conducted three strikes in Syria:

- Near Raqqah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL front-end loader.

Bomber, fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 19 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government:

- Near Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Qaim, two strikes struck two ISIL bomb-making facilities.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL sniper position, and an ISIL building.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL-used bridge.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position, two ISIL buildings, two ISIL weapons caches, wounded an ISIL fighter, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

[Pentagon](#), 29 Nov 2015.

Posted at [Central Command](#) on 30 Nov.

30 November 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using bomber and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator and three ISIL bulldozers and damaged an additional ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint and an wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail and two ISIL defensive fighting positions.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL defensive fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL indirect fire site, two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL vehicle, three ISIL buildings, three ISIL anti-air artillery sites, an ISIL tunnel system, and two ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

13 Nov 2015: terror attack in Paris

Beginning at about 21:20 Paris time on 13 Nov 2015, a total of 7 terrorists — early reports said 8 terrorists — made a coordinated attack on 6 locations in Paris:

1. three suicide bombers detonated outside a stadium where a soccer game was played. (1 dead)
2. Le Carillon bar/cafe, at 18 rue Alibert, and then Le Petit Cambodge, a restaurant across the street from the Le Carillon. (15 dead)
3. La Casa Nostra pizzeria and Cafe Bonne Biere in rue de la Fontaine au Roi. (5 dead)
4. La Belle Equipe bar/restaurant in the rue de Charonne. (19 dead)
5. one suicide bomber detonated on the Boulevard Voltaire. (0 dead)
6. the Bataclan concert hall, where a rock band from California was scheduled to play. Three — early reports said four — terrorists took the audience hostage, then sprayed the audience with bullets from assault rifles. (89 dead)

(The locations and number of dead at each location are from a report by the [BBC](#) at 13:00 GMT on 15 Nov.)

Initial reports were that approximately two dozen people were killed, but the final death toll was much worse — at 19:15 Paris time on 14 Nov there were 129 dead and 99 people in critical condition in Paris hospitals. On 20 November, the death toll increased to 130.

The concert hall and some of the attacked restaurants were only a few hundred meters from the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical newspaper that was the site of an Islamic attack on 7 January 2015.

During the night of 13 November, details were scarce and information from different sources was sometimes conflicting. However, witnesses reported the attackers yelled Islamic slogans, as noted in the annotations to the sources below.

Sources:

- "At least 120 dead in Paris attacks, Hollande declares emergency," [Reuters](#), 05:27 GMT, 14 Nov 2015.
- "120 dead in Paris attacks, worst since WWII," [Associated Press](#), 06:21 GMT, 14 Nov 2015 ("Witnesses in the concert hall described hearing attackers say 'Allahu Akbar.'").
- "A look at the attacks across Paris," [Associated Press](#), 06:24 GMT, 14 Nov 2015 (AP gives location of each attack.).
- "Paris shooting: more than 150 killed and 200 injured after Kalashnikov, grenade and

suicide attacks across French capital," [The Telegraph](#), 06:36 GMT, 14 Nov 2015 ("The gunmen shouted 'Allahu akbar' as they attacked." "One of the gunmen said 'this is for Syria', according to one witness.").

- "Live: Paris rocked by series of deadly shootings," [France24](#), live blog begins at 23:30 GMT, 13 Nov 2015.
- "Paris attacks: What we know," [BBC](#), 07:00 GMT, 14 Nov 2015 ("One of the attackers [at Bataclan concert hall] was said to have shouted 'God is great' in Arabic. One witness heard a gunman blaming President Hollande for intervening in Syria. It was the first clear evidence that Paris was once again being targeted by Islamists.") (BBC gives time and location of each attack.).
- Sybille de la Hamaide, "Timeline of Paris attacks according to public prosecutor," [Reuters](#), 18:56 GMT, 14 Nov 2015.
- "Paris attacks: 'Three teams' involved - prosecutor Molins," [BBC](#), 19:51 GMT, 14 Nov 2015.
- "Recovery just beginning for many of Paris wounded," [Associated Press](#), 14:26 GMT, 20 Nov 2015 (Total dead now 130. "By the French health ministry's most recent count, on Wednesday [18 Nov], 195 people were still hospitalized, three of them in critical condition and 41 in intensive care.").
- "Timeline of Paris attacks and investigation," [Reuters](#), 21:26 GMT, 22 Nov 2015.
- "FACTBOX — The hunt for the Paris attackers," [Reuters](#), 11:46 GMT, 26 Nov 2015. (list of suspects)
- "The Latest: Belgium says likely Paris fugitive gets help," [Associated Press](#), 18:40 GMT, 26 Nov 2015. (Salah Abdeslam still *not* arrested.)
- "Factbox: The hunt for the Paris attackers," [Reuters](#), 15:13 GMT, 3 Dec 2015.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference, which began in Paris on 30 November, gave journalists in Paris a new story to report, and consequently news diminished about the Islamic attacks on 13 November.

The Islamic terrorists in Paris

I want to emphasize one fact. The 7 dead attackers all wore suicide bomb vests, which indicated that they intended to die in the attacks. There is very little that police can do to deter terrorists who intend to die.

Reports on the night of 13 November said there were 8 attackers, but on 14 November police found dead bodies of only 7 attackers. On 15 November, police realized that at least one attacker escaped alive. There were three brothers from the Abdeslam family who were

suspected amongst the attackers:

1. Brahim Abdeslam, 31 years old, exploded on the Boulevard Voltaire, near the Bataclan concert hall,
2. Mohammed Abdeslam was arrested in Belgium on 14 Nov, but released on 16 Nov, and
3. police seek to arrest Salah Abdeslam, 26 years old.

[Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [BBC](#). On the morning of 16 November, the [Washington Post](#) reported that French police believe approximately twenty Islamic terrorists may be involved in the attacks in Paris. Also on 16 November, the [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) report that French police have identified the "mastermind" of the Paris bombings as Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a 27 year old Belgian citizen of parents from Morocco. Abaaoud was a known Islamic terrorist who had traveled to Syria, and who police believe is now living in Syria. On the night of 17 November, French police were searching for *two* escaped Paris attackers.

On 18 November, at about 04:20 Paris time, heavily armed French police began to raid an apartment in St. Denis, a northern suburb of Paris that is near the stadium that was attacked on 13 Nov. There were two reasons for the raid: (1) attempt to arrest Abaaoud the mastermind and (2) prevent a terrorist attack on the Paris suburb of La Defense. The reinforced door to the apartment resisted an attempt to blast it open, and a seven-hour standoff ensued. Police fired more than 5000 cartridges and threw grenades at the apartment. Part of the third floor of the apartment building collapsed onto the second floor. Police arrested seven people in the apartment. Initial reports said two others were killed in the standoff: a woman who was a cousin of Abaaoud, and Abdelhamid Abaaoud the mastermind. Abaaoud's corpse was "badly mangled", and it took many hours to identify it. Two days later, police found a third corpse in the demolished apartment. The third corpse had detonated his suicide vest inside the apartment. [Associated Press](#) (blog); [Washington Post](#) (Abaaoud dead); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#) (20 Nov); [Washington Post](#) (20Nov).

On 24 November, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the French prosecutor said Abaaoud the mastermind was planning to attack the Paris suburb of La Defense on either 18 or 19 November. The death of Abaaoud on the morning of 18 November prevented that attack.

A Syrian passport was found near the dead body of a suicide bomber at the stadium in Paris on the night of 13 Nov. That passport was used by a so-called refugee who traveled from Turkey and arrived in Greece on 3 Oct 2015. That passport was subsequently used at the borders of Macedonia, then Serbia on 7 Oct, and then Croatia. Serbia issued him a transit visa and he then vanished into the open borders of the European Union. The fingerprints from the dead suicide bomber matched the fingerprints of the so-called refugee who entered Greece on 3 Oct. However, on 17 Nov journalists reported that the Syrian passport was fraudulent — the name on the passport (Ahmad al-Mohammad) belonged to a Syrian army soldier who died "months ago". [Washington Post](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

On 18-20 November, journalists reported that a second suicide bomber in Paris had also entered Greece with refugees on 3 October. This second terrorist used a fake Syrian passport with the name "Mohammad al-Mahmod". [Reuters](#) (18Nov); [Washington Post](#) (20Nov);

[France24](#) (22Nov).

Abaaoud the mastermind was wanted by both Belgian and French law enforcement, yet he freely traveled between Syria and Europe, and he arrived in Paris. This shows serious problems with passport control and immigration in Europe. [BBC](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [LA Times](#).

On 28 November, it was reported that the assault rifles used in Islamic attack on Paris were manufactured in Serbia (i.e., former Yugoslavia). [Reuters](#) says the rifles were manufactured during 1987-1988. But on 27 November, the [Associated Press](#) said the rifles were manufactured during "the early 1990s".

Quotations about Paris attacks and my commentary

As the investigation into the Paris attacks began, it was quickly obvious that this was another Islamic terror attack. On the morning of 14 November, French President Hollande gave a speech blaming ISIL. Reuters reported:

The attacks at a stadium, concert hall and cafes and restaurants in northern and eastern Paris were "an act of war committed by Daesh that was prepared, organised and planned from outside (of France)" with help from inside France, Hollande said, using the Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

....

Some witnesses in the [Bataclan concert] hall said they heard the gunmen shout Islamic chants and slogans condemning France's role in Syria.

"Hollande says Paris attacks 'an act of war' by Islamic State," [Reuters](#), 10:37 GMT, 14 Nov 2015.

The Associated Press reported the claims by ISIL:

The Islamic State group on Saturday [14 Nov] claimed responsibility for a wave of attacks in Paris that killed 127 people and said France would remain at the "top of the list" of its targets.

An online statement said eight militants armed with explosive belts and automatic weapons attacked carefully chosen targets in the "capital of adultery and vice," including a soccer stadium where France was playing Germany, and the Bataclan concert hall, where an American rock band was playing, and "hundreds of apostates were attending an adulterous party."

The statement said France and its supporters "will remain at the top of the list of targets of the Islamic State."

"The stench of death will not leave their noses as long as they remain at the forefront of the Crusaders' campaign, dare to curse our prophet, boast of a war on Islam in France, and strike Muslims in the lands of the caliphate with warplanes that were of no

use to them in the streets and rotten alleys of Paris," it said.

....

The claim was made in statements in Arabic and French released online and circulated by supporters of the group. Supporters also circulated an audio version read by an unidentified speaker whose voice strongly resembled that of an announcer for the IS radio station Al-Bayan. It was not immediately possible to confirm the authenticity of the statements, but they bore the extremists' logo and resembled previous IS statements.

Maamoun Youssef, "IS group claims Paris attacks, says France at 'top' of list," [Associated Press](#), 13:20 GMT, 14 Nov 2015.

The Associated Press reported:

[French President Francois] Hollande, who declared three days of national mourning and raised the nation's security to its highest level, called the carnage "an act of war that was prepared, organized, planned from abroad with internal help."

The president said France would increase its military efforts to crush IS. He said France — which is part of a U.S.-led coalition bombing suspected IS targets in Syria and Iraq and also has troops fighting Islamic militants in Africa — "will be merciless toward the barbarians of Islamic State group."

....

Officials said a suicide bomber at the concert hall was identified as a young Frenchman flagged in the past for links with an Islamic extremist activity, and a Syrian passport was recovered from the remains of another suicide bomber outside the stadium.

Officials in Greece said the attacker with the Syrian passport had entered in October through Leros, one of the islands that tens of thousands of people fleeing war and poverty in Syria and elsewhere have been using as a gateway to the the European Union in recent months.

If the attack does involve militants who traveled to Europe amid millions of refugees from the Middle East, the implications could be profound.

Angela Charlton & Sylvie Corbet, "France vows to punish IS for Paris attacks that kill 127," [Associated Press](#), 18:05 GMT, 14 Nov 2015.

Reuters reports that the Syrian passport found near the dead body of one attacker *could* have been stolen:

Any identity documents and fingerprint records would have to be matched with the remains of the actual attackers to establish whether they passed through Greece posing as refugees, or perhaps bought or stole passports along the way.

"Holder of Syrian passport found near Paris gunman crossed Greece," [Reuters](#), 22:50 GMT, 14 Nov.

Why did ISIL attack France, instead of attacking the U.K. or USA? The Associated Press suggests that ISIL's decision was made because France recently began airstrikes against ISIL in Syria.

The Islamic State group on Saturday [14 Nov] expressed fury at France's recently launched airstrikes against it in Syria as it claimed responsibility for Friday's attacks in Paris. The airstrikes have hit training camps and reflect France's fears that hundreds of French fighters in Syria and Iraq could return home and, as President Francois Hollande put it last month, "plant bombs in our country."

....

In an interview last month with French broadcaster RTL, Hollande acknowledged French airstrikes on other Islamic State camps in Raqqa, the capital of IS' self-proclaimed caliphate, and elsewhere in Syria, saying "there are terrorists training to lead the fight in Syria but can also plant bombs in our country."

He repeated his government's estimate that there are 600 French nationals in the "combat zones" in Syria and Iraq who could return to France with the potential to carry out attacks at home.

Cara Anna, "What French have been doing against Islamic State in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 22:07 EST, 14 Nov 2015.

In the context of the French bombing of ISIL in Syria, note the first French airstrike in Syria was on 27 Sep 2015, as mentioned in my essay for [September 2015](#). The USA has dropped more bombs on ISIL and fired more missiles on ISIL than all of the remainder of the U.S.-led Coalition combined. So one might expect ISIL to target the USA, *not* France. While precise numbers are not available, it seems that France has contributed *many more* fighters to ISIL than the USA. That means the French government is more frightened of those ISIL fighters returning home to France, while the U.S. government is less concerned about ISIL fighters returning home to the USA. By attacking France, ISIL can play on that fear in the French government, and perhaps convince the French government to stop attacking ISIL in Syria. Another aspect is France has "large, disaffected, segregated Muslim populations prone to radicalism." ([Associated Press](#)) The radical Muslim population in France provides local terrorists with genuine French identity cards, who can be recruited by ISIL. On the other hand, Islamic terrorists in the USA are mostly wannabes (e.g., Garland Texas in May 2015, Chattanooga in July 2015). I say "mostly wannabes" because the Al-Qaeda gang on 11 Sep 2001 — most of whom were from Saudi Arabia, and *all* were foreigners in the USA — did a really professional job.

Osamah Golpy, writing in the Kurdish news website [Rudaw](#), suggests that ISIL timed the attacks in Paris to divert attention from the defeat of ISIL in Sinjar on 13 November.

On 14 Nov, Assad was correct to say that Islamic terrorism (e.g., suicide bombings) are the same in Syria, Lebanon (e.g., 12 Nov 2015 bombing in Beirut that killed 43 people), and France. The *Syrian Arab News Agency* reported:

President al-Assad affirmed that the terrorist attacks which targeted Paris couldn't be separated from those that took place in Beirut, and what has been happening in Syria

since 5 years and in other regions, adding “terrorism is one field in the world and terrorist organizations don’t recognize borders.”

“Wrong policies adopted by western states, particularly France, towards events in the region, and its ignorance of the support of a number of its allies to terrorists are reasons behind the expansion of terrorism,” President al-Assad said, pointing out to the importance of adopting new policies and taking active procedures to stop support for terrorists logistically or politically in order to overcome terrorism.

....

“And what happened in France yesterday cannot be separated from what happened in Beirut two days ago, because this is terrorism. That’s why you shouldn’t look at terrorism as separate arenas, like looking at Syria’s arena, Yemen, Libya, France. Actually, it’s one arena all around the world.”

"President al-Assad to French delegation: Terrorist attacks on Paris can’t be separated from those of Beirut and events in Syria," [SANA](#), 14 Nov 2015.

Note that 20 diplomats recognized Islamic terror attacks in Paris, "Beirut, Iraq, Ankara, and Egypt" in the first paragraph of the statement from the 14 Nov 2015 meeting in [Vienna](#) about Syria. The implication is that the same terrorism affects many nations outside of Syria. As Al-Qaeda and ISIL continue to spread to more nations, these Islamic terrorists will have an increasingly global reach.

The USA has been fighting against Al-Qaeda since soon after the 11 Sep 2001 airplane hijackings by Islamic terrorists in the USA. The USA has been fighting against Al-Qaeda in Iraq (which in mid-2013 entered Syria under the new name ISIL, and then in Jan 2014 invaded Iraq) since Al-Qaeda in Iraq was formed in the year 2004. But both Al-Qaeda and ISIL continue to flourish and expand to more nations, which is strong evidence of what Assad calls "wrong policies" by Western Europe and the USA. Again, I suggest that we focus more on killing the [ideology](#) of Islamic terrorism, and less on a military solution. The military solution of airstrikes on ISIL is often similar to what U.S. Senator John McCain derided in 2006 as "a game of whack-a-mole". (The reference is to a game in which a mole suddenly pops up, and you have only a few seconds to shoot it, before the mole returns underground.)

The Islamic attacks in Paris had a profound effect on politics in the USA. The focus in the U.S. presidential contest in 2016 suddenly shifted from economics to protecting the U.S. from Islamic terrorists. [NY Times](#) (15Nov); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#) (22Nov); [San Francisco Chronicle](#) (24Nov); [NY Times](#) (25Nov).

I am afraid the next U.S. President in January 2017 will increase the U.S. Military involvement in Syria and Iraq. That will waste more of U.S. taxpayers' money, kill more U.S. personnel, and have little effect on exterminating ISIL. Unfortunately, none of the candidates have any good ideas about how to win the war against ISIL and Al-Qaeda. Hillary Clinton, the candidate with the most experience in fighting Islamic terrorism, presided over the beginning of the debacle in Syria, so Hillary's experience is mostly *bad* experience. That was

after Hillary voted to invade Iraq, which led Iraq into anarchy and inability to resist ISIL.

I find it astounding that it is apparently easy for terrorists to purchase full automatic assault rifles in Western Europe, which has tight controls on sales and ownership of firearms.

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. (What Tej Parikh called a "failure in assimilation", [Reuters](#), 27 Nov 2015.) 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." And on 29 October, [The Guardian](#) reports that 14 migrants from Syria refused to leave a bus at their destination in Sweden because it was "too cold".

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 the nights of 8-9-10 November 2015, there were riots in a migrant camp in Calais, France in which more than two dozen policemen were injured. [France24](#); [Globe&Mail](#)(AP). There are approximately 6000 migrants waiting in Calais to illegally enter the United Kingdom via the tunnel under the English Channel.

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 "thousands" per day, "tens of thousands" per week, and at least a hundred thousand per month. 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.

It is *not* possible to reliably vet the so-called refugees who enter Europe:

1. Some of these migrants have no passport and no identity documents, so their name and past history can *not* be verified, except laboriously through fingerprints.
2. After the attacks in Paris on 13 Nov, it took European police three days to trace *one* Syrian passport issued to Ahmad al-Mohammad and determine that the passport was fraudulent. When there are thousands of migrants each day demanding entry, border guards can not spend three days checking each passport. Moreover, a second fraudulent Syrian passport with the same name was discovered in Serbia, which hints at widespread fraud. [The Guardian](#).
3. It is unlikely that Assad's government will cooperate with European requests for criminal background checks on emigrants from Syria, because European leaders have repeatedly called for the ouster of Assad.
4. Governments in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. have primitive criminal databases and can *not* do complete criminal background checks on tens of thousands of

migrants. Moreover, police in those nations arrest only a few of the terrorists, so most terrorists may be unknown to police.

Additionally, on 18 November, five Syrians were arrested in Honduras for using stolen Greek passports. The five Syrians intended to travel to the USA. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). This incident shows that some so-called refugees from Syrian engage in fraudulent use of passports, and they successfully passed through several borders with the fraudulent passports.

After politicians assured the public that there were *no* terrorists in the refugees entering Europe, the attacks in Paris on 13 November showed that at least two Islamic terrorists entered Europe with refugees. Then on 26 November, the Associated Press reported:

The Austria Press Agency cited German federal police chief Hans-Georg Maasen as saying that some who blend in with the migrants fought with IS and are planning a "combat mission" once they arrive in Europe. He said Thursday [26 Nov] that his office knows of 7,900 Islamic radicals in Germany who advocate violence to advance their goals, with some trying to win migrants to their cause.

He said German authorities receive one or two "fairly concrete tips" a week of planned terrorist activity. And he described IS extremists as "combat-hardened professionals" more dangerous than those from al-Qaida.

"The Latest: German official says some migrants IS radicals," [Associated Press](#), 15:21 GMT, 26 Nov 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 30 November 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/syria27.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to historical documents.

[my homepage](#)