

Syria & Iraq: December 2015

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 25 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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,
- and *The Washington Post*

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 Assad and establish a new government based on their interpretation of Islam. These jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL are *not* part of a pro-democracy revolt in Syria. Presumably, these jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL will fight against *any* secular government in Syria, so removal of Assad will *not* end their battle to establish their religious government 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 2015, 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.

My essay for [November 2015](#) mentions a 6 Nov [OPCW](#) press release about three new reports from the fact-finding mission in Syria. These three reports were to be attached to the OPCW monthly report for November, but apparently none of the four reports were publicly issued in November.

On 30 December 2015, the monthly report for November — with the three fact-finding mission reports — was listed at *neither* the United Nations Security [Council](#) *nor* the [OPCW](#) websites. On 30 Dec 2015, the October OPCW monthly report is still the most recent OPCW document at these two websites. I do *not* know why OPCW and the United Nations are concealing the November OPCW report.

OPCW Fact-Finding Missions in Syria

On 28 December, I noticed the independent [Security Council Report](#) website listed the November OPCW report as having U.N. Security Council number S/2015/908. This is a huge report — 6.6 Megabyte PDF file containing 221 pages. A link to this report is on my webpage at [rbs0.com](#).

The OPCW report to the Security Council for November 2015, U.N. Security Council S/2015/908, refers to the attached three fact-finding mission reports as S/1318/2015, S/1319/2015, and S/1320/2015. These three are *not* U.N. Security Council document numbers (indeed a U.N.S.C. report for 24 December 2015 has a report number of 1027, and the U.N. practice is to put the year *before* the report number). These three fact-finding reports are issued by the OPCW Technical Secretariat. I mention this because the November report to the U.N. Security Council contains numerous bogus links to the U.N. website for internal OPCW documents that are *not* found at the U.N. website.

My quick read of these three new reports tersely summarizes the information from the fact-finding mission (FFM) on use of chemical weapons in Syria:

1. Ten alleges uses of chlorine during April 2014 to September 2014, the worst of which was a 29 Aug 2014 use at Jober. Inconclusive, owing to long time between events and investigation, and owing to a lack of evidence presented by the Syrian government: "the FFM cannot confidently determine whether or not a chemical was used as a weapon." (S/1318/2015 at ¶1.6)
2. Alleged use of chlorine in Idlib province during 16 March to 20 May 2015. The fact-finding mission concluded the events "likely involved the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon" and the chemical was "probably" chlorine. (S/1319/2015 at ¶¶ 2, 4, 5.19)
3. One use of mustard in Marea, Syria on 21 Aug 2015. The fact-finding mission concluded: "the team can confirm ... with the utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulfur mustard". "Additionally, it is very likely that the effects of sulfur mustard resulted in the death of an infant." (S/1320/2015 at ¶4.6)

The OPCW fact-finding missions were limited to determining whether or not chemical weapons were used in Syria. Assigning blame for who used chemical weapons was beyond the scope of the fact-finding missions.

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 13 November, the [United Nations](#) announced that the JIM is "fully operational". Well, *not* "fully", because the JIM does not yet have permission to visit sites in Syria.

On 2 December, the United Nations announced that the JIM would make its first visit to Syria sometime "very soon". [Associated Press](#).

On 11 December, the Status of Mission Agreement was signed in New York City. The three leaders of the JIM were in Damascus on 17 December. [U.N. Press](#); [U.N. Geneva](#). The JIM

has no website and the United Nations is being miserly with information on the JIM.

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 2015 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 Nov/Dec 2015

On 19 November 2015, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL had established a chemical weapons research & development program. This may be how ISIL acquired sulfur mustard for release at (1) Makhmur, Iraq on 11 Aug 2015 and (2) Marea, Syria on 21 Aug 2015.

During November and December 2015, journalists ignored the use of chemical weapons in Iraq, as journalists concentrated on Syrian peace negotiations that are scheduled to begin in January 2016.

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 31 December 2015, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published an end-of-year death toll of 55,219 people killed during 2015.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of nearly 55219 persons since 01/01/2015, until 31/12/2015. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 20977 civilians, including 2574 children, 1944 female over the age of 18 and 8931 male over the age of 18.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters: 7728
- Defected soldiers and officers: 70
- Regime soldiers and officers: 8819
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, al-Ba'eth battalions, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 7275
- Militiamen from Hezbollah guerrilla: 378
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 1214
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian fighters from the ISIS, al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham organization and the Islamic Turkestan Party : 16212
- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 274

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include thousands of missing detainees people inside regime prisons and others of those who disappeared during the raids and massacres by the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them. It also does not include hundreds of regime's soldiers and pro-regime militants and supporters captured by ISIS, Islamic fighters, Al-Nusra front, rebel and Islamic battalions on charge of "dealing with the regime".

These statistics do not include also the more than 3000 abductees from the civilians and fighters inside ISIS jails from Deir Ezzor tribes who were kidnapped from their areas.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of casualties from the rebel battalions, the Islamic battalions, Junud al-Sham, The Turkestan Islamic Party, the "Islamic state" organization, Jund al-Sham, Al-Nusra Front, Jund al-Aqsa organization, al-Umma Brigade, al-Battar battalion, al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar army, and the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them of Syrian, Arab and Asian nationalities to be approximately 12,000 more than the documented numbers due to the extreme discretion by all parties about the human losses caused by the

conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

And we in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights consider the silence of the International community for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria encourages the criminals to kill more and more Syrian people because they have not found anyone that deter them from continuing their crimes that injured more than 1600000 people; some of them with permanent disabilities, which made hundreds of thousands of children orphans, and displace more than half of Syrian people and destroy infrastructure, private and public properties since the [beginning] of the Syrian revolution in March 18th 2011 until the end of 2015.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights renews its call to all international sides — despite the horrifying silence by the international community — to work more seriously for immediate stop of the Syrian people's blood shedding and to put more pressure on the countries members of the members of the UN Security Council so these war crimes and the crimes against humanity are handled by the International Criminal Court. We in the Syrian Observatory demand the punishment of all perpetrators, instigators, collaborators and all individuals and sides who used the Syrian blood as a political card and as means to carry out their personal agendas, as well as those who transformed a revolution for dignity to a sectarian and ethnic civil war.

"Syria is still bleeding — more than 55,000 thousand persons were killed during the year of 2015," [SOHR](#), 31 Dec 2015.

I checked the addition above, and SOHR's total of 55,219 appears to have omitted the 7728 rebel and Islamic fighters.

I estimate the cumulative total deaths since March 2011 by adding the cumulative total for 31 Dec 2014 to 55219, to obtain 261,931.

On 1 January 2016, the the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published an end-of-month death toll of 4633 people killed during December 2015.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 4633 people in December 2015. The death toll is as follows:

- 1329 civilians, including 288 children and 196 women
- Syrian fighters of YPG, Rebel and Islamist factions: 711.
- Non-Syrian fighters of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaysh al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army and the Islamist factions: 1145.
- Defected soldiers: 3.
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 627.
- Militiamen of the People's Committees and NDF as well as informers: 671.
- Hezbollah militiamen: 17.
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 70.
- Unidentified victims : 60

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 4600 people killed in December, 2015" [SOHR](#), 1 Jan 2016. [Several typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

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.

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 Kobani, 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 31 December 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 6 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

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. My essay for [November 2015](#) mentions another reason why Turkey is an ally from Hell: the Turks shot down a Russian airplane after it harmlessly flew across Turkey for a mere 17 seconds.

Dec 2015: Turkish soldiers trained Iraqis

Turkey has sent troops into northern Iraq to train the Peshmerga, since 2013 in an effort that is *not* part of the U.S.-led Coalition. Approximately six months ago, Turkey began training Sunni fighters. On 4 December it was announced that approximately 150 Turkish soldiers plus tanks and artillery had moved into Nineveh province, near Mosul, without the permission of the Iraqi government in Baghdad. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 5 December, [Rudaw](#) reports: "Iraqi President Fuad Masum provided a statement shortly after [the announcement of Turkish troops near Mosul]: " 'The presence of the Turkish Army forces in Mosul Province without our permission is violating international rules. I want Turkish officials to get the force out of Iraqi territory immediately.' " On 5 December, Abadi issued a public statement that calls on Turkey "to withdraw immediately from the Iraqi territory." [Abadi](#). On 5-6 December, the [Associated Press](#) and [Anadolu Agency](#) in Turkey

report the former governor of Nineveh province said the Turkish soldiers had permission from both prime minister Abadi and the speaker of the Iraqi parliament. Also on 6 December, the Iraqi government publicly demanded that the Turks remove *all* of their troops from Iraq within 48 hours (i.e., not later than 8 December), or Iraq would complain to the United Nations Security Council about Turkey's illegal invasion of Iraq. [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [BBC](#). On 7 December, [Rudaw](#) reports a leader of a Shiite militia said: "Turkish tanks will be blasted if they don't leave Iraq immediately."

My comment is that in all of the harsh words about a few Turkish soldiers in Iraq, no one is saying anything about a much larger violation of Iraqi sovereignty: the Turkish bombing of alleged PKK camps inside Iraq since the end of July 2015. The real problem seems to be that the Iranian-controlled Shiite militias in Iraq objected to the presence of Turkish troops in Iraq, just as those Shiite militias objected to the 1 December U.S. [proposal](#) to send special operations personnel to Iraq. The Turkish troops in Nineveh province were training Sunni fighters, something that Shiites oppose, in a continuation of long-standing sectarianism in Iraq.

On 8 December, the Turkish government refused to withdraw their troops from Iraq, but Turkey stopped sending more troops on 6 Dec. Turkey will not send more troops until the Iraqi government is mollified. [Reuters](#); [Daily Sabah](#) in Turkey; [Today's Zaman](#) in Turkey. Also on 8 December, the [Associated Press](#) blamed Iran for creating this crisis between Iraq and Turkey.

On 11 December, [Reuters](#) reports that Iraq asked the United Nations Security Council "to demand an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Turkish troops from northern Iraq". The Iraqi demand was written in Arabic, and took several days to translate to languages that the members of the U.N. Security Council could read.

Also on 11 December, Erdogan justified the additional Turkish troops in Iraq, because Iraq was unable to protect Turkish troops who are training Peshmerga and Sunnis. Erdogan reiterated his refusal to withdraw any Turkish troops from Iraq. [Anadolu](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 14 December, Turkey moved "some" of its troops in about 11 trucks from the training camp near Mosul to another camp in northern Iraq. [Anadolu Agency](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 14 December, the former Iraqi prime minister, Maliki, had a bizarre outburst in which he said: "Turkey has ambitions in Iraq and is trying to carve out Mosul, taking advantage of the circumstances that Iraq is going through." [Iraqi News](#). This kind of wild accusation shows the difficulty of dealing with the irrational Iraqi government. On 15 December, Russian news source [RIA-Novosti](#) joined the ridiculous by claiming Erdogan wants to create a new Ottoman Empire that includes parts of Iraq and Syria.

On 15 December, Turkey said it would not need troops in Iraq if both (1) the Iraqis liberated Mosul from ISIL and (2) the Iraqi army secured the border with Turkey. [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#); [Iraqi News](#). My comment is that Turkey is changing its justification from helping Iraq

(e.g., training Peshmerga and Sunnis in Iraq), to self-defense of Turkey.

On 16 December, the Iraqi Council of Ministers again asked Turkey "for a complete withdrawal from Iraqi territory and respect for its national sovereignty." [Iraqi News](#).

On 19 December, Turkey said it would withdraw all of its troops from the base near Mosul. Turkey characterized the dispute with Iraq as a "miscommunication". [Anadolu Agency](#); [Hurriyet](#).

On 30 December, the Iraqi foreign minister publicly declared: "if necessary, we will fight Turkey to defend our sovereignty". [Iraqi News](#); [Reuters](#); [Today's Zaman](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is not only does Turkey have the second largest army in NATO, but also Iraq needs *all* of its soldiers — plus the Peshmerga — in the forthcoming battle to liberate Mosul. Iraqi leaders need to stop the hysterical threats against Turkey.

Dec 2015: no-fly zone dead

On 9 December, General Paul Selva had the unpleasant task of telling the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee that the U.S. would *not* establish a no-fly zone in Syria, because of concern over a Russian challenge to that zone or a direct conflict with the Syrian army. [CNN](#); [Washington Post](#) (opinion by Dana Milbank); [Anadolu Agency](#). My comment is that this decision should be the end of the no-fly zone, but Turkey — and some warmongering U.S. politicians — will continue to suggest a no-fly zone. In this case, I completely agree with Obama, there is too much danger of escalation from engaging Russia over a no-fly zone in Syria. Furthermore, Turkey's idea of settling several million refugees in the no-fly zone inside Syria is silly: instead of spending heaps of money to create new cities, the money should be spent on rebuilding Homs and Aleppo.

Back on 24 November 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian airplane over Syria. In response, Russia began economic sanctions on Turkey. Then on 9 December, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov began publicly asking: *Why* is Turkey bombing Kurds, when the Kurds are the most effective fighters against ISIL? And *why* is Turkey *not* bombing ISIL? [RIA-Novosti](#); [Rudaw](#); [Russia Today](#). These are good questions. The U.S. Government should also be asking the same questions. But the U.S. Government does *not* criticize Turkey, probably because the USA is delighted that the Turks finally allowed the U.S.-led Coalition to use the airbase at Incirlik in Turkey for anti-ISIL missions.

Dec 2015: sealing Turkish/Syrian border

On 1 December 2015, Obama met with Erdogan in Paris. Obama told Erdogan to seal the border with Syria, to prevent foreign fighters and supplies to ISIL, and to stop sales of oil by ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Today's Zaman](#).

On 9 December 2015, [Reuters](#) reports that Brett McGurk, the U.S. Envoy to the Anti-ISIL Coalition, said that sealing the border between Turkey and Syria was his priority.

In July 2015, Erdogan said the Kurds were a bigger threat to Turkey than ISIL. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [July 2015](#), in the section on "We need to support the Kurds.") My essay for July 2015 also mentions that the Turkish government may have supplied weapons to ISIL in January 2014. The Turks *may* hope that ISIL will defeat the Kurds. *If* the Turkey-Syria border were sealed, then supplies for ISIL could no longer enter Syria, which apparently would make the Turkish government unhappy.

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.

My essay for [November 2015](#) explains that 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.

On 16 December, Zeina Karam, the Associated Press bureau chief in Beirut, wrote:

Weeks of Russian airstrikes in Syria appear to have restored enough momentum to the government side to convince President Bashar Assad's foes and the world community that even if he doesn't win the war he cannot quickly be removed by force. That realization, combined with the growing sense that the world's No. 1 priority is the destruction of the Islamic State group, has led many to acknowledge that however unpalatable his conduct of the war, Assad will have to be tolerated for at least some

time further.

Zeina Karam, "Russian airstrikes restore Syrian military balance of power," [Associated Press](#), 17:10 EST, 16 Dec 2015.

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 31 December 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.

It appears that the [Vienna](#) meetings may have made obsolete de Mistura's working groups, by pushing the opposition and Assad into negotiations that are scheduled to begin in January 2016. See the 24 November news story from the [U.N.](#).

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.

Meeting of Syrian opposition in Saudi Arabia herding cats is futile

On 6 December, the Saudi official press agency issued a statement about the three-day meeting of Syrian opposition parties, to develop a unified position amongst the fragmented opposition.

A Foreign Ministry official source said that on the basis of the kingdom's support for solving the Syrian crisis politically, and based on the statement issued by the 'Vienna 2' conference of the international community to support Syria, which was held on November 14, 2015, and which called for mobilizing the largest segment of the Syrian opposition to unite their ranks, choose their representatives in the negotiations and determine their negotiating positions in order to begin the process of transition of power in accordance with the statement of 'Geneva 1' 2012,

And in response to the request by the majority of the members of the 'Vienna 2' group from the kingdom to host a conference of the Syrian opposition, as well as the desire of the Syrian opposition of various segments,

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia invited all Syrian moderate opposition segments of various categories, currents and ethnic, sectarian and political spectra inside and outside Syria to participate in an expanded meeting of the Syrian opposition in the capital Riyadh during the period 8-10 December 2015.

The invitations were sent based on consultation with most partners of the international influential parties and the United Nations' envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura.

The source concluded his statement saying that the kingdom will provide all possible facilities to enable the Syrian opposition to conduct negotiations among themselves in an independent manner and come up with a unified position in accordance with the principles agreed upon in the 'Geneva 1' statement.

"Foreign Ministry: kingdom invited all Syrian moderate opposition segments to participate in expanded meeting in Riyadh," Saudi Press Agency, 19:31 GMT, 6 Dec 2015. (Website does *not* allow links to news articles.)

On the night of 8 December, I looked at the websites of the Saudi Press Agency and *Arab News*, but I found nothing about the meeting. However, Reuters posted some news:

Syria's rebel and opposition groups are trying to forge a common stance over negotiations to end the civil war but the absence of some prominent activists and a main Kurdish force from their meeting in Riyadh shows that unity remains elusive.

Saudi Arabia, a strong supporter of rebels fighting for four years to topple President Bashar al-Assad, is hosting the opposition this week in the most ambitious attempt yet to find an agreed platform ahead of planned international peace talks.

Bringing the fragmented opposition together is seen by its backers as a crucial step to end a civil war....

....

At a Riyadh hotel where the opposition meeting will start on Wednesday [9 Dec], security was stepped up and journalists were ejected as fighters and opposition leaders gathered. Special forces soldiers with body armour and assault rifles manned checkpoints.

An initial list of 65 invitees to the Riyadh talks has grown substantially, but critics say it still falls short of a fully inclusive meeting.

The Kurdish administration that runs swathes of north Syria was not invited. Rebels in western Syria do not trust the main Kurdish militia, the YPG, because they say it cooperates with Damascus rather than fighting it.

....

"It is not all-encompassing. It is not the consolidated, overall opposition platform," a Western diplomat following Syria said of the Saudi meeting. "I do not expect Riyadh to be a constructive step ... The whole thing has been very acrimonious, and it looks like a Saudi-Turkish wish-list."

....

Participants invited to the Riyadh opposition meeting include Islamist factions Islam Army and Ahrar al-Sham, a group whose founders had links to al Qaeda. Ahrar al-Sham fights alongside the Nusra Front, al Qaeda's Syrian wing, while espousing a nationalist agenda.

A dozen rebel groups who fight under the banner of the Free Syrian Army are also due to attend, including groups vetted by the United States that have received foreign military aid.

Angus McDowall, "Syria's fractured opposition seeks elusive unity against Assad," [Reuters](#), 16:03 GMT, 8 Dec 2015.

On the night of 9 December, I again looked at the website of the Saudi Press Agency, but I found nothing about the meeting. The fact that neither shootings, stabbings, nor suicide bombings were reported gives some hope. Reuters posted some news:

Syria's fragmented opposition and rebel groups sought common ground on Wednesday [9 Dec] ahead of planned negotiations to end a conflict which has devastated the country and drawn forces from Cold War and Middle East rivals into ever deeper combat operations.

....

The powerful Kurdish YPG is among several groups excluded from the talks and those there are deeply divided over central issues like how to manage a transition from Assad and the role Islam should play in Syria.

But two delegates found solace in what they described as a lack of any major rupture so far among those present.

....

While most agree on a call for Assad to go, despite signs that some Western backers have softened their demands after recognising that military force has failed to topple the president, rifts in opposition ranks are still clear.

....

Ahrar al-Sham [the Islamist insurgent group, founded by militants with al Qaeda links] said the Riyadh meeting, which opened at a luxury hotel amid high security, must stand by demands including "the complete cleansing of the Russian-Iranian occupation of Syrian land, and the sectarian militias which support it".

Angus McDowall, "Syrian opposition seeks to close ranks as army gains on ground," [Reuters](#), 20:48 GMT, 9 Dec 2015.

On 10 December, at the end of the second day of the conference, Ahrar al-Sham walked out of the conference. Reuters reported:

The powerful Islamist insurgent group Ahrar al-Sham said on Thursday [10 Dec] it was quitting a Saudi-hosted opposition meeting on Syria because the role of "revolutionary groups" had not been given proper weight.

In a statement posted on social media it objected to the "main role" given to the internal political opposition group, the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (NCB).

It also criticised the conference for failing to "confirm the Muslim identity of our people."

Sylvia Westall, "Syria armed group Ahrar al-Sham quits Riyadh conference," [Reuters](#), 15:38 GMT, 10 Dec 2015.

The [Associated Press](#) also reported the withdrawal of Ahrar al-Sham. The AP described al-Sham as "a Saudi-backed ultraconservative group whose founders are linked to al-Qaida".

On 10 December, the Saudi Press Agency reported the final agreement of the conference:

The Syrian revolutionary forces and the opposition expressed their commitment to the Syrian territory's unity and their faith in the Syrian civil state and sovereignty over all Syrian territory on the basis of the principle of administrative decentralization.

This came in a statement issued by the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces today after the meeting in Riyadh.

[¶1] In a response to an invitation from the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces held an expanded meeting in Riyadh, on Safar 27-28, 1437, December 9-10, 2015, men and women

who participated in the meeting represent the armed factions, the spectrum of the Syrian opposition at home and abroad and belong to all of Syrian society components of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Assyrians, Syrians, Circassians, Armenians and others, in order to unite, and access to a shared vision about a negotiated political solution to the Syrian issue based on the 'Statement of Geneva 1', and the relevant international resolutions, and without prejudice to the principles and fundamentals of the Syrian revolution.

[¶2] The participants discussed issues on the agenda in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and a sense of deep historical responsibility toward the Syrian people and exchanged views on crucial issues facing Syria, and briefed on the relevant documents, including the statement issued by the International Group meeting to support Syria in Vienna, on November 14, 2015.

[¶3] They expressed their adherence to the Syrian territory unity, and their believing in a civil state of Syria and sovereignty over all Syrian territories on the basis of the principle of administrative decentralization.

[¶4] The participants also expressed their commitment to Democratic mechanisms through a pluralistic system representing all components of Syrian people without discrimination or exclusion on the basis of religion, sectarian or ethnic, and based on the principles of citizenship, human rights, transparency, accountability and the rule of law for everyone.

[¶5] The conferees pledged to work on preserving the Syrian state institutions, with the necessity of restructuring and the formation of the security and military institutions.

[¶6] They assured that they refuse terrorism in all its forms.

[¶7] The participants reject existence of all foreign fighters, militias and armed groups in Syria.

[¶8] They stressed that a solution of the Syrian crisis is a political primarily due to international resolutions with need to provide international guarantees.

[¶9] The participants agreed that the aim of political settlement is to establish a state based on principle of citizenship with no role of Basher Al-Assad in any political arrangements in the future.

[¶10] They stressed their readiness to enter into negotiations with representatives of the Syrian regime in accordance the statement of Geneva and the relevant international resolutions.

[¶11] The participants agreed to form a team of negotiations with the representatives of the regime.

[¶12] The participants called upon the United Nations and the international community to force the Syrian regime implementing procedures for confirming goodwill before starting the negotiating process.

[¶13] The participants stressed their adherence to the application of the transition provisions in Syria in accordance with 'Geneva 1', especially the special item regarding establishment of a transitional body provision with all executive powers.

[¶14] The participants expressed their desire to implement a cease-fire.

[¶15] The participants stressed that Basher Al-Assad and all his supporters are to leave the power with beginning of the transitional period.

[¶16] The participants expressed their acceptance and support for the role of the United Nations and the international community to supervise the cease-fire, disarmament, peacekeeping, distribution of humanitarian aid, and coordination of reconstruction efforts in Syria.

[¶17] At the end of the meeting, the participants agree on formation of a supreme body of the negotiations from the Syrian opposition and revolution forces in Riyadh. Its mission is to choose tasks of a negotiating delegation.

"Syrian revolution and opposition forces express their commitment to the Syrian unity," Saudi Press Agency, stories 48-50, 18:01 GMT, 10 Dec 2015. [Paragraph numbers added by Standler.]

A different translation into English is provided by the [French](#) Foreign Ministry.

I have two comments on this agreement:

1. Paragraph 12 demands the United Nations or the international community force Assad to "confirm goodwill" (i.e., confidence-building measures?) *before* the opposition will begin negotiations. I interpret that to mean the opposition refuses to negotiate, but does not honestly declare that refusal, so they insist on an impossible demand as a precondition.
2. Paragraphs 9 and 15 undemocratically remove Assad from power, which is a non-starter for the Syrian government, Russia, and Iran. Note also the opposition delegates *declared* — without any vote by the citizens of Syria — that the people reject Assad. Furthermore, demanding the removal of Assad gets in the way of more important issues, such as ceasefires, delivery of humanitarian aid, and rebuilding Syria.

Most of the substance of these 17 paragraphs seems to have been copied from numerous previous documents, so there is little that is genuinely new here. My comment is that, if this is the best the opposition can do, the Syrian civil war will continue for a *long* time.

Note that the Syrian opposition has failed during a five-year civil war to depose Assad. The moderate opposition, Islamic jihadists, Nusra Front, and ISIL have successfully destroyed

much of Syria, set the Syrian economy back at least a half-Century, and killed more than 250,000 people. Now the moderate opposition arrogantly wants to *demand* what it failed to achieve in civil war.

At 14:01 GMT on 10 December, [Reuters](#) reports that the conference in Riyadh agreed to create a 25-member "supreme council" to select delegates for negotiations with Assad's government, which are scheduled to begin in January 2016. The 25-member group will be comprised of:

- 6 members of Syrian National Coalition,
- 6 rebel fighters,
- 5 members of the Damascus-based National Coordination Committee, and
- 8 independent people.

Reuters reports that one delegate in Riyadh said "'Only God knows' if delegates could agree on names."

Eight hours later (22:04 GMT), [Reuters](#) reported that the Supreme Council had 32 members, but did not mention the composition of the Supreme Council. On 11 December, [Middle East Eye](#) reported 33 members, comprised of:

- "11 members from Syria's armed rebel groups,
- 9 from the Syrian National Coalition — including its leader Khalid Khoja,
- 8 independents, and
- 5 from the National Co-ordination Body."

At a time when there were ten fighters on the Supreme Council, Charles Lister [Tweeted](#) that 8 of them were from the Free Syrian Army, one was from Ahrar al-Sham, and one was from Jaish al-Islam. Note that Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam are both jihadist organizations that want to impose a Sunni Islamic government in Syria.

At 21:55 GMT on 11 December, [Reuters](#) reported that the number of members from Syria's internal opposition had increased from 5 to 6, making a total of 34 members.

Why has the number of members of the supreme council increased from 25, to 32, to 33, and then to 34? On 8 December, [The Guardian](#) reported one delegate said: "Every Syrian worth their salt wants to be on that committee because they think it's a stepping stone to becoming a minister in a national unity government."

At 14:15 GMT on 11 December, [Middle East Eye](#) reports:

A 33-member body held talks in Riyadh on Friday [11 Dec], the day after the conclusion of a landmark conference in the Saudi capital that brought together a broad swathe of the fractured Syrian opposition for the first time since the conflict began.

....

Charles Lister, a fellow at the Brookings Institute Doha, reported sources in Riyadh as saying that the body had been expanded to 33 after an extra seat was added for the

armed opposition, leaving them with a third of the total votes.

According to Lister, the armed opposition have set out several preconditions for meeting Assad representatives, including an immediate end to bombardments targeting civilian areas ahead of a six-week negotiation period leading to Assad's departure.

[*Middle East Eye* then has a graphic image of the following [Tweet](#) by Lister:]

Key Opposition Demand: Assad departure after a 6-week negotiation period, thereby starting the transitional period.

Pre-Negotiations Confidence Building Measures:

- Cessation of all bombardment of civilian areas, including with barrel bombs
- Cessation of all sieges & opening of humanitarian access to those in need
- Immediate cessation of acts inducing civilian forced displacement
- The return of refugees to Syrian territories

The US secretary of state, John Kerry, [said](#) of the announcement: "There are some questions and obviously a couple of, in our judgement, kinks to be worked out." "Syria rebels agree talks with government — but demand Assad's removal," [Middle East Eye](#), 14:15 GMT, 11 Dec 2015. [Two links added by Standler.]

My comment is that these preconditions/demands of the Syrian opposition scuttled peace negotiations with the Syrian government, more than three weeks *before* the negotiations began. The Syrian National Coalition did the same thing in January 2014 — two years ago — in Geneva, making those negotiations fruitless. The precondition of returning refugees to Syria is currently impractical, as there are more than four million refugees and many homes in Syria have been destroyed by five years of war.

On 11-13 December 2015, I repeatedly searched Google News, Reuters, the Associated Press, Al-Arabiya, and other sources for news about the peace negotiations that are scheduled for January 2016, but journalists are ignoring how the Syrian opposition has scuttled those negotiations.

Approximately simultaneously with the opposition's preconditions, on 11 December Assad gave an interview to Spanish journalists in which Assad said he would *not* negotiate with armed groups. [SANA](#) (text of interview); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Assad's position could be overcome by having de Mistura arrange for a ceasefire by moderate rebels. Any insurgents who continue to shoot would be deemed a terrorist, and hit by airstrikes by Syria and/or Russia.

On 17 December, the Supreme Council — now translated as "Higher Authority for Negotiations" — elected former Syrian prime minister Riad Hijab as "coordinator" to lead the negotiations with Assad's government. [Reuters](#).

On 18 December, Hijab publicly demanded that Assad resign at the beginning of negotiations: "We are going into negotiations on this principle, we are not entering talks (based on) anything else. There will be no concession." [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). Hijab claims the resignation of Assad is required in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012, but an actual reading of that document shows it is silent on Assad. In fact, on the day of the Geneva negotiations, there was already disagreement between Russia and the USA over the fate of Assad, as explained in my [review](#). Aside from Hijab's fallacious reading of the Geneva Communiqué, Hijab's demand will kill negotiations with Assad's government.

On 18 December, the Saudi Press Agency issued the following news article:

The high authority for the negotiations of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition forces announced today formation a negotiating delegation and specialized committees on legal issues, international relations and support.

This came in a press conference held in Riyadh today [18 Dec] to discuss negotiating standards during the next phase.

General Coordinator of the body[,] Reyad Hijab[,] stressed that the opposition announced formation of negotiating structures and its willingness to cooperate with the international community to complete the stage of a political solution with no role of Bashar Al-Assad at all, confirming that the confidence-building measures will be taken in order to negotiate and find a political settlement in Syria.

'We discussed organizational issues concerning the work of the body. We approved internal regulations organizing the work and its mechanism in the next phase. We organize the process of election of the general coordinator and formation of specialized committees in the legal issues, international relations, support and negotiation as well as the media, financial and administrative committees,' he added, highlighting a strategy to negotiate during the next phase.

The general coordinator said that a peaceful solution is the first choice to achieve the goals of the Syrian revolution, a reference of 'Geneva 1' and UN Security Council Resolution No. 2118 which mean formation of a transitional rule body with full powers.

'There are goodwill and confidence-building measures should be adhered to by a partner in a political settlement which include releasing the detained people, including women and children, lifting the siege on cities and towns that suffer hunger, oppression and bombardment in various parts of Syria and entering of the humanitarian aid,' he added.

He pointed out that the Syrian opposition sent a letter to Special Envoy of the United Nations to Syria Staffan de Mistura regarding the negotiation procedures and the number of the negotiating delegation for the negotiating process. ' We have received a message from the UN envoy regarding that,' he added.

'The opposition will enter into a negotiation process based on principles of 'Geneva 1', and UN Security Council resolutions. There is a resolution of the General Assembly of

the United Nations No. (262/67) confirming the transitional phase without Bashar Al-Assad. We will enter into negotiations based on this principle. We will not abandon of the goals of the revolution and the international legitimacy resolutions as well as trial of Bashar Al-Assad,' Reyad Hijab said.

He stressed that the opposition is committed to the goals of the revolution and international resolutions, 'the negotiating process is going in parallel with the work of the resistance on the ground,' he added, pointing out that the higher body of the negotiations does not want a long negotiating period, not exceeding six weeks.

The general coordinator expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Crown Prince, the Deputy Crown Prince, the government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Foreign Ministry for their great efforts during the Syrian opposition's conference held in Riyadh and the meetings of the higher body for negotiations.

"Syrian Opposition Concludes Its Meeting in Riyadh with Naming Negotiating Delegation," Saudi Press Agency, stories 23-26, 14:58 to 16:13 GMT, 18 Dec 2015.

Hijab refers to a Resolution of General Assembly of the United Nations that allegedly "confirming the transitional phase without Bashar Al-Assad." However, Resolutions of the General Assembly are *nonbinding*. Further, putting Assad on trial is guaranteed to discourage Assad from negotiating with Hijab's opposition.

Let us be clear. The insurgents have fought a civil war for nearly five years, but failed to oust Assad. At best the insurgents can claim a stalemate, although the three months of Russian airstrikes on the rebels have weakened the rebels. But now, the opposition is *demanding* what they failed to achieve with their civil war. Note that the international community (e.g., ISSG meetings in next section of this essay) is demanding that the insurgents stop fighting — but this is *not* a victory by rebels.

On 28 December, Lavrov said the Syrian opposition had *not* yet selected their team of negotiators. [Reuters](#). Note that the U.S. and Russian governments have been proposing negotiations since 7 May 2013 — 31 months ago. And the opposition is still *not* ready to negotiate, because of their fragmentation and disorganization. It should be obvious that the insurgents are incompetent to lead a government of Syria.

ISSG Meetings

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. See my essay for [October 2015](#).

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 16 December, Ban Ki-moon reiterated what he said on 31 October: “It is unacceptable that the whole Syrian crisis and the solution to the crisis has to be dependent on the fate of one man.” [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On 14 November, there was a second big meeting in Vienna, as chronicled in my essay for [November 2015](#). The Arab League joined the meeting in November. The participants are now called the "International Syrian Support Group" (ISSG).

Security Council Report provides some insight into what is happening behind the scenes:

The following week [after the 30 Oct meeting in Vienna], the P3 [i.e., USA, UK, France] drafted a press statement welcoming the Vienna talks. However, it seems Russia had a strong preference to include language in the draft that would “endorse” the Joint Statement [of 30 Oct]. The P3 did not want to “endorse” the Joint Statement and believed that it was important to keep the focus on the Geneva Communiqué [of June 2012] as the guiding framework for a political transition in Syria. In the end, no press statement was issued.

....

... de Mistura will be working on the challenging task of forging a unified delegation out of disparate Syrian opposition groups aligned with various international backers. He will have the delicate task of balancing

- Turkey’s preference for the opposition in exile, the Syrian National Coalition;
- Egypt’s preference for the opposition groups that have been meeting in Cairo which do not include the Muslim Brotherhood;
- Russia’s preference for the Moscow group of “regime-approved” opposition; and
- the results of the Syrian opposition conference slated for mid-December in Saudi Arabia.

"December 2015 Monthly Forecast for Syria," [SCR](#), 25 Nov 2015. [Indented list added by Standler.]

My essay for November 2015 called John Kerry delusional for saying on 17 Nov: "We're weeks away, conceivably, from the possibility of a big transition for Syria". On 3 December, Kerry was in dreamland again when he said: "Just imagine how quickly this scourge [i.e.,

ISIL] could be eliminated — in a matter of literally months — " after a ceasefire between the Syrian government and the moderate rebels enables both the government and rebels to concentrate on fighting against ISIL. [State Dept](#); [Associated Press](#) (ISIL "eliminated in a matter of months"). Credible military observers say the fight against ISIL will take years, perhaps tens of years. There are at least three reasons why a ceasefire and cooperative effort in fighting against ISIL is unlikely in the foreseeable future:

1. Getting *all* of the moderate rebels to stop fighting against Assad's army would be a monumental achievement. The original and principal function of the moderate rebels is to defeat Assad.
2. Getting the Russians to stop bombing the moderate rebels seems very unlikely (although the Russians *say* they are only bombing terrorists like ISIL and Nusra).
3. Getting Turkey to stop attacking Kurds in Syria and Iraq seems unlikely given Erdogan's resumption of the civil war against the Kurds.

Although all of these parties — moderate rebels, Assad, Russia, Kurds, Turkey — have a common enemy in ISIL and Nusra Front, each of these parties have profound differences with at least one other party, which makes cooperation unlikely. For example, Turkey has consistently given fighting against Kurds a higher priority than fighting against ISIL.

On 1 December, Kerry proposed the next ISSG meeting be in New York City on 18 December. But the Russians objected, noting a lack of progress in implementing the decisions of the second Vienna conference. For example, Jordan has *not* produced a list of terrorist groups. And then the opposition's meeting in Saudi Arabia on 10-11 December (see previous section of this essay) produced preconditions and demands that make a peace conference *less likely*, as well as included two Islamist groups that are objectionable to Assad and Russia. [NY Times](#)(1 Dec); [Associated Press](#)(3 Dec); [TASS](#)(8 Dec); [Reuters](#)(9 Dec); [RIA-Novosti](#)(11 Dec). Kerry was in Moscow on 15 December to try reach an agreement for the 18 Dec meeting in New York City.

On 15 December, Kerry announced that the U.S. Government would accept the Russian position that the future of Assad should be decided by elections in Syria. The Associated Press reported:

"The United States and our partners are not seeking so-called regime change," Kerry told reporters in the Russian capital after meeting President Vladimir Putin. A major international conference on Syria would take place later this week in New York, Kerry announced.

....

But after a day of discussions with Assad's key international backer, Kerry said the focus now is "not on our differences about what can or cannot be done immediately about Assad." Rather, it is on facilitating a peace process in which "Syrians will be making decisions for the future of Syria."

....

However, [Kerry] described the Syrian opposition's demand that Assad must leave as soon as peace talks begin as a "nonstarting position, obviously."

Matthew Lee & Bradley Klapper, "Assad can stay, for now: Kerry accepts Russian stance," [Associated Press](#), 18:01 EST, 15 Dec 2015.

Later, Reuters did *not* mention Kerry's announcement about Assad, but Reuters did report that the conference in New York City will occur on 18 December:

... [Kerry] said the talks [in New York City] would definitely take place after the two countries agreed to try to accelerate the peace process and a potential political transition.

"We will meet this Friday, Dec. 18, in New York with the International Syrian Support Group and then ... we will pass a U.N. resolution regarding ... the next steps with respect to negotiations and hopefully a ceasefire," said Kerry.

He said the two sides had found some common ground, while agreeing to put their differences to one side for now.

Lesley Wroughton & Jack Stubbs, "Russia, U.S. clear way for Syria meeting after Kerry Moscow talks," [Reuters](#), 21:02 EST, 15 Dec 2015.

The U.S. State Department posted a transcript of Kerry's press conference in Moscow, after meeting with Lavrov for three hours. Here is what Kerry said about Assad and about the opposition statement in Saudi Arabia on 10 December.

KERRY: As I emphasized today, the United States and our partners are not seeking so-called "regime change," as it is known in Syria. What we have said is that we don't believe that Assad himself has the ability to be able to lead the future Syria, but we didn't — we focused today not on our differences about what can or can't be done immediately about Assad; we focused on a process — on the political process whereby Syrians will be making decisions for the future of Syria. But we do believe that nobody should be forced to choose between a dictator and being plagued by terrorists. Our challenge remains creating the conditions on which an alternative can emerge.

So while we don't see eye to eye on every single aspect of Syria, we certainly agreed today — and President Putin agreed — that we see Syria fundamentally very similarly. We want the same outcomes. We see the same dangers. We understand the same challenges. And we all believe that a united, nonsectarian Syria represents the future, and we also agreed that it is a future without Daesh and we're committed to try to continue to destroy Daesh.

....

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Kerry, you both talked about working together to find common ground. Did you feel today that there was any specific progress on narrowing the gaps on some of the most contentious issues, such as the terrorist blacklist, the composition of the opposition? And I know you decided to defer differences over Mr. Assad for now, but can you just respond to the decision by the opposition last week,

which was that he should go right at the start of a political transition process? Is that something you think that can allow negotiations to even begin on that basis?

[Question for Lavrov deleted here.]

SECRETARY KERRY: Yes, we did reach some common ground today and agreement with respect to the complexity of this issue of terrorist groups. But it's not appropriate for me to announce anything that we may have agreed to together on a bilateral basis. Because as Sergey just said, we really need to have the whole group take part in that discussion. And so it's appropriate for everybody to contribute to whatever decisions and outcomes there are. But we certainly narrowed down our own thinking about the complexity of it and how one can manage that. We obviously agree that ISIL and — ISIL/Daesh and al-Nusrah are absolutely outside of this process no matter what. Everybody has agreed to that; that's unanimous. And beyond that, we look forward to the discussion in New York on Friday.

With respect to the announcement or proclamations of the people who came together in Riyadh, that is not the position of the International Syria Support Group. It is not the basis of the Geneva communique; it is not the basis of the UN resolution. And we are assured by the members of the International Syria Support Group who were attending that meeting and helping with that meeting and hosting that meeting that that is not, in fact, the starting position, because it's a non-starting position, obviously. So for those people who are going to participate, they understand we are participating under the Geneva communique, and the transition process is geared to try to be taking effect within about a six-month period. That's the current target that has been approved by the International Syria Support Group.

"Press Availability With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov," [State Dept](#), 15 Dec 2015.

In my opinion, the Associated Press report of the announcement by Kerry is a defeat for the undemocratic foreign meddlers who arrogantly attempted to eject Assad.

Early on the morning of 18 December, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the foreign minister of Iran said there "seems to be no agreement" on two important issues: (1) the list of moderate rebels who would attend peace negotiations, and (2) the list of terrorist organizations who would be excluded from peace negotiations.

The ISSG meeting in New York City on 18 December has three major items on the agenda:

1. decide which groups in Syria are terrorists,
2. whether the United Nations Security Council will recognize the negotiating team appointed by the Supreme Council — now translated as "Higher Authority for Negotiations" — that met in Saudi Arabia on 9-11 Dec, and
3. decide whether President Bashar al-Assad will be permitted to be a candidate in future Syrian elections.

After the ISSG meeting in New York City, the United Nations Security Council is scheduled at 15:00 EST to meet and consider a Resolution endorsing the decisions agreed at the three ISSG meetings. [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).

At the ISSG meeting at the Palace Hotel in New York City, the following occurred on the three major agenda items:

1. Jordan collected lists submitted by different nations. Jordan then put 160 insurgent groups on the list of terrorists. ([Middle East Eye](#)) Jordan's list includes both Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham, each of whom has one member amongst the 34 members of the Supreme Council formed in Saudi Arabia on 11 December. Apparently, Jordan did an incompetent job of forming a consensus on the list.
2. It is *not* clear what happened at the meeting about recognizing the opposition's negotiating team.
3. The participants at the meeting were again unable to decide the future of Assad. On one hand, Assad, Russia, Iran, and the U.N. Secretary General (Ban) want the future ruler of Syria to be chosen in elections. On the other hand, the rebels, and various nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the USA, and Western Europe) all want Assad to be replaced at the beginning of the so-called transitional government. These intransigent and irreconcilable positions have seen little change during the past three years — since the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012.

The timetable was clarified. The negotiations begin in late January 2016. A transitional government is formed before the end of July 2016 (6 months of negotiations). Elections are held no later than Jan 2018 (18 months after transitional government begins).

No communiqué was issued for the ISSG meeting on 18 December. However, the decisions taken in the ISSG meetings were endorsed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, which is described [below](#).

On 23 December 2015, the Syrian government approved of U.N. Resolutions 2253 and 2254. [Reuters](#); [SANA](#). On 24 December, the Syrian foreign minister announced that "Syria is ready to participate in the inter-Syrian dialogue to be held in Geneva without foreign interference". [SANA](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 26 December, the [United Nations](#); [Reuters](#) and [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP) reported that de Mistura would convene negotiations between Assad's government and the insurgents on 25 Jan 2016. My comment is delusional diplomats believe that by the end of January 2016, there will be a ceasefire throughout all of Syria, Assad will resign, ISIL will apologize and leave Syria, refugees will return to fresh new buildings that magically appear, flowers will bloom in winter, and birds will sing. *<sarcastic smirk>* I predict that in February 2016 people will realize the operative principle is the German saying "von nichts, kommt nichts" (out of nothing, nothing comes). Note also that the start date for the negotiations has already slipped more than three weeks from the 1 Jan target date in the 14 Nov Vienna statement.

Syrian National Coalition fading?

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

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

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

On 11 December 2015, [Reuters](#) tersely characterized the SNC as "the main Western-backed political opposition, although it has only had tenuous links with rebels on the ground and is seen as out of touch with the general population."

On 17 December, [Reuters](#) reported: "The Turkish-based political opposition [SNC] that led the last round of failed peace talks two years ago was widely criticised as out of touch with forces on the ground."

peace in Homs

My essay for [May 2014](#) chronicled the withdrawal of rebels and jihadists from Homs, after negotiations were concluded on 2 May 2014. But, rebels in the suburb of Waer did *not* agree with the negotiations for the remainder of Homs. On 23 May 2014, it was anticipated that the rebels in Waer would agree someone soon.

Agreement in Waer was finally reached on 1 December 2015, 18 months after the withdrawal from the old city of Homs. The Associated Press reports that the most prominent insurgents in Waer were "the Nusra Front, as well as the powerful ultraconservative Ahrar al-Sham." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The insurgents withdrew from Waer on 9 December 2015. [Reuters](#) says the insurgents traveled to the city of Idlib, north of Homs. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Homs, the third-largest city in Syria, is now completely under control of Assad's government.

Back in February 2014, there were six locally negotiated surrenders inside Syria, which hinted at how the Syrian civil war might end. (See my essay for [February 2014](#).) But then the surrenders stopped, without any explanation by journalists. The December 2015 surrender in Homs may restart the process of local ceasefires followed by surrenders. [Reuters](#).

On 12 December, ISIL detonated two bombs near a hospital in Homs, killing 16 people. An Islamic car bomb exploded first, and then — as rescuers arrived — a bomb in a propane gas bottle exploded. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#). This reminds us that, in Syria, one is never far from a full-service ISIL terrorist.

On 28 December, a car bomb exploded in Homs. After rescuers arrived, a suicide bomber detonated. A total of at least 32 people were killed. [Reuters](#).

peace in four towns

The United Nations arranged a truce in four towns in Syria, which began on Monday, 28 December 2015:

1. Foua (a Shiite town),
2. Kafraya (a Shiite town),
3. Zabadani (a Sunni town), and
4. Madaya (a Sunni town)

The U.N. said a total of 338 people were evacuated from the two Shiite towns and 125 people were evacuated from the two Sunni towns. The two Shiite towns are near the border with Turkey, the two Sunni towns are near the border with Lebanon. The Shiite refugees were taken to Damascus, and the Sunni refugees to Turkey. After the insurgents departed, Assad's military took control of the four towns. [U.N. News](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); and later news from [Reuters](#).

This small step to a nationwide ceasefire in Syria was largely ignored by newspapers in the USA.

Sunni insurgents used artillery to shell the two Shiite towns on 29 Dec, violating the truce. [Reuters](#).

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2253

On 17 December, diplomats in the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2253, another meaningless Resolution about ISIL.

Resolution 2253 pretends to disrupt financing of ISIL by banning sales of oil, sales of antiquities, kidnap ransom payments, and other criminal activities. The problem is that nations *fail* to enforce laws banning sales of ISIL oil, etc. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

A copy of Resolution 2253, and other U.N. Resolutions, is available from the link at my webpage at rbs0.com.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254

The United States chairs the United Nations Security Council this month, so Kerry chaired a meeting on 18 December that considered a Resolution endorsing the negotiations agreed at the three Vienna meetings. Resolution 2254 passed unanimously. [U.N.](#); [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

A copy of Resolution 2254, and other U.N. Resolutions, is available from the link at my webpage at rbs0.com.

Journalists were trumpeting that Resolution 2254 means the United Nations is in control of the peace process in Syria. But that was never in doubt. The second United Nations Envoy, Brahimi, chaired the failed negotiations in Jan/Feb 2014. The third United Nations Envoy, de Mistura, has been planning Syrian working groups since 29 July 2015. Apparently, journalists are desperate to find some significance in Resolution 2254.

The 14 November Vienna ISSG meeting called for negotiations to begin on 1 January 2016. U.N. Resolution 2254 calls for negotiations to begin in "early January". But hours after Resolution 2254 passed, Kerry was already publicly saying that a start date of "Somewhere mid to late January is probably more reasonable [than 1 January]." Despite the delay, Kerry still believes: "... in January, we hope and expect to be at the table and be able to implement a full ceasefire. And that means all the barrel bombs would stop, all the bombing, all the shooting, all the attacks on either side." [State Dept](#); [Reuters](#).

At the U.N. Security Council meeting on 18 December, United Nations Secretary General said:

This morning, at a meeting, I urged the ISSG to apply the necessary pressure on the Syrian parties to immediately implement the following confidence-building measures:

1. First, stop the use of indiscriminate weapons against civilians, including barrel bombs, which have continued despite the Government's pledge to refrain from such assaults.
2. Second, allow unconditional and unimpeded access for aid convoys. Tens of thousands of people in besieged areas have been forced to live on grass and weeds. This is outrageous.
3. Third, halt attacks on medical and educational facilities, and lift all restrictions on medical and surgical supplies from humanitarian convoys.
4. Fourth, release all detainees. Reports indicate that prisoners face torture and atrocious conditions.

"New York, 18 December 2015 - Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council on the Situation in Syria [As delivered]," [U.N.](#), 18 Dec 2015.

How are the nations in the ISSG going "to apply the necessary pressure on the Syrian parties"? If these nations have "pressure" to apply, why was it not applied earlier? In my opinion, Ban's request is like the children's story about mice putting a bell on the cat.

Karen DeYoung, writing in the [Washington Post](#), tersely expressed the real problem: "... it remains unclear to what extent the will of the international community can be imposed on [Assad] or rebel forces."

Western Civilization (predominantly Christian) sees war as undesirable, although it may be necessary to stop some tyrant from invading nations. In contrast, the jihadists and Islamic terrorists in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq seem to *enjoy* fighting. This difference in religions may greatly complicate bringing long-term peace to Syria.

Note that the last paragraph of the preamble of Resolution 2254 — the paragraph just before paragraph Nr. 1 — says "noting in particular the usefulness of the meeting in Riyadh on 9-11 December 2015, whose outcomes contribute to the preparation of negotiations". But the Resolution does *not* accept the Riyadh delegation. Instead, the same paragraph says de Mistura will make the final determination of the opposition delegation: "looking forward to the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria finalizing efforts to this end".

In that context, note that two paragraphs earlier, Resolution 2254 says: "Urging all parties to the UN-facilitated political process to adhere to the principles identified by the ISSG, including commitments to Syria's ... non-sectarian character, ... [including commitments] to protecting the rights of all Syrians, regardless of ethnicity or religious denomination, and" Also in numbered paragraph 4, Resolution 2254 requires a transitional government in Syria that is "credible, inclusive and non-sectarian". I interpret this goal to mean that Islamists and/or jihadists should *not* be included in the opposition's negotiating team, because those jihadists want to establish a sectarian Sunni government in Syria. That means Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam should be excluded from the negotiating team. However, excluding these jihadists from negotiations might drive the jihadists into the arms of extremists (e.g., Nusra Front or ISIL).

If the ISSG truly wants a nonsectarian government in Syria, they should consider allowing Assad to continue as leader of Syria. Assad has been one of a very few leaders of nonsectarian governments in Arab nations.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2258

On 22 December, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2258 that demands that all parties in Syria allow humanitarian aid (e.g., food and medicine) to people in Syria. The new Resolution is a renewal of previous Resolutions 2165 and 2191, which expire on 10 Jan 2016. [U.N.](#); [Associated Press](#).

A copy of Resolution 2258, and other U.N. Resolutions, is available from the link at my webpage at [rbs0.com](#).

Beginning on 22 Feb 2014, Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191 demanded that Assad's government and the insurgents allow humanitarian aid to be delivered inside Syria. As chronicled in the U.N. Secretary General's monthly reports, *all* parties in Syria have violated the clear requirements of these Resolutions. There is *no* reason to believe that Resolution 2258 will be obeyed. There are two big problems: (1) both Assad's government and the insurgents (especially ISIL) are barbarians who have no respect for international law, and (2) there is *no* way for the United Nations to force the parties in Syria to obey U.N. Resolutions. Any sanctions applied during peace negotiations or the transitional government

would discourage affected parties from participating in those negotiations or transitional government — making the negotiations or government less successful. Any war crimes prosecution is in the distant future, too remote to affect current conduct.

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.

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.

Debacle in Iraq

Death Toll in Iraq

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

Atrocities in Iraq

Introduction

My previous [essays](#), beginning in June 2014, documented numerous atrocities by Islamic terrorists:

- ISIL executed hundreds of captured Shiite soldiers in Mosul and Tikrit during 11-14 June 2014.
- ISIL *crucified* eight rebels near Aleppo in Syria on 28 June 2014.
- ISIL threatened genocide of Yazidis in Iraq during August 2014 and 20-22 Oct 2014.
- an attack on a Sunni mosque in Iraq on 22 Aug 2014.
- ISIL executed captured Syrian soldiers in Raqqa, Syria in August 2014.

- Shiite militias in Iraq are murdering innocent Sunnis (reports: 14 Oct 2014, 26 Jan 2015).
- ISIL burned alive al-Kasasbeh, a pilot in the Jordanian Air Force, (see my essay for [Feb 2015](#)).
- ISIL in Libya beheaded 21 Christians on 15 Feb 2015.
- and — beginning with my essay for [Oct 2014](#) — I documented some of the car bombs in Iraq that killed large numbers of people, most commonly in or near Baghdad.

December 2015: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 4 December, the United Nations Mission in Iraq announced that 16 mass graves had been found near Sinjar. The UN asked the government of Iraq to investigate. [Associated Press](#);

On 9 December, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a Shiite mosque in Baghdad, killing 11 people. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 16 December, a group of 26 falconry hunters from Qatar were kidnapped from a hunting camp in Iraq. Two Iraqi government agents who were providing "protection" to the hunting party were briefly kidnapped, then released. [Associated Press](#); [Iraqi News](#). On 17 December, [Reuters](#) reports that nine of the kidnapped hunters escaped and fled into Kuwait. [Iraqi News](#) says the nine in Kuwait were servants of the kidnapped Qataris, and the nine were *not* kidnapped. On 25 December, [Reuters](#) reported that Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani called for the release of the Qatari hunters. Apparently, Shiite Muslims in Iraq do *not* know that kidnapping is wrong, so they need to be told to release the hunters. On 30 December, the United Nations Secretary General called Abadi on the telephone and "the Secretary-General also expressed his concern over the recent abduction of a group of Qatari citizens in Iraq, including children". [U.N. News](#); [UNAMI](#).

On 23 December, the [Associated Press](#) reported at least 15 civilians were killed in Iraq by a series of bombs, presumably by ISIL.

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.

No 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 31 December 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.

No 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 31 December 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.

December 2015

On 1 December, Liz Sly — the Beirut bureau chief of *The Washington Post* — wrote about how most Iraqis believe the U.S. Government conspires with ISIL, including supplying weapons and supplies to ISIL. [WashPost](#). This conspiracy theory is ridiculous and absurd, but most Iraqis believe it. It is true that ISIL has weapons and supplies from the USA, but those weapons and supplies were *stolen* from the Iraqi military bases when the Iraqi military fled from Mosul, Tikrit, and Ramadi. Therefore, the Iraqi military is to blame for any U.S. supplies that were acquired by ISIL.

Sly quotes Col. Warren as saying “The Iranians and the Iranian-backed Shiite militias are really pushing this line of propaganda, that the United States is supporting ISIL. It’s part of the Iranian propaganda machine.” In occasionally looking at news websites in Iran, I have seen a persistent Iranian propaganda campaign to blame ISIL on the USA, so I think it is likely that the Iraqis were influenced by Iranian propaganda.

Note that the current Shiite members of the Iraqi government would *not* have their positions if Saddam Hussein (a Sunni) were still in control of Iraq. The Shiites who currently control Iraq owe their positions to the U.S. removal of Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, the U.S. is seen as an invader, *not* a liberator. That may be the result of the total collapse of the Iraqi government when the U.S. entered Baghdad in April 2003, and the following anarchy.

The ridiculous belief by most Iraqis that the U.S. is supplying ISIL is a triumph of propaganda and wild conspiracy theories over rational thinking and established facts. The Iraqis may naturally trust the Iranians who share a common religion (Shiite Islam). Similarly,

the Iraqis may naturally distrust the U.S. who are predominantly Christians. Furthermore, the current government of Iran strongly opposes the USA, because the U.S. supported the previous Iranian government by the Shah of Iran.

On 18 October 2015, an arrest warrant was issued for the current Iraqi minister of trade. He disappeared. Because he failed to appear for work "for more than a month", on 2 December, Abadi sacked the trade minister. [Abadi](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

Iraq rejects U.S. proposal for U.S. combat troops in Iraq

On 1 December, U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, told the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee that the U.S. would send more "special operations forces" to Iraq, to engage ISIL in combat in both Iraq and Syria. The number of troops was *not* disclosed by Carter, but the [Associated Press](#) cites an anonymous government official as saying "the force could total up to a couple hundred troops, including the assault teams, aviation units and other support units." [Reuters](#) reports "the force may number around 200 troops including support personnel, with only several dozen likely to conduct operations." [Reuters](#) and the [Pentagon](#) quote Carter as saying the mission would be "to conduct raids, free hostages, gather intelligence and capture ISIL leaders". See also [Washington Post](#).

On 30 October 2015, the [Washington Post](#) collected eight instances of Obama saying in 2013 and 2014 that there would be *no* U.S. troops engaged in combat missions in Iraq. The 1 December announcement — and also the 30 Oct 2015 announcement of 50 U.S. troops in Syria — clearly violate those promises by Obama. My comment is that, because of concern about these special operations forces being the *beginning* of larger troop deployments, I am opposed to committing any U.S. troops in combat roles in either Syria or Iraq. My opinion might be different if Congress had passed and Obama had signed an Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) that clearly specified a maximum number of U.S. troops in combat roles in Iraq. But after more than a year of futile attempts, the U.S. Congress is unable to pass any AUMF.

The Iraqis quickly rejected the proposed U.S. force in Iraq. On 1 December, the Iraqi prime minister's office issued a [statement](#) that said "there is no need for foreign ground combat troops." See also [Reuters](#). My comment is that Abadi is presiding over an incompetent Iraqi army that lacks the capability that the proposed U.S. special operations force would have. Abadi is concerned with petty notions of the sovereignty of Iraq when ISIL has occupied 1/3 of Iraq since June 2014. ISIL clearly threatens (and burdens) Iraq more than a tiny U.S. special operations force.

[Reuters](#) quotes three Shiite militias in Iraq issued bellicose statements that promised to fight *against* any U.S. special operations forces in Iraq. See also [Rudaw](#). My comment is that the reaction of the Shiite militias may be the reason that the Iraqi prime minister rejected the proposed U.S. special operations forces. Nonetheless, if the U.S. is fighting against ISIL, and

the Iraqi Shiite militias will fight against the U.S., that must mean that the Shiite militia are helping ISIL.

On 2 December, Col. Warren — the Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman in Baghdad — said that the force would be "around 100", the majority of whom are support personnel. [Pentagon](#).

On 3 December, Abadi said "we will treat any foreign ground combat troops sent by an country as a hostile act". [Abadi](#); [Al-Arabiya](#) ("act of aggression"); [Reuters](#) ("act of aggression"). My comment is that the U.S. Government insists that it informed Abadi *before* announcing the small special operations force. Abadi apparently did not object until after the force was publicly announced and the Shiite militias objected.

On 4 December, [Reuters](#) reports that the U.S. Government will send a team to Baghdad "in coming weeks" to negotiate details of the U.S. special operations forces in Iraq. Reuters refers to Abadi as "Iraq's weakened leader" and notes the political power of Iraqi Shiite militia.

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](#). However, this program was quickly ignored by nearly everyone.

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 — and Islamic opinion leaders — consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government.

December 2015

On 2 December, two Islamic terrorists attacked a Christmas banquet in San Bernardino, California, killing 14 people. (See [below](#).) Four days later, Obama gave a speech, where he briefly mentioned the ideology of ISIL:

Third, we're working with friends and allies to stop ISIL's operations — to disrupt plots, cut off their financing, and prevent them from recruiting more fighters. Since the attacks in Paris, we've surged intelligence-sharing with our European allies. We're working with Turkey to seal its border with Syria. And we are cooperating with Muslim-majority countries — and with our Muslim communities here at home — to counter the vicious ideology that ISIL promotes online.

....

Here's what else we cannot do. We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam. That, too, is what groups like ISIL want. ISIL does not speak for Islam. They are thugs and killers, part of a cult of death, and they account for a tiny fraction of more than a billion Muslims around the world — including millions of patriotic Muslim Americans who reject their hateful ideology. Moreover, the vast majority of terrorist victims around the world are Muslim. If we're to succeed in defeating terrorism we must enlist Muslim communities as some of our strongest allies, rather than push them away through suspicion and hate.

That does not mean denying the fact that an extremist ideology has spread within some Muslim communities. This is a real problem that Muslims must confront, without excuse. Muslim leaders here and around the globe have to continue working with us to decisively and unequivocally reject the hateful ideology that groups like ISIL and al Qaeda promote; to speak out against not just acts of violence, but also those interpretations of Islam that are incompatible with the values of religious tolerance,

mutual respect, and human dignity.

But just as it is the responsibility of Muslims around the world to root out misguided ideas that lead to radicalization, it is the responsibility of all Americans — of every faith — to reject discrimination. It is our responsibility to reject religious tests on who we admit into this country. It's our responsibility to reject proposals that Muslim Americans should somehow be treated differently. Because when we travel down that road, we lose. That kind of divisiveness, that betrayal of our values plays into the hands of groups like ISIL. Muslim Americans are our friends and our neighbors, our co-workers, our sports heroes — and, yes, they are our men and women in uniform who are willing to die in defense of our country. We have to remember that.

Barack Hussein Obama, "Address to the Nation by the President," [White House](#), 20:01 EST, 6 Dec 2015.

My comment is — despite what Obama says — Muslim clerics and Muslim opinion leaders have done very little to counter the ideology of Islamic terrorism.

On 27 December, [Reuters](#) reported "Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Sunday [27 Dec] that Muslims must improve the image of their religion, which has been tarnished by the violence of hardline groups such as Islamic State." I looked at newsmedia in Iran to find more details, but at five different Iranian news websites, I mostly found vague calls for Islamic "unity" to defeat terrorism. See, e.g., [FARS](#) and [IRNA](#).

The Ahlul Bayt News Agency reported Rouhani's speech to the 29th International Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.

Addressing the 29th International Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran on Sunday [27 Dec], Rouhani said enemies and big powers are doing their best to portray Islam as a religion of violence, urging Muslims to take necessary steps to thwart all efforts aimed at depicting Islam as the religion of violence.

In his address, Hojat-ol-Islam Rouhani underlined the need for an end to violence and Takfiri extremism, stressing that the Muslim world should work to enhance cooperation and spread Islamic amicability.

He said violence cannot originate from Islamic text, adding that Takfiri extremism stems from narrow-mindedness and lack of moderation.

President Rouhani said that terrorism and extremism cannot be dealt with by bombs but through a change in discourse.

"Muslims Unity Vital in Battle against Extremism: President Rouhani," [ABNA](#), 27 Dec 2015.

On 28 Dec 2015, Reuters summarized:

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday [27 Dec] that Muslims must improve the image of their religion, which has been tarnished by the violence of hardline groups such as Islamic State.

"It is our greatest duty today to correct the image of Islam in world public opinion," Rouhani told a conference on Islamic unity in Tehran in a speech broadcast by state

television.

His remarks were rare for a leader of Iran, which considers itself an authority in the Islamic world and often blames the “enemies” of the religion for problems in the Middle East.

“Did we ever think that, instead of enemies, an albeit small group from within the Islamic world using the language of Islam, would present it as the religion of killing, violence, whips, extortion and injustice?” Rouhani said.

"Iran's Rouhani says it's up to Muslims to correct Islam's image," [Reuters FaithWorld blog](#), 28 Dec 2015.

Note that it is easy for Iran (a Shiite nation) to criticize Sunni extremists (e.g., Al-Qaeda and ISIL). Ironically, Iran is contributing to the violence in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Finally, it is Sunni nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar) that really need to condemn Islamic terrorism by Sunni extremists, but Rouhani has *zero* influence in Sunni nations. I conclude that this is another insignificant speech by a politician, although I agree with what Rouhani said about the need to correct the image of Islam.

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](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December, U.S. airstrikes killed al-Qaida leaders in Libya and Somalia. [Pentagon](#).
- In "late November" 2015, a U.S. airstrike in Iraq killed Abu Salah, the financial minister of ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 29 December 2015, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes had killed 10 senior ISIL leaders during 7-27 December. Some of the dead leaders were involved in the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 Nov. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 29 Dec; [Reuters](#) on 30 Dec.

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. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. 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 my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 Dec 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."

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 7 Dec 2015, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of Nov. 30, 2015, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on Aug. 8, 2014, is \$5.36 billion and the average daily cost is \$11 million for 480 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 16 Dec 2015.

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

Daily News About Iraq & Syria

ISIL kidnaps Christians

Assyrians on 23 February 2015

On 23-24 Feb, more than 220 Assyrian Christians were abducted by ISIL in Syria, as cited in my essay for [Feb 2015](#).

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

On 9 April, Fox News reported that ISIL was demanding payment of US\$100,000 per abducted Assyrian for their release, as cited in my essay for [April 2015](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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).

On 25 December, the Associated Press put a terse paragraph at the bottom of a long news story about another topic in Syria:

Also on Friday [25 Dec], the Stockholm-based Assyrian Human Rights Network announces that Islamic State militants released 25 more Assyrian Christian hostages that had been held captive in Syria for 10 months. The group said the release brings to 148 the number of Assyrian hostages that have been released so far.

Bassem Mroue, "Top Syrian rebel killed in airstrike near Damascus," [Associated Press](#), 23:43 EST, 25 Dec 2015.

Also on 25 December, the Assyrian International News Agency reported:

ISIS today released 25 Assyrians that it captured on February 23 when it attacked the 35 Assyrian villages on the Khabur river in the Hasaka province. ISIS captured 253 in the initial attack and drove 3,000 Assyrians from their villages. Most have not returned.

Two of the hostages are men, seven are women, and the rest are children between the

ages of 3 and 11. The hostages are in good health. They arrived in Tel Tamer in the morning.

....

The number of Assyrians from Khabur still being held is now 105. ISIS is also holding 185 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

"ISIS Release 25 Assyrian Hostages in Syria, Mostly Women and Children," [AINA](#), 12:23 GMT, 25 Dec 2015.

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.

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](#), [October 2015](#), and [November 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 begins 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]."
10. On 9 December, The [Washington Post](#) reported: "Speaking on Iraqi television Tuesday [8 Dec], Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi predicted that Ramadi would fall to pro-government forces 'in days.' 'Very soon, we will finish Ramadi,' he said."

As explained above, during May-November 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. During May-November, there were inconsistent reports of whether Shiite militias would be used to liberate Ramadi. In December, the Shiite militias were *not* 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.

2-20 December 2015: Ramadi

On 2 December, Col. Steve Warren — Operation Inherent Resolve Spokesman in Baghdad — gave a press briefing at the Pentagon.

COL. WARREN: So, I'm assuming the map is up, now. And I'll go through it. In Ramadi, which is star number one on your map, Iraqi Security Forces completed the isolation phase of the operation when they seized the Palestine Bridge on November 25th.

ISF are poised to begin the clearing phase in support of that. Yesterday alone, the coalition conducted 37 engagements and nine strikes that killed 47 ISIL fighters.

....

QUESTION: Colonel Warren, I wanted to go back to Ramadi for a moment. Help us understand what the hold up is in retaking Ramadi. You briefed us in the past about the — the difficulty of the dug-in defenses. You showed us the kind of breaching equipment, the tactics that they're teaching. Yesterday in his testimony, Secretary Carter seemed to indicate one big problem was the lack of Sunni fighters and he called on the Baghdad government to do more. Particular, I — I saw him — heard him emphasize, you know, recruit and — and pay these fighters.

What is the hold up? What — what's the factor that's preventing Ramadi from being retaken in a timely fashion?

COL. WARREN: Well, first of all, a little context. You know, when — when the American military took Ramadi, it was a six-month long process, six months. So Ramadi's not an easy city to take. It is a difficult problem and — and I would submit to you that ISIL defenses inside of Ramadi now are more difficult than what we, the United States Army, faced years ago. So it's a — it's a tough nut to crack, so that's — that's thing one.

Thing two, you have to remember, when this all started, the — the — much of the Iraqi security forces had — had been shattered, so they had — had to have been rebuilt. We spent the last year training, advising and equipping the Iraqi security forces. These things take time. You don't train an army over night, it takes months to train it, and then there's the process of equipping it. So that's thing two.

Thing three. Yes, there have been some internal, I think, politics at play here as far as recruiting and paying some of the — some of the Sunni — some of the tribal fighters. This is something that the secretary alluded to yesterday and it's something that we're working every day with the Iraqis to help solve.

So, there's a — you know, there's a lot of different factors involved here, but I think the most important factor is that it's just a hard one, this is a difficult — is a difficult city to take.

QUESTION [by David Martin]: Still on Ramadi. You said that the fall of the Palestine Bridge had completed the isolation of the city.

I thought there was still some routes in and out to the northwest of the city.

So, one, is the — is the city completely isolated?

And two, there was reporting yesterday from Iraq that the — the battle to retake Ramadi had begun. And you're saying that's not the case, correct?

COL. WARREN: Let's be clear about one thing, isolated is not sealed, all right?

There's no possible way to seal a city like that. There are, you know, three river entrances in and out. I mean, it's a complex city. You're never going to seal a city the size of Ramadi.

So, there's going to continue to be rat lines and smuggling routes and et cetera, there's ways in and out of the city. But it is militarily isolated; in other words, large formations can't move in and out.

So, I think that's, you know, an important distinction.

Has the start — you know, again, I would submit to you that the fight for Ramadi started months ago, when the isolation thing started, right? Again, militarily, the operation to liberate Sinjar has broken into phases. Phase I, isolate. Phase II, clear. Phase III, stabilize.

So, you know, the isolation phase is complete. We're now moving into the clearing phase. And I — I would submit to you the clearing phase has started. Again, you know, we dropped — you know, we conducted, what did I say, 47 air strikes, or 39 whatever it was. Nine air strikes with 47 enemy killed yesterday, as part of the clearance process.

So, I would tell you it has begun.

....

QUESTION [by Richard Sisk]: Colonel, any estimate on how many — how many ISIS fighters now in — now in Ramadi?

COL. WARREN: Now, we're — our number right now is, you know, 600 to 1,000 total, and that includes fighters and maybe, you know, some auxiliary, some helpers and supporters and such.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 2 Dec 2015.

On 8 December, Agence France-Presse reported some progress in liberating Ramadi: Iraqi security forces on Tuesday [8 Dec] recaptured a large area on the southwestern side of Ramadi from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group, which overran the city in May, officials said.

....

"Today [8 Dec], our forces completely cleared the Al-Tameem area after a fierce battle against Daesh gunmen," Sabah al-Noman, the spokesman for Iraq's counter-terrorism service, told AFP, using an Arabic acronym for ISIS.

ISIS fighters "had no choice except to surrender or fight and they were completely destroyed," Noman said.

....

"Iraqi forces are ready and close to entering the center of the city," Irzayij [the police chief for Anbar] said.

"Iraq forces retake large part of Ramadi from ISIS," [Al-Arabiya](#), 15:14 GMT, 8 Dec 2015.

On 8 December, the Associated Press reported:

Iraqi troops battling the Islamic State group on Tuesday captured [the southwestern Tamim] neighborhood on the outskirts of militant-held Ramadi and a provincial operations center to the north of the city, officials said.

It was the first significant incursion into Ramadi since Iraq announced a major offensive last month aimed at taking back the provincial capital. Iraqi troops backed by Shiite militiamen recently seized the Palestine Bridge, a main gateway, completing their encirclement of the city.

....

[Sabah al-Numani, a spokesman for an Iraqi counterterrorism unit fighting in Ramadi,] cautioned that there is still a long battle ahead, and that Warar River, a tributary of the Euphrates, separates the troops in Tamim from the center of Ramadi. "We cannot give a specific time we will liberate the city," he said, adding that IS had "destroyed many of the bridges" over the river.

Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraqi forces seize neighborhood on outskirts of IS-held city," [Associated Press](#), 18:33 GMT, 8 Dec 2015.

On 13 December, The [Washington Post](#) reported: "Iraqi commanders say they expect to regain all of Ramadi by the end of the year."

On 20 December, the Iraqi security forces instructed civilians in Ramadi to leave on or before 23 Dec, to avoid being harmed in the final battles for Ramadi. But ISIL will kill any civilian who attempts to leave, because ISIL wants to use civilians as human shields to avoid bombing by the U.S.-led Coalition. On 1-2 Dec: [Wall Street Journal](#); [The National](#). On 20 Dec: [Rudaw](#); [Iraqi News](#); [Reuters](#). And on 21 Dec: [Reuters](#).

22-27 Dec 2015

Final Assault on Ramadi Begins

On 22 December — after 7 months of procrastination and postponement (!) — Iraqi troops finally began an assault toward the city center in Ramadi. Col. Warren said the number of ISIL fighters currently in Ramadi is between 250 and 350, as most of the ISIL fighters have either fled or been killed in airstrikes. The Iraqi security forces and Sunni tribal fighters (but *not* Shiite militias) are participating in the battles to liberate Ramadi. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 23 December, [Iraqi News](#) reports: "On Wednesday [23 Dec], the Council of Anbar Province stated, that the liberation operation of Ramadi needs more time, while noted that

everything in the city is booby-trapped" [Rudaw](#) reports that "booby traps and suicide bombers have slowed an offensive in Ramadi". But [Reuters](#) reports the chief of staff of the Iraqi army continues to predict the "complete liberation" of Ramadi "in the coming days".

On 22 December there were numerous predictions that Ramadi would be totally liberated on or before the weekend (i.e., 26 December). Those optimistic predictions vanished on 23-24 Dec. On 24 December, Western newsmedia were preoccupied with Christmas, but my searches of Arab newsmedia (e.g., [Iraqi News](#), [Al-Arabiya](#)) also found little about Ramadi. On 24 December, [Reuters](#) reported: "No ground advance was made on Thursday [24 Dec] morning as the troops focussed on clearing explosives," The Iraqi army is approximately 1700 meters from the Ramadi government complex in the city center.

On 25 December, news about Ramadi was again sparse. [Reuters](#) euphemistically says that the Iraqi troops "were consolidating their positions" before making a final assault to liberate Ramadi. [Iraqi News](#) reports that the Anbar Provincial Council said on 25 Dec ISIL had destroyed 80% of Ramadi and that it would take at least 10 years to rebuild Ramadi. ISIL has destroyed *all* of the bridges in Ramadi.

On 26 December, news from Ramadi was again difficult to find. [Reuters](#) reports: "Iraqi troops have pushed deeper into the heart of the last remaining district held by Islamic State in the city of Ramadi, despite being slowed by bombs and booby traps...." The Iraqi army is now approximately 800 meters from the Ramadi government complex in the city center.

On 27 December, [Iraqi News](#) hysterically reported that the Anbar Provincial Council announced "the security forces have stormed the government complex in the center of Ramadi". Another story by [Iraqi News](#) claims that ISIL had withdrawn from the Ramadi government complex in the city center, and taken hundreds of civilians hostage, to be used as human shields. But, also on 27 December, the [Associated Press](#) — in their first story about Ramadi since 22 Dec — said: "Gen. Ismail al-Mahlawi, head of the Anbar military operations, told The Associated Press that the advance was hampered by suicide bombers, snipers and booby traps. Al-Mahlawi said he could neither confirm nor deny media reports that IS fighters had pulled out of the government complex by nightfall Sunday [27 Dec]." The AP also reported an anonymous Iraqi army officer "said the Iraqi army has yet to gain full control of a single Ramadi neighborhood." And on 27 December, [Reuters](#) reported "Iraq's army declared victory over Islamic State fighters" in Ramadi. Reuters admits that the Iraqi army must now "clear pockets [of ISIL fighters] that could exist here or there in" Ramadi. Reuters also reports "some districts [of Ramadi] appeared to have been completely destroyed by the advance."

The news reports on 27 December paint a confusing and inconsistent picture of what is happening in Ramadi. But it is clear that Ramadi is *not* completely liberated from ISIL, although progress is being made.

28 Dec 2015 Government Complex in Ramadi Captured

On 28 December, the U.S. Central Command announced that the Iraqi security forces had

seized the Government Center in Ramadi. Here is the entire CENTCOM statement:

Iraqi military leaders announced today Iraqi Security Forces seized the Government Center in Ramadi from Da'esh (the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State).

The Coalition congratulates the Iraqi Security Forces for its success in Ramadi. The ISF operations to reach the center of Ramadi are a significant milestone on the path to clear Da'esh from the historic city and the overall campaign to defeat the terrorist group across Iraq.

"The Iraqi Security Forces, including the Counter-Terrorism Service, the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi Air Force, the federal and local police, and the tribal fighters, have demonstrated their resolve in the fight for Ramadi," said Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, commander of the Combined Joint Task Force supporting Iraqi security operations. "I also want to commend the thousands of troops of the Coalition who have made this success possible through relentless strikes against Da'esh, training and equipping support to the Iraqi Security Forces, and advice and assistance provided to Iraqi security leaders. This success belongs to them as well, and we will all work together to defeat our common enemy."

Coalition support to operations in Ramadi include more than 600 strikes focused against Da'esh targets in and around Ramadi, training and equipping of multiple elements of the Iraqi Security Forces, providing specialized engineering equipment to clear improvised explosives devices, and providing advice and assistance at multiple Iraqi headquarters.

"Dec. 28: Iraqi Security Forces seize Ramadi Government Center," [CENTCOM](#), 28 Dec 2015.

Later on 28 December, the Pentagon announced the capture of the government complex in the center of Ramadi. Here are the first five paragraphs of the Pentagon press release:

Defense Secretary Ash Carter offered his congratulations today [28 Dec] to Iraq's prime minister after Iraqi forces succeeded in retaking the government center in Ramadi from Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

"The expulsion of ISIL by Iraqi security forces, supported by our international coalition, is a significant step forward in the campaign to defeat this barbaric group and restore Iraq's territorial sovereignty," Carter said in a statement.

The operation to reach the center of Ramadi was a significant milestone on the path to clear ISIL from the historic city and the overall campaign to defeat the terrorist group across Iraq, according to a statement released by Combined Joint Task Force &8212; Operation Inherent Resolve officials today.

Ramadi's strategic location on the highway that connects Iraq with Syria and Jordan made it a prized target for ISIL, which took the city in May.

"The fight for Ramadi demonstrates how capable, motivated local forces backed by coalition air support and training can defeat ISIL," Carter said. "Now it's important for

the Iraqi government, working with provincial and local authorities, to seize this opportunity to maintain the peace in Ramadi, prevent the return of ISIL and other extremists, and facilitate the return of Ramadi's citizens back to the city.”

"Iraqi Forces Reach Strategic Milestone in Fight For Ramadi," [Pentagon](#), 28 Dec 2015.

My comment is that neither CENTCOM nor the Pentagon mentioned the "liberation" of Ramadi from ISIL, because that has not yet happened. CENTCOM, echoed by the Pentagon, said the capture of the government complex "was a significant milestone on the path to clear Da'esh [ISIL] from" Ramadi. The celebration is *only* the capture of the Iraqi government complex in the center of Ramadi.

On 28 December, [Iraqi News](#) triumphantly reports Iraqi military claims "Ramadi completely liberated". But another news story in [Iraqi News](#) reports the Anbar Provincial Council announced that only "75% of Ramadi areas have been cleansed from ISIS elements".

On 28 December, the Associated Press reported:

Iraqi forces backed by U.S.-led airstrikes drove Islamic State militants out of the center of Ramadi on Monday [28 Dec] and seized the main government complex there, according to military officials, who said insurgents are still dug into pockets of the city west of Baghdad.

....

In recent months Iraqi forces launched several offensives to retake Ramadi, but all had stalled.

....

Brig. Gen. Ahmed al-Belawi told The Associated Press that IS militants stopped firing from inside the government complex at around 8 a.m. Monday and said troops were encircling it as engineering teams cleared booby traps.

A few hours later, military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool announced in a televised statement that Ramadi had been "fully liberated."

But Gen. Ismail al-Mahlawi, head of military operations in Anbar, quickly clarified that Iraqi forces had only retaken the government complex and that parts of the city remained under IS control. He said IS fighters still control 30 percent of Ramadi and that government forces do not fully control many districts from which IS fighters have retreated.

"The troops only entered the government complex," al-Mahlawi told The Associated Press. "We can't say that Ramadi is fully liberated. There are still neighborhoods under their control and there are still pockets of resistance."

....

An Iraqi military officer told the AP that the militants had retreated from the

government complex to other parts of the city.

"We were totally surprised today," the officer said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the press.

"We didn't expect them to retreat from a number of Ramadi areas today, where we entered without any resistance, as if they evaporated," he said.

[Brig. Gen. Ahmed] Al-Belawi said the fighters retreated mainly to the eastern neighborhoods of Sijariya and Sufiya.

Sinan Salaheddin, "Iraqi troops advance in Ramadi, pockets of IS remain," [Associated Press](#), 23:08 GMT, 28 Dec 2015.

After days of detailed coverage of the battle in Ramadi, Reuters reported little on Ramadi on 28 Dec. The reason may be that [Reuters](#) reported the Iraqi army declared victory in Ramadi on the night of 27 Dec.

29-31 Dec 2015: Ramadi

On 29 December, the Iraqi prime minister personally toured Ramadi, but rockets or mortar shells from ISIL forced him to retreat. [Rudaw](#); [Reuters](#). On 29 Dec, the [Associated Press](#) cites Iraqi Brig. Gen. Ahmed al-Belawi as saying "He estimates that more than half of the city's buildings have been destroyed, including government offices, markets and houses." The AP also reported: "IS militants still control an estimated 30 percent of the city, according to Gen. Ismail al-Mahlawi, head of military operations in Anbar province."

On 30 December, [Iraqi News](#) reports that ISIL executed 40 civilians in eastern Ramadi. [Rudaw](#) reports the Anbar provincial council says 80% of Ramadi was "reduced to rubble" in the battle against ISIL.

Why didn't the Iraqi army clear ISIL from Ramadi on 30 Dec? The [Associated Press](#) says "rainy weather" prevented the Iraqi army from working on 30 Dec.

On 30 December, [Reuters](#) reports: "About 700 Islamic State fighters were believed to be hiding in the centre and eastern outskirts of Ramadi on Wednesday [30 Dec], three days after Iraqi government forces claimed victory over the militants in the western city, the U.S.-led coalition said." Reuters says these ISIL fighters, plus numerous bombs and booby-traps, would prevent civilians from returning to Ramadi. On 31 December, [Iraqi News](#) reports that the head of the Anbar Provincial Council said 700 ISIL fighters were gathered "on the outskirts of the city of Ramadi". My comment is that ought to dampen celebrations about the alleged liberation of Ramadi.

On 31 December 2015 and 1 Jan 2016, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported on the battle in Ramadi.

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.

On 10 December 2015, Col. Warren defined the mission in Fallujah: "To prevent Fallujah from being able to reinforce ISIL fighters in Ramadi. That has been successful." [Pentagon](#). However, in June and July 2015 the Iraqis were promising to *liberate* Fallujah, which has been a complete failure.

On 31 December, [Reuters](#) reports: "there has been no indication of if and when a battle will be launched to take [Fallujah from ISIL]...." Reuters also says: "Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's government and the U.S.-led coalition backing it have been cagey so far in plans for Falluja, which lies between Baghdad and Ramadi,...."

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, October, and November 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.

December 2015: Mosul

On 25 December, Abadi gave a speech in which he declared that Mosul would be liberated soon after Ramadi was liberated. [Reuters](#).

On 28 December, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi delivered a speech He said 2016 would be "the year of the final victory and the end of the existence of Daesh on Iraqi territory." This was *before* Ramadi was liberated, and *before* the assaults on Fallujah and Mosul began, yet Abadi was already predicting the defeat of ISIL everywhere in Iraq. Mosul is next on Abadi's list of cities to liberate. See also [Iraqi News](#); [Rudaw](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that Abadi is hysterical.

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 essays for

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

I takes me at least 15 minutes/day — about 8 hours/month — to search the websites of TASS, RIA-Novosti, and Russia Today for news about Russian airstrikes in Syria. It takes even more time to write and revise news in this essay. The Russian news media are an unreliable source of facts, and so it is a waste of my time to collect and report assertions in the Russian news media. Accordingly, I am discontinuing my daily searches of Russian news media.

On 3 December, journalists reported that Russia had begun improving an air base located approximately 40 km southeast of the city of Homs. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 4 December, Russia announced airstrikes against 1458 targets during the past week, "from 26 November to 4 December". The Russian airstrikes were in the Syrian provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia, Hama, Homs, Deir Ezzor, and Raqqa. [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). The interval beginning on 26 November and ending on 3 December is 8 days.

On 9 December, the U.S. Envoy to the anti-ISIL Coalition said only 30% of Russian airstrikes in Syria targeted ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On 16 December, the [SOHR](#) reported that 353 civilians in Syria had been killed by either Russian or Syrian airstrikes during two weeks, 1-15 December. Alternate [URL](#). For comparison, the U.S.-led Coalition killed only 299 civilians in 15 months of bombing in Syria, 23 Sep 2014 to 23 Dec 2015. [SOHR](#).

On 23 December, [Amnesty International](#) suggested that Russian airstrikes that killed civilians and damaged hospitals may be war crimes. [Reuters](#).

On 25 December, Russia announced a total of 5240 sorties flown in Syria since their airstrikes began on 30 Sep 2015. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Reuters](#).

On 25 December, a Russian airstrike on a headquarters in an eastern suburb of Damascus killed Zahran Alloush, the leader of Jaysh al Islam, a major jihadist group. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). Russian newsmedia credited the Syrian air force with the assassination of Zahran Alloush. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#). On 28 December, the U.S. State Department said that the killing of the leader of a major insurgent group "complicate efforts to bring about meaningful political negotiations" with Assad's government that will begin in January 2016. [State Dept](#); [Reuters](#).

U.S.-led Coalition 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 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Nov. 30, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using 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. Coalition military forces conducted one strike in Iraq in support of Coalition operations using fighter aircraft.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Makhmur, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL staging area, and an ISIL weapons cache, damaged two ISIL command and control nodes, two ISIL buildings, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck inoperable Coalition equipment denying ISIL access in support of Coalition operations.

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

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

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

2 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and

in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, nine strikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, 10 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tactical vehicle, five ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL RPG positions, an ISIL tunnel, an ISIL anti-tank position, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL staging location, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL command and control node, cratered an ISIL-used road, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL fighting position, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL VBIED facility and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

3 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using attack, 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, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL check point.
- Near Abu Kamal, three strikes struck three ISIL oil field well heads.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL

buildings and an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, six strikes struck six ISIL oil field well heads.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, denied an ISIL tactical vehicle movement, and wounded eight ISIL fighters.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Mosul, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, eight strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tunnel, three ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), nine ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL light machine gun positions, three ISIL heavy machine gun positions, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL tactical vehicle and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL-used bridge.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL weapons storage facility, and wounded an ISIL fighter.

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

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

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

4 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 3, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes using attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted six strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, six strikes struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes struck an ISIL oil field well head.
- Near Ayn Isa, four strikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL

- fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mar'a, eight strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, four ISIL staging areas, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle borne explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL compound, and wounded four ISIL fighters.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 14 ISIL heavy machine guns, five ISIL RPGs, an ISIL recoilless rifle, two ISIL anti-air artillery pieces, three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL sniper positions, three ISIL staging areas, three ISIL bed down locations, two ISIL compounds, an ISIL VBIED, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, one strike damaged an ISIL VBIED storage location.

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

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Coalition nations which have conducted strikes in Syria include Australia, Bahrain, Canada, France, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

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

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

On 2 December, the House of Commons in the United Kingdom voted 397-223 to begin airstrikes in Syria. Early in the morning of 3 December, U.K. aircraft bombed the Omar oil field in eastern Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Note that CENTCOM added the United Kingdom to its list of nations that have conducted airstrikes in Syria.

5 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 4, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 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 fighter, bomber ground-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Near Ayn Isa, one strike produced in inconclusive results.

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant well-head.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building and wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL bunker, two ISIL VBIEDs, 15 ISIL fighting positions, 12 ISIL buildings, three ISIL light machine guns, three ISIL RPGs, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL assembly area, five ISIL staging areas, an ISIL weapons cache, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

6 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 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 fighter, bomber and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL building.
- Near Ayn Isa, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL excavator, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and an ISIL building.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, five strikes destroyed five ISIL oil well-heads.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL tunnel.

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar tube, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL excavator, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and suppressed a separate ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, three ISIL buildings, four ISIL command and control nodes, three ISIL staging areas, two ISIL weapons caches, damaged an ISIL fighting position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

7 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 6, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Dayr Ar Zawr, four strikes struck four ISIL oil well-heads.
- Near Mar'a, one strike damaged an ISIL artillery piece.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 13 ISIL buildings, nine ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL staging areas, two ISIL house borne IEDs, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL

tunnel, an ISIL IED, an ISIL assembly area, wounded five ISIL fighters, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

8 December 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 8 December 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 11 strikes in Syria:

- Near Hawl, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Raqqah, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units, wounded two ISIL fighters and destroyed an ISIL structure.

Fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 20 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of the Iraqi government:

- Near Huwayjah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units, wounded two ISIL fighters, damaged an ISIL trench, and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL rocket cache.
- Near Mosul, a strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, denied ISIL access to terrain, and destroyed three ISIL ammo caches, 12 ISIL buildings, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL sniper position, seven ISIL heavy machine guns, four ISIL staging areas, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL tunnel entrance, seven ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL supply caches.
- Near Sinjar, a strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed three ISIL weapons caches, nine ISIL bunkers, three ISIL tunnels, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, a strike destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives facility and two ISIL vehicle bombs.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL logistics facility and an ISIL vehicle bomb-making facility.

[Pentagon](#), 8 Dec 2015.

The link to this press release at the CENTCOM website gave a "page not found" error message on 8-9 December. The correct link is [CENTCOM](#).

9 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter, bomber, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL oil well-head.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL oil well-head.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed four ISIL bunkers and seven ISIL trenches.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL rockets, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, and suppressed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed four ISIL rockets.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, seven strikes struck an ISIL logistical facility, an ISIL training facility, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL weapons storage facility, two ISIL staging areas, an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck three separate large ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL bed down locations, two ISIL light machine guns, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL recoilless rifle, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tactical vehicle, three ISIL buildings, four ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL VBIED factory, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL compound, an ISIL resupply location, two ISIL command and control nodes, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and immobilized an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives cache, an ISIL bed down location, and a VBIED factory.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 9 Dec 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 9 Dec 2015.

10 December 2015: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kobani, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Al Qaim, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL boats, five ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL weapons caches, and four ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL fighting position, and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit 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](#), 10 Dec 2015.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 10 Dec 2015.

11 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, bomber, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and wounded ISIL fighters.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factory.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL bed down location, an ISIL VBIED, and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, and suppressed an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike cratered four ISIL-used roads.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed two ISIL bed down locations.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike cratered two ISIL-used roads.
- Near Tikrit, one strike destroyed two ISIL bunkers.

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

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

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

12 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 11, 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 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL drone.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and damaged four ISIL buildings and wounded two ISIL fighters.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL mortar tube, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL weapons cache, and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL light machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL supply cache.

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

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

13 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 12, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, bomber, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and

destroyed two ISIL vehicles and wounded two ISIL fighters.

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed seven ISIL buildings.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL staging area and damaged two others.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facilities, two ISIL staging locations, and five ISIL buildings.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL VBIED facilities.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL assembly area, two ISIL fighting positions, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Rawah, one strike struck an ISIL VBIED facility.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

14 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three 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 fighter and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and damaged an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), two ISIL improvised explosive devices (IED), five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL light machine gun.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar tube.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck three ISIL staging areas and destroyed an ISIL bed down location, two ISIL staging areas, an ISIL command and control node, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and two light machine guns.
- Near Tikrit, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil tanks.

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

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

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

15 December 2015: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL building.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factory.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL light machine guns, an ISIL heavy machine gun, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL staging area, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed

three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL light machine gun, and halted an ISIL vehicle's movement.

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

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

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

16 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, three strikes struck an ISIL headquarters, an ISIL IED facility, and an ISIL VBIED facility.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed two ISIL-used bridges.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL tactical vehicles, two ISIL vehicles, nine ISIL staging areas, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, three ISIL bed down locations, cratered eight ISIL-used roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

One airstrike near Fallujah on 15 Dec was reported on 18 Dec.

On 16 December 2015, the Pentagon reported cumulative statistics:

As of 3:59 p.m. EST Dec. 16, the U.S. and coalition have conducted a total of 8,912 strikes (5,856 Iraq / 3,056 Syria).

- U.S. has conducted 6,934 strikes in Iraq and Syria (4,056 Iraq / 2,878 Syria)
- Rest of Coalition has conducted 1,978 strikes in Iraq and Syria (1,800 Iraq / 178 Syria)

As of Dec. 12, U.S. and partner nation aircraft have flown an estimated 60,735 sorties in support of operations in Iraq and Syria.

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 16 Dec 2015.

Notice that the USA is flying 69% of the airstrikes in Iraq and 94% of the airstrikes in Syria.

17 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes struck an ISIL financial building, an ISIL headquarters building, and an ISIL training camp.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL bunkers.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and damaged an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL tunnel, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL RPG system, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL home-made explosives cache.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck multiple large ISIL tactical units and three suicide bombers and destroyed 12 ISIL machine guns, 13 ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL machine gun, three ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL buildings, three ISIL staging areas, and an ISIL VBIED.

Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL machine gun.

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

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

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

18 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar position, two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL-used bridge, cratered an ISIL-used road, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL light machine guns, two ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, six ISIL staging areas, and an ISIL building.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL light machine guns, two ISIL excavators, an ISIL fighting position, and suppressed an ISIL light machine gun position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL communications tower.

Additionally, there was an unreported strike on Dec. 15:

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL

fighting positions, two ISIL buildings, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

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

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

19 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, four ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL front end loader. One strike is currently under investigation for a potential friendly fire incident.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL excavator and wounded ISIL fighters.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, damaged an ISIL bunker, and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL building, nine ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL staging area, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, and two ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

20 December 2015: airstrikes

On Sunday, 20 December 2015, neither the Pentagon nor CENTCOM websites reported airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. As of 15:50 EST on Tuesday, 22 Dec there was no press release for 20 December at these two websites, although press releases for both 21 and 22 December had been posted. A search of Reuters showed they had no report of airstrikes issued on 20 Dec.

See the 21 December press release below for one airstrike in Syria that was omitted from the nonexistent 20 Dec press release. It is strange that CENTCOM and the Pentagon would correct a nonexistent press release.

21 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 20, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using ground-attack and remotely piloted aircraft. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, bomber, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL road obstacle and an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED).

Iraq

- Near Bayji, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL RPG, an ISIL heavy machine gun, seven ISIL vehicles, two ISIL caches, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL weapons storage facility, and an ISIL weapons cache and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL mortar tube, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL checkpoint, two ISIL vehicles, and suppressed an ISIL light machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL buildings, eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL tactical vehicle, three ISIL heavy machine guns, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

Additionally, there was an additional strike from Dec. 19 that was not included on the Dec. 20 strike release:

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck five ISIL gas and oil separation points and two ISIL crude oil collection points.

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

22 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 21, 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. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

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

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an improvised explosive device (IED) facility and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed ISIL rocket fire.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, 12 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL vehicles, five ISIL bunkers, and destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL command and control nodes, four ISIL weapons caches, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), wounded two ISIL fighters, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

23 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 22, 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. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 24 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, four ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL rocket system.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns and two ISIL mortar systems.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, five strikes struck four ISIL staging areas and an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL crane, an ISIL bulldozer, two ISIL excavators, two ISIL vehicles, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL light machine gun, an ISIL checkpoint, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL bunker, 19 ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL sniper positions, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, four ISIL RPG positions, two ISIL recoilless rifles, two ISIL grenade launcher positions, two ISIL heavy machine gun positions, three ISIL command and control nodes, two ISIL bed down locations, an ISIL staging area, cratered an ISIL-used road, 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 and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

24 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 23, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL logistics facility.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and 24 ISIL rockets.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, nine strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 24 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL excavator, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, five ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL bed-down location, an ISIL artillery site, cratered five ISIL-used roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

25 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL crude oil collection point.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Manbij, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, and wounded two ISIL fighters.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes struck an ISIL cave complex, an ISIL staging facility, an ISIL staging area, and destroyed three ISIL buildings.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL trench system.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Makhmur, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 13 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL heavy machine gun, five ISIL rockets, four ISIL bunkers, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL assembly area, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, seven ISIL house borne improvised explosive devices (HBIED), three ISIL staging areas, three ISIL buildings, two ISIL tunnels, an ISIL homemade explosives (HME) cache, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.

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

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

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

26 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 25, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL tunnels, two ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) factories, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles, six ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factories, two ISIL heavy machine gun positions, an ISIL sniper position, two ISIL house borne improvised explosive devices (HBIED), and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes destroyed three ISIL-used bridges and an ISIL-used culvert.

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

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

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

One airstrike in Syria and three airstrikes in Iraq were omitted from the above report, but included in the 27 Dec report.

27 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 26, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 28 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL weapons cache, and wounded ISIL fighters.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed three ISIL excavators, two ISIL bulldozers, and damaged an ISIL excavator.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL homemade explosive cache.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 15 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL bunker, four ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL command control nodes, and cratered two ISIL roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL VBIED factory, an ISIL VBIED staging location, an ISIL building, two ISIL house borne improvised explosive devices (HBIED), an ISIL staging area, an ISIL fighting position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL-used bridges, and two ISIL-used culverts.
- Near Tal Afar, seven strikes struck four ISIL-used bridges, an ISIL culvert, and destroyed 12 ISIL bunkers.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position, an ISIL-used bridge, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL bed down location.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL tunnel.

Additionally, there were four additional strikes from Dec. 25 that were not included on the Dec. 26 strike release.

Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece position, five ISIL staging locations, two ISIL HBIEDs, three ISIL weapon caches, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL VBIED, two ISIL resupply locations, and an ISIL vehicle, cratered five ISIL-used roads, damaged an ISIL tactical vehicle, and wounded ISIL fighters.

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

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

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

28 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter, attack,

bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Hasakah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL building.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, eleven strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL building, cratered two ISIL-used roads, and damaged an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL staging area.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, six ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL checkpoint, and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL RPG positions, an ISIL bulldozer, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL VBIED staging area, denied ISIS access to terrain, and wounded 12 ISIL fighters.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL assembly area.

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

[Central Command](#), 28 Dec 2015.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 28 Dec 2015.

Two airstrikes in Syria on 27 were reported on 29 Dec.

29 December 2015: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 29 December 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:
Attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted nine strikes in Syria:

- Near Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL tunnel complex.
- Near Manbij, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle-borne bomb, an ISIL fighting position, and cratered three ISIL-used roads.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Additionally, two additional strikes in Syria from Dec. 27 were not included on the Dec. 28 release:

- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.

Fighter, attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 22 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of the Iraqi government:

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL bunkers, two ISIL tunnel entrances, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL trench system.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed two ISIL excavators.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, 14 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tunnel, and three ISIL command-and-control nodes.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL oil tanker trucks, three ISIL heavy machine gun positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL front end loader, an ISIL vehicle-borne bomb, an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL house bomb, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL-used culvert.

[Pentagon](#), 29 Dec 2015.

On 29 Dec 2015, CENTCOM posted their [press release](#) about airstrikes under the erroneous title "Dec. 29: Iraqi Security Forces seize Ramadi Government Center".

30 December 2015: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 24 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, attack,

bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Aleppo, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL main oil pump station.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike damaged an ISIL trench system.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, nine strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL bed down location, 20 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL rocket rail, an ISIL building, an ISIL homemade explosives (HME) cache, an ISIL front end loader, two ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL heavy machine gun positions, wounded an ISIL fighter, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL VBIED storage facility.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 30 Dec 2015.

31 December 2015: airstrikes

On Thursday, the CENTCOM webmaster apparently began a four-day weekend, as nothing was posted at that website during 31 Dec.

On Thursday, 31 December 2015, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted seven strikes in Syria:

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL building.

- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, and wounded four ISIL fighters.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Fighter, attack, and bomber aircraft conducted 17 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government:

- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, nine strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, two ISIL staging locations, three ISIL headquarters, and destroyed 21 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL staging area, 10 ISIL fighting positions, seven ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL rocket-propelled grenade position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and a light machine gun position.

[Pentagon](#), 31 Dec 2015.

On 4 Jan 2016, this press release was finally posted at [CENTCOM](#).

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.
- My essay for [November 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Paris that killed 130 people on 13 Nov 2015.

These previous essays also mention concerns by governments in Europe and Russia that Islamic terrorists will return from Syria and engage in terrorism in Europe and Russia.

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions a 15 y old girl in Denmark who stabbed her mother to death after repeatedly watching on the Internet (YouTube) videos of ISIL executions with her 29 y old boyfriend who was a so-called "refugee" from Iraq. That essay also mentions an

Iraqi terrorist in Berlin who was killed by police in an attack on 17 Sep 2015.

Islamic Migration into Europe

One of the major news stories during September 2015 was the flood of approximately 100,000 migrants into Europe, mostly from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan. This increase in Muslim population in Europe will likely lead to an increase in Islamic terrorism in Europe for two reasons:

1. Muslim migrants do *not* speak the local language of their host nation, and the migrants have different religious values from the prevailing local Christian majority values, so the migrants will feel out of place in European society. (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.

On 7 December, the German government announced that a total of 965,000 migrants had registered in Germany during the first 11 months of 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

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.

On 10-11 December 2015, [ABC News](#); [CNN](#); and [Reuters](#) reported that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement had determined that ISIL was now able to issue fake Syrian passports, using genuine blank passports and genuine passport printing machines. This means that *all* Syrian passports are now worthless, because border guards can not distinguish a real Syrian passport from a fake Syrian passport. See [Reuters](#) for 20 December.

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.

On 22 December 2015, the *Bild* newspaper in Germany reported anonymous German government officials said approximately 12 people entered Germany with fake Syrian passports and then they disappeared in Germany. The presumed terrorists entered sometime before 13 Nov, when the terror attacks in Paris occurred. Two of the attackers in Paris had similar fake Syrian passports. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

13 Nov 2015: terror attack in Paris

My essay for [November 2015](#) chronicled the attacks of 8 Islamic terrorists who killed a total of 130 people in Paris on the night of 13 Nov 2015. My essay cited many news sources.

Sources in December 2015:

- Pablo Gorondi, "Hungary: Paris fugitive recruited men amid Budapest migrants," [Associated Press](#), 16:24 GMT, 3 Dec 2015. (Salah Abdeslam recruited two men from migrants at the Budapest train station in mid-September.)
- Lorne Cook & John-Thor Dahlburg, "Belgians seeking 2 new suspects in Paris attacks

probe," [Associated Press](#), 17:48 GMT, 4 Dec 2015. (The two carried "bogus identification in the names of Samir Bouzid and Soufiane Kayal".)

- [Associated Press](#), "Who were the Paris attackers? Many crossed officials' radar," [Associated Press](#), 18:25 GMT, 9 Dec 2015. (Profiles of 6 dead terrorists, 1 dead accomplice, and 4 fugitives.)
- [Marine Penetier & Gilbert Reilhac](#), "Another Paris attacker named, had been in Syria," [Reuters](#), 20:59 GMT, 9 Dec 2015. (The third attacker who died in the concert hall was identified as Foued Mohamed-Aggad, a Frenchman who was in Syria for a few months in 2013-2014.)
- [Lori Hinnant](#), "Days at wheel, months of planning for Paris attack fugitive," [Associated Press](#), 15:27 GMT, 10 Dec 2015. (Detailed account from anonymous police source of travels of Salah Abdeslam, beginning in August 2015. "Of the 10 dead attackers and accomplices, three remain unidentified," Salah Abdeslam and Mohamed Abrini continue to elude police.)
- "Factbox: The hunt for the Paris attackers," [Reuters](#), 18:08 GMT, 10 Dec 2015. (Profiles of 6 dead terrorists, 1 dead accomplice, and those arrested.)
- "Factbox: The hunt for the Paris attackers," [Reuters](#), 10:25 GMT, 24 Dec 2015. (Police believe there were at least 10 attackers, of whom 8 are dead. Police continue to seek 4 suspects.)
- "FACTBOX-The hunt for the Paris attackers" [Reuters](#), 11:17 GMT, 31 Dec 2015.

Terror Attack in San Bernardino, California

Some of the initial information reported by journalists on 2-4 December was wrong, so I have written a terse description of what actually happened, using the final version of the facts. Links to news sources are collected below.

At 11:00 PST on 2 December 2015, someone began shooting at a social services center for alleged people with developmental disabilities in San Bernardino, California. The social services center is irrelevant — the shooting occurred in a conference room that was rented by the San Bernardino County Public Health Department for their Christmas banquet. This shooting was the worst mass murder in the USA in the past three years: the final toll was 14 dead and 21 wounded.

Witnesses said the two gunmen escaped from the murder scene in a dark-colored SUV. Police in Redlands were going to search a residence when a dark SUV slowly drove past the residence, then sped away. Police pursued the SUV, the SUV crashed about two miles from the homicide scene, and then a gun battle began at 15:00. Both suspects died at the scene of the gun battle.

At 18:47 PST on 2 December, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that anonymous law enforcement sources said the gunman's name was Syed Rizwan Farook. Later reports said that Farook was a 28 year old devout Muslim who inspected restaurants for the county health department for the past four years. Farook was born in the USA, the son of Muslim parents from Pakistan. The other dead suspect was Farook's wife, Tashfeen Malik, 29 years old. Malik is a citizen of Pakistan, but she was living in Saudi Arabia when Farook married her.

The massacre seems to have been planned, because:

- Farook built 15 pipe bombs, 3 of which were left at the banquet and 12 were found in Farook's home. Farook had enough pipe in his home to make an additional 19 bombs.
- Farook had acquired more than 6000 cartridges: more than 1600 cartridges in their SUV, and more than 4500 cartridges in their home.
- rented a SUV with Utah license plates (to confuse police?)
- Before the attacks, Farook and Malik deposited their half-year old baby with Farook's mother.
- Farook his wife were wearing military clothing during the attack.
- Farook and his wife removed the hard disk drive from his computer, crushed two cell phones, and attempted to delete many of their online posts (to destroy evidence?)

Farook and his wife fired approximately 70 cartridges at the banquet, and fired 76 cartridges in a brief standoff with police.

Farook left three pipe bombs at the banquet. The three bombs were connected to one radio-controlled detonator. Farook did not know how to design and build electronic circuits, he simply removed a radio control from a toy car and used it in his bomb. The bombs at the banquet did *not* explode, perhaps because the toy car radio-control did not have adequate range to operate when Farook pushed the detonate button. The design of the pipe bomb may have come from an Al-Qaeda website. [Time](#); [ABC News](#).

On 2 December, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "[Co-worker Patrick] Baccari said he been sitting at the same table as Farook at an office party Wednesday morning, but his co-worker suddenly disappeared, leaving his coat on his chair." When Farook returned, he was wearing military-style clothing and carrying an assault rifle. Those facts suggest that something at the banquet made Farook angry and caused him to massacre his co-workers, making it a case of workplace violence. But Farook's preparations (e.g., amassing 4600 cartridges, building 15 pipe bombs, destroying evidence) suggest the massacre was planned months in advance, *not* a spontaneous reaction.

On the morning of 4 December, the *Los Angeles Times* reported anonymous federal law enforcement officials said:

- Farook was in contact with both Nusra Front in Syria and al-Shabab in Somalia.
- Malik "pledged allegiance to an Islamic State leader in a Facebook posting". Facebook deleted the post because it "violated the company's community standards", and Facebook gave a copy of the deleted post to the FBI.

On the afternoon of 3 December, the FBI became the lead agency in the investigation of the

massacre, because of the Islamic terrorism.

By 5 December, it had become clear that Farook and Malik were *neither* trained, financed, *nor* directed by any Islamic terror organization. However, ISIL encourages Muslims to attack Western Civilization, and that is what Farook and Malik did. On 4 December, the ISIL-affiliated Amaq news agency — and on 5 December, the ISIL radio station al-Bayan — claimed that Farook and Malik were "followers" of ISIL. But ISIL does *not* claim responsibility for the attack. [LA Times](#); [CBS News](#); [Reuters](#).

Farook and Malik used two assault rifles that fired 5.56 mm (.223 Remington) cartridges. One rifle was a Smith & Wesson Military Police-15. The other rifle was a DPMS A-15. ([Washington Post](#)) Both of these rifles are similar to the Colt AR-15, which is a civilian version of the U.S. Military M-16. Both rifles were legally purchased in 2011 or 2012 by Enrique Marquez, who was formerly a neighbor of Farook in Riverside, California. On 3 December, the day after the shooting, Marquez checked himself into a mental hospital, and was *not* available for interrogation by law enforcement agents. ([KABC](#)) On 6 December, law enforcement finally began to interview Marquez. The [Los Angeles Times](#) published an article about Marquez on 9 Dec, and the [Washington Post](#) had an article on 13 Dec. Although Marquez had converted to Islam, he apparently was not devout. Marquez alleges he had no prior knowledge of the San Bernardino massacre.

On 17 Dec, the FBI arrested Marquez and charged him with:

1. "making a false statement in connection with the acquisition of firearms". Marquez purchased two assault rifles for use by Farook, a Smith & Wesson in November 2011 and a DPMS rifle in February 2012. Marquez fraudulently asserted at the time of each purchase that he was the actual buyer and the rifle was for his personal use. Marquez purchased the rifles for Farook, because "Farook looked Middle Eastern" and might attract suspicion.
2. "providing material support to terrorism". In 2011-2012, Marquez purchased two assault rifles used by Farook and Malik. In 2012 Marquez purchased gunpowder used to make pipe bombs for use by Farook.
3. fraud in immigration. In November 2014, Marquez entered into a sham marriage with a Russian woman, and Marquez was paid \$200/month for this marriage. (Incidentally, Farook's brother married the sister of Marquez's so-called wife.)

[Los Angeles Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Both the *Times* and *Post* have links to a copy of the FBI affidavit in support of the charges.

The FBI affidavit quotes a 5 Nov 2015 Facebook chat by Marquez, in which he admits he is guilty of numerous crimes:

No one knows really knows me, I lead multiple lives and I'm wondering when its all going to collapse on M[e]. Yeah. My life turned ridiculous

[chat partner says: "Incidentally, I think everyone leads multiple lives."]

Involved in terrorist plots, drugs, antisocial behavior, marriage, might go to prison for fraud, etc.

Affidavit in *U.S. vs. Marquez*, 5:15-MJ-00498 (C.D.Cal. 17 Dec 2015) page 27 of 36.

Part quoted at [NBC News](#) and [Associated Press](#).

On 21 December, Marquez was denied bail because he is allegedly "a continuing danger to the community". [Associated Press](#).

Why?

On 15 April 2013, two brothers — Muslim immigrants from Caucasus or Kyrgyzstan — put bombs at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing 3 people and maiming more than 16 people. The older brother was an amateur boxer and a dropout from a community college, the younger brother was a student at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and neither had American friends. The 16 July 2015 Islamic terror attack in Chattanooga Tennessee that killed five people was perpetrated by a 24 year old Muslim who could be characterized as a loser — he used marijuana, was arrested for driving while intoxicated with alcohol, and in debt. (See my essay for [July 2015](#).) In contrast, Farook was successful — he had steady employment at a salary of \$71,230/year in 2013, was married, and had a half-year old baby. One would *not* expect Farook to become a terrorist, indeed his friends and family were astounded.

Malik studied in Pakistan during the years 2007 to 2013 to become a pharmacist, but a friend said Malik "changed around 2009, suddenly paying more attention to Islamic studies than to pharmacology." [Washington Post](#). There is no mention by journalists of her ever being employed as a pharmacist. *The Post* says "More than three days after Wednesday's massacre, no one had surfaced as a friend — or even an acquaintance — of Malik's in San Bernardino." I see two reasons why Malik was isolated in the USA:

1. One reason why she was isolated in the USA was that she did *not* speak the English language, she only spoke "broken English". [NY Times](#). The language barrier alone would prevent her assimilation into mainstream U.S. society. The Pakistani language, Urdu, was her primary language.
2. *The Post* and [LA Times](#) say Malik's religious views were apparently Wahhabi, a Sunni sect from Saudi Arabia. Wearing a niqab when outside the house would also limit her assimilation into mainstream U.S. society. The gender segregation espoused by Wahhabi theology would limit Malik to female acquaintances.

So language and religion would narrow the scope of Malik's friends in the USA to a minuscule group of female Pakistani immigrants who were also Wahhabi. Note that Farook was successful and assimilated into U.S. society, while Malik had studied for six years to earn a pharmacy degree that she never used (i.e., Malik unsuccessful in her nonexistent career) and she was isolated in the USA.

Because Farook was successful and assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, on 5 December law enforcement suspected Malik of radicalizing her husband. But on 9 December it was revealed that Farook was radicalized *before* he first corresponded with Malik.

Effect on U.S. Immigration Policy

The U.S. Government vetted Malik when she applied for a fiancée visa to enter the USA. The U.S. Government granted the visa and later granted a permanent resident status ("green card") to her. [NBC News](#); [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#). This shows that an Islamic immigrant can commit a terrorist act *after* having been successfully vetted by the U.S. Government. Even if the vetting were perfect, it is always possible that an Islamic immigrant can become radicalized later.

In my essay for [November 2015](#), I noted that the 13 Nov 2015 Islamic attack in Paris had "had a profound effect on politics in the USA." The Islamic attack in San Bernardino on 2 December, showed that the U.S. vetting of immigrants was *not* adequate to prevent terrorists attacks by those immigrants. As a result of the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, it is going to be much more difficult for Obama and Kerry to admit refugees from Syria and Iraq into the USA.

[New America](#) compiled statistics of murders in the USA since 11 Sep 2001 by (1) Muslim extremists and (2) non-Muslim extremists (e.g., antigovernment, white supremacists, etc.). See reports in *The New York Times* for [5 Dec](#) and San Bernardino [special](#). The statistics show 45 killed by Muslim extremists and 48 killed by non-Muslim extremists. The 5 Dec *Times* article seems to shrug its shoulders with indifference, comparing 45 or 48 to the more than 200,000 murders in the USA during the same time. But why start the statistics *after* 11 Sep 2001? I suggest starting at 1 Jan 2001, and give the Muslim extremists credit for the approximately 2977 dead on 11 Sep 2001. [CNN](#).

Furthermore, note that that most of the 320 million people in the USA are Christian, with only approximately 3 million Muslims. If we accept New America's ignoring the massacre on 11 Sep 2001, then, on a per capita basis, the death rate from terror attacks in the USA is approximately 100 times greater for Islamic terrorism than other terrorism. If we include the Sep 2001 attacks, the death rate from terror attacks in the USA is approximately 6000 times greater for Islamic terrorism than other terrorism.

Islamic terrorism — the use of an extreme version of Islam to justify killing innocent people — is a serious problem in the USA and Western Europe. To be clear, I emphasize that such terrorism is distinct from mainstream Islam, with the exception that a tiny fraction of mainstream Muslims have been radicalized into committing Islamic terrorism. [Above](#), I urge that both Islamic clerics and Islamic opinion leaders continually oppose the ideology of Islamic terrorism. Indeed, Islamic terrorism is a bigger problem for mainstream Muslims living in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq than for Christians living in Western Europe or the USA.

Sources

- "The Latest: California county to close most offices for week," [Associated Press](#) (blog), final at 02:45 EST, 3 Dec 2015.

"14 dead, 17 wounded in California shooting; 2 suspects dead," [Associated Press](#), 03:12 EST, 3 Dec 2015.

- "12 pipe bombs, 4,500 bullets found at San Bernardino mass shooters' Redlands home," [San Bernardino Sun](#), 12:45 PST, 3 Dec 2015. (Other sources report 3000 cartridges in the home plus 1600 cartridges in SUV.)
- "Authorities pick through suspects' path: Marriage, baby and then bloodshed," [Washington Post](#), 3 Dec 2015. (mentions Farook's salary)
- "San Bernardino killers erased digital presence day before the attacks," [Washington Times](#), 3 Dec 2015.
- "The Latest: Thousands gather for vigil for California dead," [Associated Press](#) (blog), final at 02:10 EST, 4 Dec 2015.
- "San Bernardino shooting investigated as 'act of terrorism'," [CNN](#), 4 Dec 2015. (early report that Malik pledged allegiance to ISIL)
- "San Bernardino massacre probed as terrorism, FBI says," [Los Angeles Times](#), 14:17 PST, 4 Dec 2015. (Tashfeen Malik wore a niqab.)
- "The Latest: UPS center near shootings evacuated over package," [Associated Press](#) (blog), final at 02:06 EST, 5 Dec 2015.
- "Woman in deadly California rampage had become more devout," [Associated Press](#), 19:29 EST, 5 Dec 2015. (speculation that Malik may have radicalized Farook)
- "The Latest: New information emerges on raided home," [Associated Press](#) (blog), final at 20:28 EST, 5 Dec 2015.
- "Tashfeen Malik Eyed as Possible Mastermind of San Bernardino Shooting," [ABC News](#), 05:55 EST, 6 Dec 2015.
- "The hatred more powerful than a mother's love," [Sunday Times](#) in England, 6 Dec 2015. (Malik fired first at the banquet, while Farook "hesitated" to shoot.)
- "San Bernardino shooter's dad: He was 'obsessed' with Israel," [Times of Israel](#), 13:15 GMT, 6 Dec 2015. (Reports interview of Farook's father by Italian newspaper, *La Stampa*, in which the younger Farook said he "shared [IS leader Abu Bakr] Al Baghdadi's ideology and supported the creation of the Islamic State.")
- "San Bernardino mourns its dead, calls for unity, not rancor," [Associated Press](#), 20:39 EST, 6 Dec 2015. (previously titled: "The Latest: Investigators: Wife may have been driving force in rampage".)
- "The Latest: No immediate decision on shooters' baby custody," [Associated Press](#)

(blog), final at 20:28 EST, 7 Dec 2015. (at 12:20 PST: "David Bowdich, assistant director of the FBI's Los Angeles office, said ... that Syed Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, participated in target practice at ranges in the Los Angeles area. [Bowdich] says the bureau believes both were radicalized and had been 'for some time.' He says the bureau doesn't know when or how they were radicalized.")

- "FBI: Killers had been radicalized 'for quite some time'," [Associated Press](#), 23:17 EST, 7 Dec 2015.
- "Bank records show \$28,500 deposit to Syed Farook's account two weeks before the shooting, source says," [Fox News](#), 8 Dec 2015. (The \$28,500 was a loan from a bank.)
- "The Latest: Officer describes taking bullet after killings," [Associated Press](#) (blog), final at 21:30 EST, 8 Dec 2015.
- "The Latest: California shooter, man who bought guns related," [Associated Press](#) (blog), final at 19:22 EST, 9 Dec 2015.
- "California shooters discussed martyrdom before meeting - FBI," [Reuters](#), 21:18 EST, 9 Dec 2015. (FBI Director: "... as early as the end of 2013 they were talking to each other about jihad and martyrdom before they became engaged.")
- "FBI: California shooters radicalized at least 2 years ago," [Associated Press](#), 22:09 EST, 9 Dec 2015. ("... the FBI now believes that Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, embraced radical Islamic ideology even before they had begun their online relationship and that Malik held extremist views before she arrived in the U.S. last year...." "The latest disclosure also suggests that the government's vetting process failed to detect Malik's radicalization when she applied for the visa,....")
- "San Bernardino Suspects Spoke of Earlier Attack, F.B.I. Says," [NY Times](#), 9 Dec 2015. (Farook canceled an attack in 2012. Farook and Malik exchanged messages in 2013 about a terrorist attack. Malik arrived in the USA in July 2014.)
- "The Latest: Mother of gun buyer says he's a good person," [Associated Press](#) (blog), final at 19:11 EST, 10 Dec 2015.
- "Divers search lake for evidence in Southern California massacre," [Reuters](#), 11:58 EST, 11 Dec 2015. ("U.S. government sources told Reuters on Thursday [10 Dec] that Malik tried in vain to contact multiple Islamic militant groups in the months before she and Farook staged their attack, but her overtures were ignored. While [ISIL] has since embraced the couple as among its followers, U.S. government sources have said there was no evidence Islamic State even knew of the couple before the San Bernardino killings.")
- "Radioactive radical: Body of San Bernardino jihadist bride unclaimed," [Fox News](#), 11 Dec 2015. (Significant news begins to diminish, as journalists report — falsely — Malik will be cremated, as the cheapest disposition of her unwanted corpse.)

- "Everything we know about the San Bernardino terror attack investigation so far," [LA Times](#), 19:03 EST, 14 Dec 2015.
- "FBI: Calif. shooters privately discussed commitment to jihad," [Associated Press](#), 15:00 EST, 16 Dec 2015.
- "Exclusive: San Bernardino shooters buried in quiet funeral following Islamic rituals," [Reuters](#), 10:54 EST, 17 Dec 2015. (Farook and Malik buried in private ceremony at cemetery in southern California on 15 Dec.)

Multi-day blogs of current news

- "San Bernardino shooting — live" [The Telegraph](#) in England, blog begins at 19:40 GMT (11:40 PST) on 2 Dec and continues to 6 Dec 2015.
- "San Bernardino shooting live updates," [Los Angeles Times](#), blog begins at 16:19 PST on 2 Dec and continues to 11:00 PST on 9 Dec 2015.
- "Full Coverage San Bernardino terror attack," [Los Angeles Times](#), (annotated list of *Los Angeles Times* articles)
- "What Investigators Know About the San Bernardino Shooting," [New York Times](#), last updated 7 Dec 2015. Annotated [list](#) of articles in the *The New York Times*.
- "All the latest developments related to the San Bernardino shooting," [Riverside Press Enterprise](#). Alternative link to "2015 Archive Stories Inland Regional Center," [Press Enterprise](#).

Conclusions

I still agree with what I said in my Conclusion to my [eighth essay](#) on Syria that was written during June 2014.

The capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL on 10 June 2014 — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — changed the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.

Western View of Insurgency in Syria *Before 10 June 2014*

Before 10 June 2014, the conventional wisdom in the London11 nations — including the USA — was that Assad was Evil, and the removal of Assad was the Nr. 1 goal in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition has a consistent and intransigent demand that Assad resign. The intransigence of the Syrian National Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Kerry, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian

government.

Obama's foreign policy on Syria is essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. (See my [document](#) that collects quotations from Obama and two U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and John Kerry.) When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012 or 2013, Obama's foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality.

One can summarize a series of events that exposed the futility of the plans of the London11 group of nations and the United Nations negotiations in Geneva:

1. The reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, Assad is winning the civil war in heavily populated western Syria, and the insurgents are unable to force Assad to resign.
2. Assad did *not* resign, and the Geneva peace negotiations ended in failure on 15 Feb 2014. The Coalition's intransigent demand that Assad resign, and Assad's insistence on remaining in power, are *impossible* for compromise.
3. Not only are there no plans to resume Syrian peace negotiations in the foreseeable future, but also the United Nations negotiator (Brahimi) resigned in frustration on 13 May 2014.
4. Assad was re-elected for another seven-year term on 3 June 2014.
5. It is now obvious that neither side in the Geneva negotiations genuinely wanted to negotiate. The U.S. Government essentially forced the Coalition to attend the Geneva negotiations, and Russia forced Assad's government to attend.

Not all of these facts or events were known on 15 Feb 2014, when the Geneva negotiations ended. But all of these facts are known at the end of June 2014, and were documented in my previous essays. A more detailed analysis of the failure of the Geneva negotiations is found in my separate [review](#). I suggest that the London11 group of nations — and the Syrian National Coalition — were so obsessed with deposing Assad that they did not recognize that their demand that Assad resign would cause the Geneva2 negotiations to fail. Not only was much diplomatic effort and expense wasted on Geneva2, but also the frustration caused the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resign on 13 May 2014.

Western View of Insurgency in Syria After 10 June 2014

After the capture of Mosul by ISIL on 10 June 2014, it was obvious that the big enemy in Iraq was ISIL. Because ISIL actively operated in *both* Syria and Iraq, the problems in the two nations were suddenly recognized to be intertwined. The U.S. Government's view was that terrorists in Syria had spilled into Iraq. The Truth is that ISIL was created in Iraq in 2004 under the name "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" and entered Syria in May 2013, when these terrorists took the name "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL).

An important point to recognize is that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL) was essentially defeated when the USA pulled its combat troops out of Iraq in Dec 2011. The weak and ineffective government of Maliki in Iraq allowed ISIL to capture much of western and northern Iraq from January 2014 through June 2014. There is an obvious lesson here. If the weak and ineffective Syrian National Coalition were to control Syria, ISIL would exploit that weakness. The result would be that ISIL would quickly seize control of Syria. In other words, we *need* a strong, decisive, experienced leader (e.g., Assad) in control of Syria, to limit the expansion of terrorists like ISIL, because ISIL is worse than Assad.

My conclusions for [August 2014](#) through [June 2015](#) contained a list of citations to some commentators who recognized that we should be cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL and other terrorist organizations. In the interest of brevity, I have deleted those citations from current and future essays.

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

Conclusion for Syria

Obama needs to end his obsession with deposing Assad, and begin coordinating with Assad a strategy to defeat ISIL in both Syria and Iraq. It's past time for Obama to get with the program of defeating terrorism.

The refusal of Obama to cooperate with Assad has multiple disadvantages for the USA:

1. any U.S. airstrikes in Syria would be an illegal aggression against Syria.
2. unnecessary risks to U.S. pilots from Syrian anti-aircraft fire or Syrian fighter jets.
3. U.S. airstrikes will be less effective without Syrian intelligence on the ground
4. the airstrikes need to be coordinated with army action on the ground, and Assad has the best army in Syria (with the possible exception of ISIL).
5. it will be at least a year before we can train 5000 moderate Syrian rebels, while we would not need to train Assad's army — so we can attack ISIL in Syria sooner if we partner with Assad instead of the rebels.
6. helps Islamic terrorists defeat Assad, which is bad, because Assad is both the strongest and most experienced leader of Syria, and the only plausible secular leader of Syria (without Assad, Islamic extremists would likely be controlling Syria).

Assad's military is currently stretched thin by fighting against the jihadists in the Islamic Front, against Al-Qaeda (i.e., Nusra Front), and against ISIL. It is conceivable that Islamic terrorists could eventually defeat Assad. Having Syria under the control of Islamic terrorists would be a much worse outcome for not only Syria, but also for surrounding nations. That is another reason why Obama should cooperate with Assad to defeat ISIL.

Here is how Obama painted himself into a corner. ISIL has been in Syria since May 2013, with an increasing number of atrocities committed by ISIL. ISIL began to invade Iraq in Jan 2014. Obama ignored the ISIL problem in both Syria and Iraq. But, on 7 Aug 2014, — after ISIL threatened genocide of the Yazidis — Obama decided to help defeat ISIL in Iraq, by ordering airstrikes in Iraq. But eastern Syria is now a safe haven for ISIL, so Obama realized sometime around 21 Aug that ISIL would *also* need to be defeated in Syria. The logical plan would be for Obama to call Assad on the telephone and begin to arrange cooperation between the Syrian military and U.S. Military on defeating ISIL in Syria. But Obama will *not* do that, because of Obama's obsession with deposing Assad. As a result of the failure to cooperate with Assad, Obama's military campaign in Syria will be less effective, as explained in the previous paragraphs. Ironically, *both* Assad *and* Obama need help from each other, but Obama is too stubborn to ask Assad, and it would be futile for Assad to ask Obama for help in defeating ISIL.

However, even *if* the U.S. Government were to support Assad's fight against terrorism, and *if* the moderate rebels rejoin the Syrian army, it will be a tough job to defeat the jihadists and Al-Qaeda in Syria. The third U.N. envoy for Syria, de Mistura, proposed a freeze in Aleppo that was rejected by the Syrian National Coalition and the insurgents. As of 31 December 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 planed 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/syria28.pdf>
begun 1 Dec 2015, last modified 4 Jan 2016.

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

[my homepage](#)