

Syria & Iraq: January 2016

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Table of Contents

1. Chemical Weapons

OPCW fact-finding missions (FFM) in Syria

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

ISIL used mustard in Iraq (11 Aug)

2. Syria

United Nations Diverted from Syria

death toll in Syria now over 266,600 (31 Jan)

U.S. troops in Syria

Free Syrian Army is Leaderless since June 2015

We need to support the Kurds in Syria

Turkey begins to fight against ISIL (24 July 2015)

Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

Peace Negotiations for Syria

ISSG meetings

SNC fading?

Peace Conference in Geneva

de Mistura postpones negotiations to 29 January

Geneva talks begin (29 Jan)

U.N. Report by Secretary General

3. Iraq

Atrocities in Iraq

No Criminal Prosecution of Iraqi Army Officers

No Prosecution for Fall of Mosul

No Prosecution for Rout at Ramadi

No Criminal Prosecution for Employing "Ghost Soldiers"

Iraq is a failed nation

4. Islamic public relations problem

my proposal

Need to kill ideology of Islamic terrorism

5. ISIL is *not* defeated

cost of U.S. war against ISIL

6. [Daily News](#) about Syria & Iraq
 - ISIL abducted [Christians](#) in Syria
 - Iraqi army intends to liberate [Anbar](#) province
 - Iraq begins liberation of [Ramadi](#) on 22 Dec 2015
 - Iraq to liberate [Fallujah](#) sometime (begins 12 June 2015)
 - Abadi wants to liberate [Mosul](#) too! (begins 1 June 2015)
 - Anti-ISIL Coalition Meeting in [Paris](#) (20 Jan 2016)
 - [Russian](#) airstrikes in Syria
 7. U.S.-led Coalition [Airstrikes](#) in Iraq & Syria
 - airstrike in Mosul destroys ISIL [cash](#) (11 Jan)
 8. Islamic terrorism and migration in [Europe](#)
 - Islamic attacks in [Paris](#) (13 Nov)
 - Muslim immigrants run amok in [Cologne](#), Germany (31 Dec)
 - Terror Attack in [Paris](#) (7 Jan)
 - Attack in [Marseille](#) (11 Jan)
 9. [Conclusions](#)
-

Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 26 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 essays for [November 2015](#) and [December 2015](#) mention three new reports from the OPCW fact-finding mission in Syria. These three reports were attached to the OPCW monthly report for November.

OPCW Fact-Finding Missions in Syria

On 4 January 2016, [Reuters](#) reports that the December 2015 monthly report from OPCW to the United Nations mentions Assad's government asked OPCW to investigate 11 alleged uses of chemical weapons in Syria. OPCW concluded "In one instance, analysis of some blood samples indicates that individuals were at some point exposed to sarin or a sarin-like substance." The December 2015 OPCW monthly report is in the United Nations Security Council document S/2015/1049 and the relevant material is on page 6 of 6.

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, and also during January 2016, journalists ignored the use of chemical weapons in Iraq, as journalists concentrated on Syrian peace negotiations that were scheduled to begin on 25 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 14 Jan 2016 was only 11,300.

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](#).
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Deaths in Syria

On 1 Feb 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll of people killed during January 2016.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 4680 people in January 2016. The death toll is as follows:

- 1345 civilians, including 295 children and 190 women.
- Syrian fighters of YPG, Rebel and Islamist factions: 603.
- Non-Syrian fighters of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaysh al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army and the Islamist factions: 1080.
- Defected soldiers: 4.
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 735.
- Militiamen of the People's Committees and NDF as well as informers: 752.
- Hezbollah militiamen: 9.
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 103.
- Unidentified victims: 49.

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 800 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.

"About 4700 people killed in January, 2016," [SOHR](#), 1 Feb 2016. [Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of death tolls announced by SOHR, beginning 31 Aug 2013. The total number of people who have died during the Syria civil war that began in March 2011 is now *more than* 266,600.

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 2015, the SNC extended the task to create a new FSA High Military Command for "another two months". [SNC](#) On 25 August 2015, the SNC announced it "is finalizing new plans for forming a new FSA High Military Command." [SNC](#).

On 1 Feb 2016, 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 7 months to choose a leader for the Free Syrian Army, during an existential war.

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. In mid-2015, Turkey began training Sunni fighters in Nineveh province. 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. My essay for [December 2015](#) reports that the Iraqi government and Shiite militias were hysterically screaming about alleged violations of Iraqi sovereignty by Turkey. The Shiites oppose training Sunni fighters, in a continuation of long-standing sectarianism in Iraq.

On 22 January 2016, Abadi was continuing to demand that Turkey remove their combat troops from Iraq. [Associated Press](#).

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.

On 22 January 2016, [Reuters](#) reports the U.S. Secretary of Defense publicly said: "the reality is [Turkey] shares a big border with Iraq and Syria, which border has been porous to foreign fighters going in both directions and I think the Turks could do more."

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 2015, 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.

January 2016

On 19 January 2016, both the *Associated Press* and *The Washington Post* explained that Assad's recent successes on the battlefield made it unlikely that Assad would offer concessions during scheduled peace negotiations in Geneva, as explained [below](#).

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](#).)

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 Working Groups inside Syria to specify details of a political solution. Finally, on 22 September 2015, de Mistura announced that the U.N. Secretary General had appointed leaders of the four working groups. For details, see my essay for [September 2015](#). However, these working groups never met.

ISSG Meetings

On 23 October 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, 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).

On 18 December 2015, there was a third meeting of the ISSG in New York City, followed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. (See my essay for [December 2015](#).)

On 6 January 2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported on an internal U.S. Government memorandum that "sets a date of March 2017 for Assad to 'relinquish' his position as president and for his 'inner circle' to depart." The AP also reports: "One official, who like the others spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private document, said the goal for Assad to leave in March 2017 might slip even further." However, the U.S. State Department Spokesman, John Kirby, [said](#) the document "was a preliminary pre-decisional document, a working-level, staff-level document that sort of laid out a potential way forward for the political process,...." Later in the press briefing, Mr. Kirby said: The document "does not represent official U.S. policy."

On 12 January, *The Independent* in London reported that Cameron, the British prime minister, admitted there are "not enough moderate fighters" in Syria:

David Cameron has admitted that “there aren’t enough” moderate Syrian fighters to defeat Isis yet and conceded some of the rebels belong to “relatively hardline Islamist groups”.

....

... during his appearance before the Liaison Committee — the group of 32 Select Committee chairs — Mr Cameron said: “Are all of these people impeccable democrats who would share the view of democracy that you and I have? No, some of them do belong to Islamist groups and some of them belong to relatively hardline Islamist groups but nonetheless that’s the best estimate of the people that we have potentially to work with.

....

[Cameron] added: “I would agree with all those assessments but the point I would make is: Is there a third way between a Daesh-style state and President Assad the butcher remaining in charge of his country?

“My answer is there has to be a third way, we have to find a third way, it should involve, of course, people [like] Alawites, perhaps even who’ve taken part in the state run by Assad — we don’t want to dismantle that.”

Matt Dathan, "Syria air strikes: David Cameron admits 'there aren't enough' moderate fighters on the ground and some are 'hardline'," [The Independent](#), 17:40 GMT, 12 Jan 2016.

In my opinion, Cameron's admission is critically important. Obama and European leaders have condemned Assad, but without clearly specifying who would be better than Assad. Daesh (i.e., ISIL) is obviously worse than Assad. Nusra Front (i.e., Al-Qaeda in Syria) is only marginally better than ISIL. The various Islamists and jihadists are worse than Assad, who leads a secular government. Now Cameron admits the moderate rebels are too few to defeat ISIL and Nusra. The removal of Assad — advocated by Obama and European leaders — could easily lead to a takeover of Syria by ISIL and Nusra. Given this reality, should the foreign meddlers continue to insist that Assad must depart? Note that Cameron did *not* specify the "third way", a way other than either Assad or ISIL in charge of Syria.

British journalists (e.g., [The Independent](#), quoted above; [The Telegraph](#); [Daily Mail](#)) focused on Cameron's 30 Nov 2015 estimate that the moderate rebels had 70,000 fighters. That estimate is now admitted to be erroneously high. But I think the real issue is that Assad is the least worst ruler of Syria.

On 25 January 2016, John Kerry said there will be a fourth ISSG meeting that is tentatively scheduled for 11 Feb. [U.S. State Dept.](#) At that fourth ISSG meeting, various nations will decide how to salvage the Geneva negotiations after the Syrians belligerently misbehave in Geneva. But on 25 January, de Mistura said that the initial Intra-Syrian talks in Geneva "should be lasting between two and three weeks", which means the initial talks might end between 12 and 19 February. It would seem desirable to schedule the fourth ISSG meeting *after* the initial talks in Geneva have ended.

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 Conference in Geneva

On 26 December 2015, de Mistura announced he would convene negotiations in Geneva between Assad's government and the insurgents on 25 Jan 2016. [U.N. News](#).

On 2 Jan 2016, the Syrian National Coalition posted a press release. I quote the entire press release:

Riad Hijab, general coordinator of the Supreme Negotiations Committee, said that the Assad regime is ineligible to sit at the negotiating table as it barely controls 18% of Syrian territory. "The only Syrian province that remains under the Assad regime's full control is Tartous," Hijab stated.

Hijab added that the Assad regime has lost control of all the roads that link Syria to neighboring countries as well as of almost all border crossings.

"Moreover, the Assad regime controls only 8% of the oil and gas fields in Syria. I, therefore, wonder how we will negotiate with a regime that has lost control over its resources and assets," he said.

"Hijab: Assad Regime Ineligible to Negotiate With," [SNC](#), 2 Jan 2016.

My comment is that Hijab is being ridiculous. Assad obviously controls a military that is bombing and shelling insurgents, as well as blocking delivery of humanitarian aid. Negotiations between Assad's government and the insurgents (so-called opposition) are *necessary* to end the civil war, as it appears that neither side can win militarily.

On 4 January 2016, [Reuters](#) reports the Syrian opposition is demanding that Assad provide "confidence building measures" (e.g., release of political prisoners, stopping bombing of towns by airplanes, lifting blockages on rebel-held towns) *before* any negotiations begin. Reuters wryly says "a demand [for prisoner release] could complicate efforts to start the talks."

Riad Hijab, General Coordinator of the Supreme Commission for Negotiations, issued a press release that summarized the 3-4 Jan meetings of the Commission:

The Commission members also agreed on the urgency for total adherence to Articles (12) and (13) of Security Council resolution 2254 before embarking on further preparations for the negotiating process; in particular,

- lifting the siege imposed on cities and besieged regions in order to enable humanitarian agencies access to deliver aid to all those in need,
- releasing all unlawfully imprisoned detainees,
- the cessation of aerial and artillery bombardment of civilians and civilian targets,
- for all parties to immediately honour their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law,
- and other goodwill and confidence-building measures with which negotiations may be possible.

....

Dr. Hijab stressed that selecting the negotiating team comes as part of the Syrian opposition's keenness to cooperate with international efforts to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria; but he also stressed that this cooperation is most certainly not a *carte blanche* for the regime and its allies to continue committing crimes against the Syrian people in repeated violations of international law. Indeed, Security Council resolution 2254 has many loopholes, cynically used by the regime and their allies to continue their violently belligerent agenda in total disregard for any political process.

With the continued indiscriminate shelling of civilians, the insistence of some to conveniently and unjustly classify opposition groups as terrorists, and attempts by the regime and its allies to determine selection of opposition delegation, it is no wonder that Dr Hijab questioned the feasibility of this negotiating process. He pointed out that the Security Council resolution in New York intended to defer disagreement amongst international powers, without attempting to engage with or resolve such disagreements. Dr Hijab warned of the risks of prolonging the crisis and responding to the attempts by the regime and its allies to disrupt the political process through protracted negotiations whilst the regime continues its systematic bombardment and killing.

Riad Hijab, "Syrian Supreme Commission for Negotiations Communiqué," [PRnewswire](#), 4 Jan 2016. [Indented list formatting added by Standler.]

The origin of these demands is clear. They were contained in Kofi Annan's — the first U.N. Special Envoy to Syria — six-point proposal that is endorsed in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2042 (14 April 2012), see points 2-4 of Annan's proposal.

These demands appear again in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012, ¶5.

Most recently, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (18 Dec 2015) in ¶10 specifically calls for "confidence-building measures", *and* reiterates the U.N. approval of the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012.

By including a list of desirable goals, diplomats created a way for the Syrian opposition to scuttle negotiations, by making the desirable goals into preconditions for negotiations. Instead, diplomats *should* have brought the parties to a negotiating table, and let Assad's government and the Syrian opposition create their own goals and confidence-building measures. The number one goal here is to begin negotiations, *not* to impose confidence-building measures created by foreign meddlers. I say "impose ... by foreign meddlers" because *no* one who represented Syria attended the one-day meeting on 30 June 2012 that produced the Geneva Communiqué.

Note that the Syrian opposition's demands only affect Assad's government. There is *no* promise by the Free Syrian Army to stop firing mortar and artillery shells at Syrian cities. There is *no* promise by the Free Syrian Army to allow humanitarian aid to cities controlled by Assad's government. In negotiations, generally *both* parties do something — for example, the Syrian opposition stops fighting *and* Assad's army stops fighting. Given the disorganization and fragmentation of the Free Syrian Army, it would be useful to demonstrate that those rebels will obey a ceasefire that is declared by the negotiators. The need for such a demonstration comes from the negotiations in Geneva on 26 Jan 2014, when negotiators agreed on delivery of humanitarian aid to Homs, but delivery did not occur until 8 Feb 2014, and the ceasefire was repeatedly violated.

Hijab met with de Mistura in Saudi Arabia on 5 Jan 2016. [Reuters](#). On 8 Jan, Reuters reported:

Syrian rebels said President Bashar al-Assad's opponents are under international pressure to make concessions that would prolong the conflict, underscoring their doubts about a new U.N.-led drive for peace talks planned to begin this month.

An opposition council that met U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura this week was under pressure "to offer concessions that will prolong the suffering of our people and the spilling of their blood", a statement signed by prominent rebel groups said.

....

The rebels, including groups represented in the council, said they would not accept any concessions that run counter to "the principles of our revolution" and condemned what it called international connivance "against the revolution".

Opposition leaders told de Mistura the government must take goodwill steps before any negotiations by halting bombardments of civilian areas, lifting blockades of rebel-held areas and releasing detainees. They are waiting to hear back from him.

Tom Perry, "Syria rebels warns U.N. 'pressure' will prolong war," [Reuters](#), 13:39 GMT, 8 Jan 2016.

On 10 January at 21:00 GMT, I searched Google News and prnewswire.com for the 8 Jan statement mentioned by Reuters, but I did not find it.

In contrast to the obstructionist demands of the opposition, Assad's government is ready to attend negotiations in Geneva. On 9 Jan, the Syrian foreign minister requested a list of the opposition delegates and a list of terrorist groups. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

On 11 January — two weeks before the scheduled start of negotiations in Geneva — Reuters reported the opposition was unwilling to negotiate:

Syria's opposition co-ordinator Riad Hijab accused Russia of killing dozens of children after a bombing raid on Monday [11 Jan] and said such action meant the opposition could not negotiate with President Bashar al-Assad's government.

....

"We want to negotiate, but to do that the conditions have to be there," Hijab told reporters. "We cannot negotiate with the regime when there are foreign forces bombing the Syrian people."

....

Peace talks are scheduled to be held between the government and opposition on Jan. 25 under the auspices of the United Nations. However, opposition officials have already cast doubt on whether the talks will go ahead on schedule, citing a need to see goodwill measures from the government side.

John Irish, "Syrian opposition casts doubt on peace talks after Russian bombing," [Reuters](#), 17:29 GMT, 11 Jan 2016.

When Hijab says "We want to negotiate, but" what he really means is "we demand total victory over Assad the butcher and his foreign invaders." On 4 January, Hijab had three pre-conditions that Assad must satisfy *before* the opposition would meet in Geneva:

- release of Assad's political prisoners,
- stopping bombardment of towns by airplanes and Assad's artillery, and
- lifting siege on rebel-held towns.

Each of these three pre-conditions would kill negotiations.

Besieging Cities in Syria

On 4 January, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Assad's army had besieged the town of Madaya for 174 days, and the approximately 40,000 civilians there were at risk of starvation. [SOHR](#). On 11 January, Assad finally allowed the United Nations to send humanitarian aid into Madaya, after more than two dozen people had died of starvation. In addition, the United Nations also delivered humanitarian aid to Foua and Kfarya, which were under siege by rebel groups. [U.N.](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Journalists emphasize the atrocities of the starvation siege of Madaya, without mentioning the urgent need to convene negotiations in Geneva and *end* the civil war, including ending the siege of cities

and stopping attacks on civilians.

On 14 January 2016, Ban ki-Moon, the Secretary of General of the United Nations, declared: "Let me be clear: the use of starvation as a weapon of war is a war crime." [U.N. SecGen](#); [U.N. News](#); [Reuters](#) (32 deaths in Madaya during past 30 days); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). While, Ban is correct, I suggest that the emphasis should be on getting relevant parties to attend a peace conference, then ending the civil war, including stopping besieging cities. Empty threats about future prosecution for war crimes does *not* encourage people to negotiate. And the threats are empty, because the International Criminal Court does *not* have jurisdiction over Syria, as explained in my essay for [April 2015](#).

On 14 January, the UK, France, and the USA requested an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council tomorrow to discuss pressuring *both* Assad *and* rebels into ending sieges of all towns in Syria. [Associated Press](#).

At the Security Council meeting on 15 January, Russia "accused [Britain, France and the U.S.A.] of 'double standards' by focusing on the suffering in Madaya, a rebel-held town besieged by Syria's government, while minimizing suffering in towns under siege by rebels." [Associated Press](#). Western nations focus on Madaya, because there are more deaths from starvation there. But, in my opinion, Russia has a good point: the United Nations should be demanding an end to besieging by *both* Assad *and* the rebels.

At the Security Council meeting on 15 January, Syria's position was an embarrassing retreat from reality. [Reuters](#) reports that Syria asserted: "no one cares more about the Syrian people than President Bashar al-Assad's government". Meanwhile, Médecins Sans Fronti res [confirmed](#) 35 deaths in Madaya. Apparently, the Security Council took no action on 15 January.

On 27 January, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the number of besieged cities in Syria had increased from 15 earlier in January to 18.

Continuing Towards Peace Conference in Geneva

On 13 January, Hijab — with the grandiose title of "former Syrian Prime Minister and General Coordinator of the Supreme Commission for Negotiations" — met with the German foreign minister Steinmeier, then Hijab issued a press release that said in part:

... [Hijab] affirmed the opposition's readiness to: participate in the political process leading to the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive authority, the establishment of a pluralistic system which is representative and inclusive of all Syrian people; Bashar al-Assad and his regime will not be part of any future political arrangements.

....

Dr. Hijab added: "I stressed to Dr. Steinmeier the need for securing the right conditions for the start of negotiations, and in particular: pressing foreign forces in Syria to a

ceasefire and committing to articles (12) and (13) of UNSCR 2254, including lifting the siege imposed on cities to enable humanitarian agencies to deliver aid to all those in need, the release of all detainees, ceasing aerial shelling and artillery attacks against civilians and civilian targets, followed by other good will and confidence-building measures."

Dr. Hijab confirmed that the Supreme Commission for Negotiations believes in the need to separate the humanitarian track which all parties must unconditionally adhere to in accordance with binding UN resolutions, and the political track, which must be pursued by convincing the regime's allies to cease combat and withdraw foreign militias and mercenaries in urgent adherence to international law which prohibits bombing populated areas. This is no longer in the hands of the regime as it has lost its sovereign decision-making ability, and hence, it is futile to negotiate with its representatives.

Dr. Hijab added: "I expressed my doubts to Dr. Steinmeier of the feasibility of negotiating with a regime that has lost its sovereignty, its presence has diminished to 18 percent of the Syrian territory, it has lost control of most border crossings and supply and transportation routes, and half of the Syrian population lives outside its control; all this, while foreign forces and cross-border militias fight on its behalf." Dr. Hijab reiterated the need for the international community's support in reaching an agreement with the various regional and international parties for a cease-fire, and for the delivery of aid to affected areas, where some five million Syrian refugees take shelter in neighbouring countries, and about 6 million Syrians are displaced living in areas outside the control of the regime.

"Riad Hijab Meets German Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier," PRnewswire.com, 13 Jan 2016.

The actual name of Hijab's Commission is in the Arabic language, and there are various translations to English, including "High(er) Negotiations Commission (or Committee)". Because the press releases from Hijab's Commission call it the "Supreme Negotiations Commission", that is the translation that I use.

Also on 13 January, the Associated Press reported a related development:

Rebel groups in Syria say they are rejecting peace talks in Geneva later this month unless humanitarian conditions mentioned in a U.N. resolution are fulfilled.

In a statement Wednesday [13 Jan], the Free Syrian Army and 33 other factions and rebel groups — including the powerful Army of Islam — say the humanitarian clauses specified in the resolution must be met.

Unless this happens, the statement says: "We reject going ahead with any negotiations."

Zeina Karam, "Syrian rebels: No talks unless humanitarian conditions met," Associated Press, 13:36 EST, 13 Jan 2016.

Reuters reports the same demands by the rebel fighters. Later on 13 Jan 2016, Reuters reports de Mistura believes Assad can be convinced to allow humanitarian access, so that the

negotiations will begin as scheduled on 25 January. My comment is that while de Mistura may have a thin grasp on reality, that is necessary for him to do his impossible job. Someone who who has a firm grip on reality would realize that this Syrian peacemaking job is impossible, and then quit, like Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi.

Hijab's argument seems to say that when Assad invited Russia to bomb Syrian cities, Assad abandoned sovereign rule over Syria. This is nonsense. If Assad were to ask the Russians to stop bombing Syrian cities, the Russians would surely obey. The Russians are *not* invaders, the Russians are there at the invitation of the lawful government of Syria.

As for the argument about Assad denying humanitarian aid to Syrian cities, the United Nations Secretary General's monthly reports on Syria clearly say that *both* Assad *and* the rebels are besieging cities in Syria. Admittedly, Assad is besieging more than the rebels, but that is only because Assad has a bigger military than the rebels. The problems with delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria emphasize the need for negotiations that lead to an end of the civil war. The current problems with delivery of humanitarian aid are *not* a legitimate reason to refuse to negotiate.

On 14 January — 11 days before the negotiations are scheduled to begin in Geneva — [Reuters](#) has a headline that says in part "doubts cast on peace talks". Reuters reported: George Sabra, "a prominent member of the political opposition to President Bashar al-Assad[,] told Reuters that [25 Jan] was unrealistic, reiterating opposition demands for the lifting of sieges, a ceasefire and the release of detainees before negotiations."

Note that the United Nations is working on *only one* of the at least three preconditions demanded by the Syrian opposition: ending sieges. I say "at least", because some statements by the opposition seem to also demand that foreign fighters (e.g., Russia, Hezbollah) depart from Syria, or that Assad resign.

On 18 January — 7 days before the negotiations are scheduled to begin in Geneva — there was still *no agreement* on the list of opposition groups that de Mistura would invite to Geneva. The Associated Press reports: "Diplomats and observers say one dispute is over the groups Ahrar-as-Sham and Jaish al-Islam which Russia and Syria consider 'terrorists' but Saudi Arabia, the United States and others view as legitimate opposition groups." The United Nations in New York City still believes the negotiations in Geneva will begin, as scheduled, on 25 Jan. [U.N. DPB](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Note that de Mistura — *not* Hijab's Supreme Commission for Negotiations — determines who will represent the opposition at the negotiations in Geneva.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, at page 2, specifically says: "Bearing in mind the goal to bring together the broadest possible spectrum of the opposition, chosen by Syrians, ... and looking forward to the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria finalizing efforts to this end". This gives de Mistura authority to determine who represents the opposition at the Geneva negotiations.

On 19 January, [Reuters](#) reports that the Saudi Arabian foreign minister objected to the United Nations deciding who represents the Syrian opposition in Geneva: "The Syrian opposition is

the party which decides who represents it in the talks, and the higher committee that emerged from the Riyadh conference is the concerned party and they are the ones who decide who represents them in the talks."

The Saudi government hosted the conference that created Hijab's Supreme Commission for Negotiations on 10 Dec 2015, so one would expect the Saudi government to defend the group. I think the Saudi government has a good point that each side in a negotiation should choose their own delegates. But Hijab's Supreme Commission for Negotiations has been spewing demands and preconditions since it was created, conduct that will scuttle the negotiations. In my opinion, Hijab's delegation is *defective* and unacceptable, because of their demands and preconditions. Moreover, Hijab's committee fails to include *all* of the major Syrian groups. For example, the Syrian Kurds are not included in Hijab's committee.

On 20 January, *Foreign Policy* reported that Saudi Arabia was obstructing the expansion of the opposition delegation.

In a barely veiled swipe at one of the Middle East's leading powers, the United Nations' special envoy for Syria accused Saudi Arabia of undermining his efforts to bring a broad slate of Syrian opposition groups to upcoming peace talks designed to end Syria's brutal civil war.

In his confidential Jan. 18 briefing to the U.N. Security Council, which was obtained exclusively by *Foreign Policy*, Staffan de Mistura said Riyadh is complicating his efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the Syrian conflict by trying to tightly control which opposition groups will be allowed to participate in the negotiations.

His comments came shortly after a slate of Saudi-backed Syrian opposition groups, organized under the banner of the Riyadh-based High Negotiations Committee (HNC), rebuffed his personal appeals to allow other groups to take part in the talks. De Mistura complained to the council that the Saudi-backed opposition coalition and its "sponsors insist on the primacy and exclusivity of their role as 'THE' opposition delegation." While de Mistura did not name Saudi Arabia, Riyadh is the main international sponsor of the HNC. The group, however, is backed by France, Turkey, and Qatar.

....

"The Syrian opposition is the party which decides who represents it in the talks, and the higher committee that emerged from the Riyadh conference is the concerned party and they are the ones who decide who represents them in the talks," Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Tuesday [19 Jan] in Riyadh, according to Reuters. "No other party is allowed to impose on the Syrian opposition who represents them in the talks with Bashar al-Assad."

Colum Lynch, "U.N. Envoy Signals That Riyadh Is Obstructing Syria Peace Talks," [Foreign Policy](#), 20 Jan 2016.

**Assad's recent battlefield victories
affect Assad's willingness to negotiate**

Early in the morning on 19 January 2016, people in the USA awakened to a dismal — but I believe accurate — assessment by the Associated Press:

Syrian peace talks due next week are looking increasingly moot as a string of recent battlefield victories by government troops have bolstered President Bashar Assad's hand and plunged the rebels into disarray.

....

A proxy war on the ground between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, disorganization among the rebels after a top commander and several other local leaders were killed, rigid and disparate U.S. and Russian positions regarding Assad's future, and a spat over which groups will be invited to the negotiating table have all added to the conflagration.

"I don't think we should expect any major results," said Fawaz Gerges, professor of Middle Eastern politics at the London School of Economics. "Assad really believes that time is on his side, that he is winning, that the opposition is in tatters."

....

"The Syrian army has shifted from a defensive mode to offense," said Gerges. "Before the Russian intervention the army was bleeding, it was desperately trying to maintain its position, but now it has achieved major tactical gains on many fronts." [9] This does not bode well for the Geneva talks, as neither side will be interested in making compromises while the front lines are in a state of flux, Gerges added.

Brian Rohan, "Assad's Battlefield Gains Cast Cloud On Upcoming Syria Talks," [Associated Press](#), 07:17 EST, 19 Jan 2016. (original version at 01:01 EST).

Later on 19 January, the Beirut bureau chief of *The Washington Post* wrote:

Russia's military intervention in Syria is finally generating gains on the ground for Syrian government forces, tilting the battlefield in favor of President Bashar al-Assad to such an extent that the Obama administration's quest for a negotiated settlement to the war suddenly looks a lot less likely to succeed.

....

But after 3□ months of relentless airstrikes that have mostly targeted the Western-backed opposition to Assad's rule, they have proved sufficient to push beyond doubt any likelihood that Assad will be removed from power by the nearly five-year-old revolt against his rule. The gains on the ground are also calling into question whether there can be meaningful negotiations to end a conflict Assad and his allies now seem convinced they can win.

....

Peace talks scheduled to start in Geneva next week are already in doubt because of disputes between Russia and the United States, their chief sponsors, over who should

be invited.

....

Even if the guest list is agreed upon, however, it is far from clear whether the opposition will attend without some gesture on the part of Russia and Syria to demonstrate that they are negotiating in good faith. A group of 33 rebel groups issued a statement last week saying they would not join the talks unless Russian and Syrian warplanes stop striking civilian targets, release political prisoners and send humanitarian aid to besieged towns such as Madaya, where people have been dying of starvation.

Liz Sly, "Russian airstrikes are working in Syria — enough to put peace talks in doubt," [Washington Post](#), 18:18 EST, 19 Jan 2016.

My comment is that that the quest for a negotiated peace in Syria is more than "the Obama's administration's quest". The quest also includes the Russians, the other nations in the ISSG, and the United Nations.

On 24 January, the [Associated Press](#) reported that "a senior official in President Bashar Assad's ruling Baath party" declared that Assad's government will *not* make any new concessions in Geneva, because of Assad's recent battlefield victories. I looked at the SANA and *Syria Times* websites, but I found nothing on this news.

Hijab announces his opposition delegation

On 20 January, Kerry and Lavrov met in Zürich, but the two diplomats were unable to agree on a list of opposition people to invite to Geneva. However, both Kerry and Lavrov agreed the negotiations should begin this month. Hijab announced that one delegate from Jaysh al-Islam is included in his negotiating team, but Russia and Assad both consider Jaysh al-Islam to be terrorists. Russia wants to broaden the opposition participants in Geneva, but Hijab declared his group would boycott Geneva if any other opposition delegates attended. [Reuters](#); [TASS](#). Later on 20 Jan, de Mistura finally admitted that the negotiations in Geneva might need to be delayed. [Reuters](#).

On 20 January, Hijab's Supreme Commission issued the names of the opposition negotiators. Astoundingly, the chief opposition negotiator is Mohamad Alloush, who is a member of the jihadist group, Jaish al-Islam (aka Jaysh al-Islam). [Reuters](#)(21 Jan); [Reuters](#)(22 Jan); [NY Times](#).

The Saudi Press Agency announcement said in full:

The Supreme Committee of the Syrian opposition for the negotiations announced yesterday its members of the delegation for the upcoming Geneva talks on Syria.

The General Coordinator Dr. Riad Hijab said in a press statement to the media yesterday they appointed Asa'ad AL-Zu'bi as President of the delegation, George Sabra, Vice President, and Mohamed Alloush, Chief Negotiator.

The Supreme Committee also announced it would not participate in the negotiations if foreign countries intervened and introduced a third party in the talks.

The Supreme Committee requested formally and directly from the United Nations envoy to issue an invitation to the Committee to attend the negotiations.

"Syrian opposition appoints delegation for peace talks negotiations in Geneva," *Saudi Press Agency*, 11:19 GMT, 21 Jan 2016.

Date for Geneva Negotiations Postponed

In the late afternoon on 21 Jan, the [Associated Press](#) reported that de Mistura admitted that the Geneva negotiations "are likely to be delayed by a few days." Russia is apparently unhappy over the negotiating team selected by Hijab's Supreme Commission, so de Mistura can *not* send invitations to the Geneva negotiations.

The U.S. [State](#) Department was ready with a comment on 20 Jan, when the deputy spokesperson said: "... if [the deadline] slips one or two days, that's not the end of the world either."

On 21 January, Russia declared that if Hijab's Supreme Commission boycotted the Geneva negotiations, then Russia would supply an alternative opposition delegation. [Reuters](#). While I like giving Hijab the boot, there is an immense practical problem. We want to negotiate a ceasefire that includes the Free Syrian Army (FSA), but the FSA is in Hijab's group. So the Russian alternative opposition would *not* be able to bind the FSA, unless the FSA deserts from Hijab and joins the Russian opposition group. Because Russia has been bombing the FSA since 30 Sep 2015, it would be unlikely that the FSA would join the Russian alternative opposition. Another problem is that the Russian alternative opposition group includes Syrian Kurds, which will get Erdogan's knickers in a twist. [Reuters](#).

On 21 January, John Kerry told journalists that, when the Geneva negotiations begin, Assad's delegation and the opposition delegation will meet in separate rooms, and de Mistura will walk between rooms. Kerry used the euphemism "proximity talks" to refer to such indirect negotiations. [U.S. State Dept](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Apparently, part of the reason for the so-called "proximity talks" is to pretend that there are *no* negotiations, so that Hijab's delegation will attend without any of their pre-conditions being satisfied.

But the deputy head of the opposition Supreme Commission said the opposition would refuse to attend such indirect negotiations *before* Assad's government had called a "halt to the bombardment of civilians by Russian planes, and sieges of blockaded areas must be lifted". [Reuters](#). My comment is that the opposition's pre-conditions or demands for confidence-building measures continue to change, but these demands — whatever they may be — will scuttle any negotiations.

On 21 January, the timetable seems to be that de Mistura will issue invitations on Sunday, 24 Jan and the talks in Geneva will begin on either 27 or 28 Jan. [Reuters](#). On 22 Jan, de Mistura scheduled a press conference for the afternoon of 25 Jan.

Overview on 22 January 2016

How did we get into the disorganized mess? The answer is complicated:

1. Most importantly, the negotiations in Geneva are intra-Syrian negotiations. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 specifically calls for a "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition". The critical problem is that the Syrian opposition is fragmented and disorganized, so that there are many opposition groups, and they have differing goals. The United Nations, as convenor of the negotiations, has the sole authority to issue invitations to potential delegates.
2. Resolution 2254 says: "noting in particular the usefulness of the meeting in Riyadh on 9-11 December 2015" that created Hijab's Supreme Commission. Sometime around 18-19 Jan 2016, Hijab's Supreme Commission arrogantly declared it was the *only* opposition delegation. In retrospect, it was a mistake for the Saudi government to convene the meeting in December that created the Supreme Commission. De Mistura's should have selected a representative opposition delegation from people who he had met during one-on-one talks with people from Syria in May-July 2015. Because the Syrian opposition is fragmented and disorganized, there is *no* group that represents all of the Syrian people.
3. The Vienna Statement of 30 Oct 2015 calls for "non-sectarian governance" in Syria. The Vienna Statement of 14 Nov 2015 (§10) repeats this goal. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (§4) includes "non-sectarian governance" as a goal. Despite this requirement, the 34 members of Hijab's Supreme Commission includes two members who represent Islamic jihadist groups, Ahrar-as-Sham and Jaish al-Islam. Worse, on 20 Jan 2016 the member from Jaish al-Islam was appointed by Hijab as chief negotiator. Not only is the Jaish al-Islam group sectarian, but also both Assad and the Russians believe Jaish al-Islam is a terrorist organization. Assad refuses to negotiate with terrorists.
4. The Supreme Commission *could* have selected a chief negotiator who is committed to non-sectarian governance of Syria. Obvious candidates include:
 - a. Riad Hijab, a former Syrian prime minister
 - b. Salim Idriss, former commander of the Free Syrian Army (Dec 2012 to Feb 2014)
 - c. Qadri Jamil, a former Syrian deputy prime minister
 - d. Ahmad Jarba, former president of Syrian National Coalition (July 2013 to July 2014)
 - e. Khaled Khoja, current president of Syrian National Coalition (since Jan 2015)
 - f. George Sabra, from Syrian National Coalition and Syrian National Council(I am *not* endorsing any of these people, but only noting that they are well-known opponents of Assad.)
5. Soon after its creation, Hijab's Supreme Commission began issuing demands that Assad must satisfy *before* negotiations could begin:
 - o release of Assad's political prisoners,
 - o stopping bombardment of towns by airplanes and Assad's artillery, and

lifting sieges on rebel-held towns.

As mentioned above, these demands were included in various United Nations Security Council Resolutions since April 2012. But each of these demands will scuttle negotiations with Assad's government. Notice that Hijab does *not* offer any measure(s) that would increase Assad's confidence in the opposition.

My opinion is that Hijab's Supreme Commission *intended* to scuttle the Geneva negotiations, by demanding preconditions that Assad's government would *not* accept, and by appointing a jihadist as the chief opposition negotiator.

I will go one step farther: as I said in my essay for [December 2015](#), the jihadists and Islamic terrorists in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq seem to *enjoy* fighting. They have *no* urgency in ending wars.

As Kofi Annan said in his resignation [speech](#) in 2012, "I can't want peace more than the protagonists". The real problem is that the Syrian insurgents want a total victory, *not* the compromises from negotiations. The Syrian insurgents seem willing to fight indefinitely.

Given that the insurgents want to continue fighting, is there a way to force peace on Syria? The foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, USA, Qatar, etc.) who are sending munitions to the insurgents should stop. But the foreign meddlers are unwilling to stop sending munitions to Syria. Furthermore, there is *no* organization in the world who could enforce a ban on sending munitions to Syria. The United Nations is toothless, as it has repeatedly demonstrated during the five-year Syrian civil war.

Commentators often speak of a "proxy war" in Syria, in which foreign meddlers support armed groups. Obama wants to oust Assad, without realizing that Assad is the least-worst leader for Syria. Saudi Arabia wants to oust Assad, install a sectarian Sunni Muslim government in Syria, and reduce the influence of Iran in Syria. Other Arab nations have their own agendas. These foreign meddlers can afford to continue the Syrian civil war, as the foreign meddlers are *not* having their nations destroyed by the Syrian civil war.

Continuing Towards Peace Conference in Geneva

On 23 January — in an astounding display of chutzpah — "a joint statement signed by 45 opposition and rebel groups" blamed Russia and Assad for the failure of any talks in Geneva. [Associated Press](#). The entire statement by the Syrian National Coalition and 43 rebel and jihadist groups says:

In light of the continued humanitarian disaster and bloodshed in Syria; the ongoing war crimes of the Assad regime and its allies, Iran and Russia; and the rapid pace of political developments, the Syrian revolutionary forces have decided upon the following:

First: We affirm our support, within the parameters of the principles of the Syrian Revolution, for the political process. We emphasize our stance that provisions 12 and 13 on humanitarian issues of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015)

must be fulfilled in full, especially since the importance of these provisions has already been affirmed in the previous Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), and 2165 (2014). We consider the fulfillment of these provisions a basic human right without which it is impossible to begin the negotiating process.

Second: We affirm that the United Nations and the international community are responsible for the continued siege, starvation, and bombardment of civilians by dint of its failure to oblige the regime concerning the aforementioned Security Council resolutions.

Third: We fully and categorically reject Russian dictates. We fully and categorically reject Russia's interference in the political process by way of military aggressions, political extortion, and barefaced meddling in the affairs of the opposition delegation.

Fourth: We hold the Assad regime and its Russian ally responsible for any failure of the political process due to their continued war crimes, including the killing, besiegement and starvation of civilians; their destruction of essential infrastructure, schools, and border crossings; and their overall refusal to fulfill United Nations Security Council resolutions concerning humanitarian affairs before the start of negotiation.

"Joint Statement," [SNC](#), 23 Jan 2016.

In the first and fourth points, the rebels and jihadists ignore the repeated and continuing violations of United Nations Resolutions by rebels and jihadists, as documented in the U.N. Secretary General's monthly reports (see [below](#)). In the second point, "the United Nations and the international community are responsible" is propaganda that is like blaming the police for failing to prevent criminals committing crimes. While the United Nations is blameworthy for its failure to act, the bulk of the blame must be on Assad's government *and* the rebels/jihadists for continuing the Syrian civil war in a barbaric way. In the fourth point, it is rare to see a pre-emptive excuse for a failure that has not yet happened.

The United Nations has been very tight with information about the problems and proposed solutions in arranging the negotiations in Geneva. On Saturday, 23 January, at 15:54 GMT [Bloomberg](#) reported anonymous sources said that de Mistura would invite *two* opposition delegations. One delegation would be from Hijab's Supreme Commission and the other delegation would include delegates requested by the Russian government.

On 25 January, John Kerry held a press conference in Laos. Matthew Lee of the Associated Press asked Kerry about (1) Assad's government was not going to compromise, and (2) "complaints from the opposition that you in particular are trying to ram this kind of Geneva modality, whatever you want to call it, down their throats and that they don't like it." Kerry dismissed the posturing by Assad's government and by Hijab's Supreme Commission:

I don't know what winning — what does it mean, they're winning? They control a tiny portion of the country. Most of it's controlled by ISIL or by Kurds or by somebody else. I mean, that doesn't make sense. The war does not end as long — if that's their attitude, the war doesn't end.

So — that's not the Russian attitude, I'll tell you that. The Russians say that they're

going to go and they're going to negotiate. And I have said from day one — you've heard me say it publicly; I repeat it today — we are going to know very quickly, in a month or two or three, whether these guys are serious. The Russians and Iranians are at the table and they've signed on to a ceasefire, to an election, to a new constitution, and to what they call a unity government but everybody else calls a transitional government under the Geneva process. And the Geneva is what they've signed up to. So we will learn whether or not these major nations who have signed up to a UN Security Council resolution, giving it force of international law, are serious or not. I've always said that is what this is going to show. And Assad or some spokesperson in the Syrian whatever may have some expressed attitude, but that is not what we have heard from either the Iranians or the people at the table.

Now, we're not — we don't have any — look, I don't know what the — whoever said that is talking about, because we're completely in agreement with the Arab community and our European friends and the other members of the ISSG exactly what is expected in terms of the negotiations and who's negotiating. We're not trying to change any — there's no change. We — the HNC [High Negotiations Committee] is the primary negotiating entity according to what was decided in New York and elsewhere, but Staffan de Mistura has the final say with respect to who he invites. We've all agreed with that, and we're not trying to do anything except start.

And we hope that they will fully understand we support getting a ceasefire, we support getting humanitarian access, we support Assad — again, we've said 100,000 times Assad cannot be part of the long-term future of Syria because you can't end the war if he is. It's very simple. Nothing has changed.

I think these are just tensions. These are things you hear as people are worried and concerned, but as the communication takes place, I think people will get confidence that nothing's — there's no change.

....

.... The position of the United States is and hasn't changed; that we are still supporting the opposition politically, financially, and militarily; and we will — I forget one of the things you said, but we — it's up to the Syrians to decide what happens to Assad. That's in the UN resolution. And they are the negotiators, so they will decide the future. And I will tell you that what I did say to them is, look, it's by mutual consent. You have a veto and so does he. So you're going to have to decide how to go forward here. And we made it very clear that we presume that if Assad is sitting there saying, "Well, I'm going to continue on and not give any" — that you're going to say no and there'll be — it's not going to happen. So we completely empowered them, and I don't know where this is coming from. Maybe it's a pressure thing or maybe it's an internal political thing. Maybe it's a — I don't know, but that is not the situation.

....

.... I hope it is possible — I would express it that way — to resolve whatever rumors

are being circulated by one — there are a lot of factions here, folks, and when — lot of different interests at play too. So I just don't buy into this public back-and-forth. It doesn't serve any purpose.

And it won't get — it's not going to change the basics here, which are: we have to get to the negotiation without preconditions and get into the discussion of a ceasefire and a humanitarian access and other things that can build some confidence, and lay down the road ahead with a transition discussion itself and put to test whether or not they're serious. And as I have said again and again, this is not in our hands whether they're — they have to be serious. If they're not serious, war will continue. You've heard that refrain from me for months. Up to them. You can lead a horse to water, you can't make it drink. You've got to give people an opportunity here to sit down and negotiate. We have created a framework. Syrians have the ability to decide the future of Syria, with countries that are involved and engaged backing one group or another on the sidelines, advising and pushing and cajoling and encouraging. That's where we are, and we'll have to see what decision Staffan makes as to exactly how he's going to begin.

John Kerry, "Remarks at a Press Roundtable," [U.S. State Dept](#), 25 Jan 2016.

But Kerry is wrong: there have been changes in the U.S. position during the past months, in order to move the Geneva negotiations forward. The U.S. is no longer demanding that Assad resign at the beginning of negotiations. The U.S. is now tolerant of jihadists in the opposition delegation. There is nothing wrong with change. Changes as a result of compromises are how one moves from civil war to peace.

25 January: de Mistura's announcement

On 25 January, the day the negotiations were scheduled to begin, de Mistura held a press conference and announced:

- the invitations would be sent on 26 Jan, and the talks are now scheduled to begin on Friday, 29 Jan.
- Assad's delegation and the opposition delegation would be in separate rooms (what Kerry on 21 Jan called "proximity talks"). The opposition would be in multiple rooms. De Mistura declared there are "no preconditions" for these negotiations.
- de Mistura has three priorities:
 1. creating "a broad ceasefire" with everyone except ISIL and Nusra Front,
 2. "stopping the threat of ISIL", and
 3. "an increase of humanitarian aid".

[U.N. Geneva](#) (transcript of de Mistura's press conference); [U.N. News](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Part of the transcript of de Mistura's press conference is worth quoting here, because it is the definitive statement:

Mr. de Mistura: Security Council [Resolution] 2254 is very clear in assigning to me, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, the task to finalize the efforts of the list of

Syrian participants, taking note of the meetings in Moscow, Cairo and in particular, the youthful [?] meeting in Riyadh on the 9th of December. That's basically the mandate that I've been assigned to by the Security Council. Security Council 2254, urging me to bring the broadest possible spectrum of the opposition. Now, due to the intense disagreements, frankly, and different opinions on who should be on the list, the actual beginning of the talk, which was meant to be today, 25 January, have been delayed. And today, therefore, instead of announcing the beginning of the talks, I am in a position of still announcing to you the date in which, in my opinion, we will be in a position to send invitations — tomorrow. And the date which we will be aiming at having the beginning of the Intra-Syrian Talks — 29th of January. The invitation will be issued based on the criteria of inclusiveness, substantive weight. The agenda will be the one set by the 2254. The invitations will clearly want to be also addressed to women and civil society, I've made a point, and the Secretary-General has been extremely clear on that, whatever list of various delegations want to come, we will make sure that there is a substantial presence of women to advise me and make sure that we are in the right position regarding the future of Syria of which there are 51 per cent, at least, of them in Syria. The agenda will be already set up. It's the governance 2254 resolution, about the new governance, a new constitution and new elections. However, here comes a major point that I think you should be aware of, the first priority will be the focus of the talk of what most Syrians, if not all, want to hear. The possibility of a broad ceasefire and the possibility of stopping the threat of ISIL. And therefore and thanks to a broader ceasefire, an increase of humanitarian aid. You will hear tomorrow, we will have a special press conference, which we have been supporting very much, of my colleagues from the humanitarian side, in order to be able to explain to you how urgent, how important and what needs to be done, in order to make sure that those who are, in a way, getting here to talk about the future of Syria, don't forget that the end of the day, every day lost is a day lost for a ceasefire and for humanitarian aid. There will be no opening ceremony. I regret from the camera point of view, I know from the photo point of view, you will not have the type of feeling of a large group of people sitting, and probably arguing publicly, among them. That will not be what you will be seeing. We are going to aim at proximity talks. Starting on the 29th and ongoing for six months on a staggered, chronological proximity approach. That will be the way we try to make it different from the past. This is not Geneva III. This is leading to what we hope will be a Geneva success story, if we are able to push it forward.

There are political risks. And you will hear them as soon as you will hear the fact that I am announcing that I intend to do on the 29th, and that I will be issuing invitations tomorrow. But those political risks, intentions and prepositioning should also be taken into account that our line and the Security Council has been clear: **no preconditions**. [Boldface added by Standler.] At least to start the talks, and while the talks starts. The rest is open. It's going to be uphill. They are not in an agreement yet. But we are all feeling that what have been happening in the past, and what all the regions and the main stakeholders feel, the time has come to at least try hard to produce an outcome. Imagine if we did have a ceasefire discussion, seriously starting, and then following the rest, all political risks of starting a conference, in fact of Intra-Syrian Talks, without having a total clarity what direction they will all go, is worth it.

....

[Workings Groups abandoned]

Question: Mr. de Mistura, permit me to ask about the scenario of the negotiations, if I can say. You were talking before about four working groups in the negotiations in parallel. Are you going to start like this, or are you going to contact each party in separate and after you will go to the working groups? Thank you.

Mr. de Mistura: Thank you. It's a good opportunity of clarifying this. Remember, when we did not have yet the Vienna process starting. When we did not have the refugee crisis, we didn't have the Russian military intervention, when we didn't have the feeling that ISIL was moving further and forward, there was an attempt by us to still have a framework of what could be a discussion preparing to what we are doing now. Things have moved forward. Now we have a Vienna clear message about starting the three arguments, the three issues, therefore the working groups don't exist anymore. They are the past. Now, we have only one Intra-Syrian Talk about governance, about constitutional review and about future elections. Hopefully, starting with discussing first what is the most urgent thing for the Syrian people, who have heard already constitution, they want to hear about ceasefire and about humanitarian aid. That doesn't mean that we will not, at any occasion of the proximity talks, not establish special working groups in order to address specific scientifically specific areas. For instance, the type of monitoring of ceasefire. That is a special working group with specialists.

....

[different opposition groups in different rooms]

Mr. de Mistura: You see, the issue about rooms and delegations will be part exactly of the creativity of these proximity talks. And you will see it yourself: there will be in my opinion a lot of shuttling because there are not only different delegations, but there is also civil society, women and others who deserve to be heard. The issue is, they will be meeting me and my colleagues and those we will be assigning as facilitators, so negotiators. So you could have quite a lot of simultaneous meetings taking place.

....

[expect bad behavior: posturing, walk-outs]

Mr. de Mistura: In terms of vision, things may get faster, things may get slower, I can tell you in advance, don't be surprised. There will be a lot of posturing, we know that. A lot of walk-outs and walk-ins because a bomb has fallen or because someone has done an attack and you will see that happening. We should not be impressed, neither depressed, but it's likely to happen. The important thing is that we keep the momentum.

The first plan would be that the first part of the talks should be lasting between two and three weeks. And then give time for the various interlocutors to consult their own

supporters and consult themselves about the next steps. And give us the time to prepare also for the next round. So it's not six months full time, everybody in one room, not walking out. The name of the game is to be as flexible and creative as possible to adjust to the different challenges of this time of intra-Syrian talks.

....

[no preconditions; only terrorist groups at the moment are ISIL and Nusra Front]

Mr. de Mistura: You see, things are moving, and I think probably there is a much better understanding by those who have been insisting on pre-conditions, such as, "we need the list in advance of who is a terrorist" or "we need to have a clarity of who is the opposition". In terms of understanding also that what matters is also starting the talks with some type of minimum common understanding. The process of deciding on who should be in a terrorist list is still ongoing. Jordan have been very kind and generous in wanting to take that very difficult job. There are other processes which are taking place in the Security Council in the UN. There are committees on it. So all that may continue and probably will put more clarity on what is being considered "terrorist". At the moment, I am basing myself on what the Security Council tells me. The Security Council has been telling me ISIL and Al-Nusra. This is what I've been hearing from the Security Council.

"Transcript of the press conference given in Geneva by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, on the Intra-Syrian Talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 25 Jan 2016.

My comments: Note that two of de Mistura's priorities are essentially the same as the preconditions of Hijab's Supreme Commission. Fighting against ISIL will give the Syrians something constructive to do after the ceasefire, since Syrian insurgents apparently enjoy killing people. Hijab's other demand (i.e., releasing political prisoners from Assad's prisons) seems out-of-reach for the moment.

There was *no* mention that the Geneva negotiations are now four weeks behind the target date specified in the 14 Nov 2015 Vienna statement. Valuable momentum has been lost in the petty squabbling over the composition of the opposition delegation. Does the composition of the opposition delegation matter? In my opinion, *any* delegation that includes the Free Syrian Army and/or jihadists will be unwilling to negotiate a ceasefire. And *if* they do negotiate a ceasefire, then that ceasefire will be violated by fighters on the ground in Syria, as was demonstrated in 2012 and 2014.

Broadening the opposition to include large numbers of women and civil society greatly increases the complexity of the Geneva negotiations. However, it could also expose that there are other considerations besides those of professional politicians, insurgents, and Assad's government. Women might make clear that they want a ceasefire and an end to the slaughter of their children, something you will *not* hear from rebels and jihadists.

De Mistura's one-on-one talks with people from Syria during May-July 2015 will be helpful to him in identifying opposition delegates.

Continuing Towards

Peace Conference in Geneva

On 26 January, Hijab's Supreme Commission met in Riyadh to decide whether to attend the negotiations in Geneva that begin on 29 Jan. The Supreme Commission was unable to decide on 26 Jan, so they continued their discussions on 27 Jan. *Middle East Eye* and *Foreign Policy* reported that de Mistura invited 15 members of Hijab's Supreme Commission as the only opposition negotiators, but also invited approximately 10 or 12 "consultants" who were recommended by Russia. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(Reuters 26 Jan); [Middle East Eye](#); [Asharq Al-Awsat](#); [Foreign Policy](#). Also see [Reuters](#) and [Al-Arabiya](#) on 27 Jan.

Previously, Hijab's Supreme Commission had issued preconditions (i.e., demands) that it would *not* attend the Geneva negotiations until *after* Assad had done *all* of the following: (1) release of Assad's political prisoners, (2) stopping bombardment of towns by airplanes and Assad's artillery, and (3) lifting sieges on rebel-held towns. Hijab's Supreme Commission then demanded that they be the *only* opposition group, or they would not attend the Geneva negotiations. Given these four past demands, Hijab's Supreme Commission can *not* attend the Geneva negotiations without openly admitting they are full of bluster, lack of integrity, and untrustworthiness. The past demands and threats by Hijab's Supreme Commission give that group zero credibility as a reliable negotiating partner in the peace process.

The problem is that de Mistura — quite reasonably — wants to negotiate a ceasefire with the rebels and jihadists. That means that the Free Syrian Army and major jihadist groups must be represented in the opposition at the Geneva negotiations. But the Free Syrian Army and two jihadist groups are members of Hijab's Supreme Commission. That makes Hijab's Supreme Commission an indispensable party to the negotiations — at least until the Free Syrian Army and the jihadists can be persuaded to join another opposition group in Geneva.

On 27 January, Hijab's Supreme Commission sent a letter to the United Nations Secretary General that repeats the three initial demands of Hijab's group *before* negotiations in Geneva. [Reuters](#). This is a publicity stunt. *If* the Secretary General had the power to release political prisoners, stop bombardment of civilians, and lifting sieges on rebel-held towns, then he would have done that long ago. Further, it is well-known United Nations procedure that the Security Council — *not* the Secretary General — enforces Resolutions of the Security Council. Hijab's Supreme Commission is *not* contributing to peace in Syria, instead Hijab's Supreme Commission is obstructing peace negotiations.

On 27 January, Hijab's Supreme Commission sent a letter to de Mistura asking for clarification "whether peace talks planned for Friday [29 Jan] are to be held with the aim of succeeding, or just for the sake of holding them." [Reuters](#). This is a ridiculous request. Of course, the ISSG, United Nations, and de Mistura personally are all committed to peace negotiations. It is Hijab's Supreme Commission that is obstructing the negotiations. Waiting for a reply to their ridiculous question gives Hijab's Supreme Commission another day or two to make a decision on whether to attend the negotiations in Geneva. [Reuters](#).

Back in January 2014, the Syrian National Coalition spewed demands, hesitated about attending negotiations in Geneva, and delayed the negotiations. (See my essay for [January 2014](#).) Members of the Syrian National Coalition are approximately 1/4 of Hijab's

Supreme Commission.

I am concerned on 27 January that journalists are *not* exposing the hypocrisy, delay, and bad behavior of Hijab's Supreme Commission. Nearly all of the news about Hijab's Supreme Commission is coming from Reuters, as other journalists ignore the details.

On 28 January, de Mistura made an eloquent appeal in the Arabic language directly to the people of Syria to tell the damned rebels, jihadists, and terrorists: "enough killing, murdering, torturing, prisons. Enough buildings being destroyed".

As salamu aleykom,

My message today is meant to reach every single man, woman, child of Syria, inside Syria and outside, in the refugee camps or wherever you are.

You know in the next few days we are planning to launch what we call the Intra-Syrian talks, negotiations, in order to have progress in the context of reaching, finally, stability and peace and dignity back in Syria.

You deserve it.

Five years of this conflict have been too much.

The horror is in front of everyone's eyes.

You must know also that we count on you to raise your voice, to say khalas, it is enough, to say to everyone who is actually coming from Syria and from abroad to this conference that there are expectations on them to make sure that their vision, their capacity of compromise in discussion for reaching a peaceful solution in Syria is now and they need to produce that.

You have seen enough conferences, two of them already taken place.

This one cannot fail.

We've heard your voices, we heard when you been telling us so many times wherever we met you, you Syrian people, you women, men and children of Syria saying: Enough, khalas, kefaya, enough killing, murdering, torturing, prisons.

Enough buildings being destroyed,

Enough bombing my city where I am, and I do not [know] who is bombing me; I just see bombs coming down, rockets, anything,

Enough, my brother, my sister being humiliated and becoming a refugee and trying to take a boat and drowning in the Mediterranean when I love my country.

Enough, when you see your children say I want to go to school and I cannot go to school because you are not allowing me to go because it is too dangerous.

All this we have heard it. Now we need to hear your voice to everyone who is coming to this conference, and saying this conference must be an opportunity not to be missed.

We are going not to disappoint you from the UN point of view. You know we will never abandon the Syrian people, but we need now you to feel that this time is the right one, we will do all what we can.

God willing,

As salamu aleykom

(Staffan de Mistura, Geneva, 28 January 2016)

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of the video message by UN Special Envoy for Syria to the Syrian people ahead of the Intra-Syrian Geneva Talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 28 Jan 2016.

Although the Geneva talks are scheduled to begin tomorrow (29 Jan), note that de Mistura said on 28 Jan that the talks will begin "in the next few days", which could mean 1 February. As de Mistura retreats into diplomatic vagueness, it becomes more difficult to understand what is really happening.

De Mistura's plea for the people of Syria to tell the opposition delegation "enough" is unlikely to have an effect. The opposition delegation is mostly expatriates from Syria who have lived in Istanbul or Riyadh for years. The opposition delegation has little contact with people currently living in Syria.

On the afternoon of 28 January — less than 24 hours before the Geneva negotiations are scheduled to begin — Hijab's Supreme Commission announced that it will *not* attend on 29 Jan. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

At 22:31 GMT on 28 Jan, Karen DeYoung and Liz Sly wrote an article in the [Washington Post](#) titled "Syrian talks are set to begin, but no one is sure who is coming". They report "the United States voiced growing exasperation at [opposition leaders'] hesitation." They also quote Andrew Tabler of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy as saying "the rebels 'are being pulverized' " on the battlefield. The [NY Times](#) published a similar article.

My opinion: The Syrian opposition does *not* seem to realize they are now being defeated on the battlefield. The Syrian opposition still clings to the fantasy that peace negotiations are an opportunity to demand what they failed to achieve during five years of war. The next step is for the Russians and Assad to bomb the Free Syrian Army into oblivion, then let the Free Syrian Army crawl to a surrender on Assad's terms. Meanwhile, it would be poetic justice — and salvage the negotiations in Geneva — if de Mistura would rescind the invitation to Hijab's delegation, then make the "consultants" or "advisers" suggested by Russia into the official opposition delegation. As I said above, the problem is that representatives from the Free Syrian Army and jihadist groups are probably necessary at negotiations before a ceasefire can be negotiated. As always, it remains uncertain whether rebel/jihadist fighters on the ground in Syria would obey a ceasefire negotiated in Geneva.

29 January: Peace Conference in Geneva Begins Without Opposition Delegation

On 29 January, Hijab's Supreme Commission — which had previously attempted to scuttle the negotiations with three pre-conditions plus a demand that it be the only opposition delegation — failed to attend the negotiations in Geneva. Instead, they remained in Riyadh, where they discussed for a *fourth* day whether or not to send a delegation to Geneva. *If* they send a delegation, the delegates would *not* attend negotiations until after their three demands were met. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [Washington Post](#); [Middle East Eye](#). I read somewhere — I forget where — that one of the opposition delegates in Riyadh wanted to travel to Geneva, because it would be easier to get attention of journalists by holding press conferences in Geneva.

Pessimistically, [Reuters](#) quotes an anonymous "Western diplomat" as saying the peace talks in Geneva "were a 'complete failure' before they started on Friday [29 Jan]". My comment is that de Mistura does *not* need gravel thrown at him for his courageous effort to end the Syrian civil war.

On the afternoon of 29 January, the Associated Press reported:

[Ahmad] Ramadan [a senior official with the Syrian National Coalition] said that de Mistura sent a letter on Thursday [28 Jan] to the head of the HNC, Riad Hijab, which was deemed unsatisfactory. He and another opposition figure, Khaled Nasser, said the U.N. envoy wrote that the opposition's demands were reasonable and that humanitarian issues should be "above negotiations," but that he was powerless to implement them himself, adding that negotiations were the best way to force everyone to implement those resolutions.

....

In Syria, the official Tishrin newspaper boasted that the no-show by the Saudi and Turkey-backed opposition in Geneva "reflects the collective flight of terrorist groups backed by Saudi Arabia and Turkey from the political table, following their collapses on the battlefield."

....

Opposition figures from outside the HNC are in Geneva, but they were invited as advisers. The HNC is supposed to be the main opposition group in the talks.

But a leading Syrian opposition figure who is not part of the HNC and is currently in Geneva hinted that his team will be part of the talks as a second opposition delegation.

"The presence of three delegations expresses the will of the (U.N.) Security Council who called for a delegation representing all parties of the opposition," former Syrian deputy prime minister, Qadri Jamil, said in an interview with The Associated Press. Bassem Mroue, "UN hosted Syria peace talks begin in Geneva," [Associated Press](#),

17:13 GMT, 29 Jan 2016. Zeina Karam wrote an earlier version of this news story.

At night on 29 Jan, the Associated Press reported that Hijab's delegation would travel to Geneva on 30 Jan, but only to discuss its demands with United Nations officials, and *not* to negotiate.

Peace talks aimed at ending Syria's five-year civil war got off to a shaky and chaotic start Friday [29 Jan], with the main opposition group at first boycotting the session, then later agreeing to meet with U.N. officials — while still insisting it would not negotiate.

....

The HNC [Higher Negotiating Committee], a Saudi-backed bloc, had previously said it would not participate in the U.N.-sponsored talks without [1] an end to the bombardment of civilians by Russian and Syrian forces, [2] a lifting of blockades in rebel-held areas and [3] the release of detainees.

An HNC statement said the opposition decided to take part in the talks after receiving assurances from friendly countries about those humanitarian issues, and that a delegation headed by HNC chief Riad Hijab will leave Saudi Arabia for Geneva on Saturday [30 Jan].

Only once the conditions are met will the delegation negotiate, the statement added.

"We have decided to participate in a political process to test the seriousness of the other side through talks with the United Nations team about the implementation of international and humanitarian commitment as an introduction to the negotiations process and to move toward forming a transitional governing council with full executive powers," the statement said.

....

The decision by the HNC came after many Western powers and Saudi Arabia — a major backer of the group — had pushed hard for the it to attend, diplomats said. Bassem Mroue & Jamey Keaten, "UN-hosted Syria peace talks get off to shaky start," [Associated Press](#), 23:00 GMT, 29 Jan 2016.

The United Nations news story said:

Speaking to reporters in Geneva after the first set of intra-Syrian talks, which today [29 Jan] featured only a Government delegation headed by the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations, Bashar Jaafari, UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura said that as was standard practice, a "preparatory meeting" had been held to get an idea about what the next steps will be.

"Now the issue is obviously that any type of ceasefire discussions, which is obviously something that we are aiming at, apart from substantive discussions on the future of Syria, need two interlocutors [?] that is why for us it is very important to have an

indication of where we are on the presence of the High Negotiations Committee (HNC)" he said, referring to the ongoing discussions among the opposition about attending the Geneva talks.

One of their key concerns he said, included the desire "to see a gesture from the government authorities regarding some type of improvement for the people in Syria during the talks, for instance release of prisoners, or for instance some lifting of sieges."

While noting that this particular issue is part of a UN Security Council resolution on the situation in Syria, Mr. de Mistura said that "we have been strongly suggesting to them that the best way to actually discuss the implementation of such type of discussion and there after improvement is to be done here and to do it with us, as proxy talks or directly; whatever the format." At the same time, he said that he expected his talks with the delegation of the Syrian opposition could begin on Sunday [31 Jan].

"I have good reasons to believe that they are actually considering that very seriously. And therefore to be in a position to probably Sunday to actually start the discussions with them in order to be able to proceed with intra-Syrian talks," he said, adding, that while there has been no official confirmation of the opposition attending the talks, "as you can imagine I've been hearing a lot of rumours and information already [?] I have reasons to believe, but I will only react when I have a formal indication of that, but that is a good signal."

Responding to questions, Mr. de Mistura said that tomorrow, "depending on if and when we have the arrival of an additional delegation, and based on that, I will decide whether we have, like we had with the Government, a specific introduction meeting [?] or whether there would be something on Sunday."

"Syria: UN-mediated talks get under way; relief agencies amplify calls for access to besieged civilians," [U.N. News](#), 29 Jan 2016. ([?] indicates non-ASCII character in U.N. News story)

The official announcement from the Saudi Press Agency is completely different from what the Associated Press and Reuters reported. The Saudi government says Hijab's Supreme Commission will participate in negotiations, after receiving unspecified "assurances" from the ISSG and the United Nations. The Saudi government also believes there will "be no place for Bashar al-Assad" in future elections in Syria, something that is *not* yet decided. Here is the entire Saudi statement:

An official source at the Foreign Ministry expressed support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the decision of the Supreme negotiating commission of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, in Riyadh, to participate in the negotiations of Geneva conference, with the aim of implementation of all provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution (2254), based on the assurances received by the Commission from the majority of the Vienna Group as well as of the United Nations.

The position of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia support for the Syrian opposition, the political solution based on the principles of the Geneva Declaration 1, that were

guaranteed by the UN Security Council Resolution (2254), the formation of a transitional rule authority for managing the country's affairs, drafting of a new constitution for Syria and supervision of the elections for a new Syria, where there will be no place for Bashar al-Assad, the official source confirmed.

"Official Source at KSA Foreign Ministry: Kingdom Supports Decision of Syrian Revolution, Opposition Forces' Supreme Negotiating Commission, in Riyadh, to Participate in Negotiations of Geneva Conference," [SPA](#), 21:55 GMT, 29 Jan 2016. (The Saudi Press Agency redesigned their website a few days ago, and it is now possible to link to individual news stories.)

At 21:39 GMT on 29 Jan, [Al-Arabiya](#) reports: "The High Negotiations Committee (HNC) decided to participate in the Geneva talks after receiving American and United Nations guarantees," al-Hadath [the sister channel of Al-Arabiya News] said." It is difficult to imagine what those guarantees might be. In a typical guarantee, a seller refunds the purchase price when the buyer returns a defective product. In the context of besieging Syrian towns, I doubt that Obama would restore life to people who died of starvation. But Al-Arabiya also says: "A member of the HNC, Farah Atassi, said the delegation is coming 'not to negotiate' but to talk to U.N. officials after receiving reassurances from the organization." That is consistent with what the Associated Press and Reuters reported.

The U.S. State Department spokesperson, John Kirby, said during the Daily Press Briefing that began at 15:18 EST on 29 January:

MR KIRBY: The Syrian opposition's High Negotiating Committee, the HNC otherwise known, has not yet sent a delegation, and we continue to encourage them to respond positively to Mr. de Mistura's invitation.

.... Even as we address issues such as humanitarian access and an end to airstrikes by the regime and its international backers on civilians on an urgent basis, we believe the opposition should attend the Geneva negotiations without preconditions. There's no change to our policy on that.

.....

.... As I said at the opening, the Secretary has been very clear that it's important for these talks to continue, to continue without preconditions, to get people to begin this — the process of negotiating an end to the civil war in Syria.

QUESTION: In a statement they have released a while ago too, they said that Secretary Kerry has called Riyad Hijab and he promised to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2254, especially Articles 12 and 13, and he said that the U.S. — the statement said that the U.S. will guarantee the formation of the transition body too, and Secretary Kerry told Hijab that he is ready to go to Geneva to support the opposition delegation. Can you confirm that?

MR KIRBY: I can confirm that he had a conversation today with Dr. Hijab. He's had a conversation with Special Envoy de Mistura. He's had a conversation today with Foreign Minister Lavrov. So even while he's up in Quebec City today, he has been very much engaged in following this process and monitoring it and talking to all the

relevant parties. And the implementation of paragraphs 12 and 13 of UNSCR 2254 are necessary by all parties, Michel. All parties. And so the Secretary has made that clear as well. But I'm not privy to every detail of the conversation as you lay it out there.

[U.S. State Dept](#), 29 Jan 2016.

Then John Kerry issued a terse press statement that says in full:

The United States welcomes the important decision by the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition to attend negotiations hosted by the United Nations in Geneva. The United States also reiterates that UN Security Council Resolution 2254 must be fully implemented by all parties to the talks, including with regard to the urgent need for humanitarian access for besieged areas of Syria. The United States further expects that both sides in these negotiations will participate in good faith and achieve early, measurable progress in the days ahead.

John Kerry, "On the Syria Negotiations in Geneva," [U.S. State Dept.](#), 29 Jan 2016.

My comment is that the USA may "expect" that Hijab's Supreme Commission will "participate in good faith", but they have already demonstrated bad faith by issuing three preconditions that must be satisfied before they will attend negotiations, demanding to be the *only* opposition negotiating team, provocatively appointing a jihadist as their chief negotiator, *and* failing to attend the first two days of talks in Geneva.

On 29 January, the independent *Security Council Report* issued some commentary about the opposition's demands:

Aside from the issue of representation, the opposition has said it would participate in the talks only if the government met several demands: [1] lift sieges, [2] release detainees and [3] stop indiscriminate attacks — particularly aerial bombardment.

The [U.N. Security] Council focused on besieged areas at three meetings in January, in part to build the opposition's confidence that the Security Council would use its leverage on the humanitarian track in the lead-up to talks.

....

Regarding the confidence-building measures requested in resolution 2254, the Secretary-General has said that lifting sieges, the release of those arbitrarily detained, and stopping indiscriminate attacks will be fundamental tests for the credibility of the renewed political process. Council members have mixed views about the proposals for confidence-building measures.

- A few are cautious about treating obligations under international law as bargaining chips in a political process.
- Many others share that view but also believe that if such demands are met as part of a larger political process it would ameliorate the dire humanitarian situation civilians are facing, and an enhanced protection environment would create a positive momentum for negotiations.
- A smaller set of Council members view these as unacceptable pre-conditions to the opposition's participation in the Geneva talks.

"February 2016 Monthly Forecast," [SCR](#), 29 Jan 2016. [Indented list formatting in last paragraph added by Standler.]

On 29 January, Friday, after his meeting with Assad's delegation, de Mistura spoke to journalists in Geneva. Here is what he said about the opposition's demands:

You are more aware than I am, because I have been sitting in a room, that the HNC have been going through now three[,] four days of internal discussion about their own decision to come to Geneva for this Intra-Syrian talks. They have been raising, it is not a secret, they said it publicly, they raised an important point of their concern, they would like to see a gesture from the government authorities regarding some type of improvement for the people in Syria during the talks, for instance release of prisoners, or for instance some lifting of sieges. It is a human rights point it is not even an issue to negotiate. This is part of the paragraph 12 and 13 of the Security Council resolution 2254. At the same time we have been strongly suggesting to them that the best way to actually discuss the implementation of such type of discussion and there after improvement is to be done here and to do it with us, as proxy talks or directly. Whatever is the format.

Now I have good reasons to believe that they are actually considering this very seriously and therefore to be in a position on probably Sunday to actually start the discussions with them in order to be able to proceed with Intra-Syrian talks. I was considering Monday as an important day to re-access the situation but my feeling is, I may be wrong, that in fact their internal discussion is leading towards accepting our suggestion. The best way to actually discuss the implementation of important signals towards the population of Syria is to come to Geneva and of course be also an occasion of talking about what we call the political process.

"16.01.29 - Transcript of the Press Stakeout of the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 29 Jan 2016.

In summary, let history record that Assad's government was the only delegation to attend the beginning of the Geneva negotiations on 29 January 2016. Hijab's Supreme Commission refused to attend on 29 January, because none of their three preconditions (i.e., demands) had been met. Just as in Jan/Feb 2014, the opposition again obstructed and delayed the peace negotiations.

30-31 January: Peace Conference in Geneva

At 10:47 GMT on Saturday, 30 Jan, Reuters reported:

A delegation representing Syria's main opposition group were travelling to Geneva on Saturday [30 Jan] to assess whether to join Syrian government representatives in United Nations-brokered peace talks, an opposition representative said.

....

The HNC, which includes political and militant opponents of Syrian President Bashar al Assad, said it wanted to discuss humanitarian issues before engaging in negotiations

in peace talks that started on Friday [29 Jan] to try to end a five-year-old war.

"We are going to Geneva to put to the test the seriousness of the international community in its promises to the Syrian people and to also test the seriousness of the regime in implementing its humanitarian obligations," Agha [, an opposition representative,] said.

"Main Syrian opposition team head to Geneva as peace talks open," [Reuters](#), 10:47 GMT, 30 Jan 2016.

On the night of 30 January, I searched PRnewswire (which had published two of Hijab's press releases quoted above), Saudi Press Agency, Google web search, and Google News search for press releases from Hijab's Supreme Commission. I did not find the original press releases that were mentioned by journalists during the past week.

At 19:40 Geneva time on 30 Jan, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the current demands of Hijab's Supreme Commission include: "[1] releasing detainees, [2] ending the bombardment of civilians by Russian and Syrian forces, and [3] lifting government blockades on rebel-held areas. They agreed to come to Geneva to further discuss the matter with U.N. officials, but still have not agreed to participate in the talks." These three demands were repeated in a later [Associated Press](#) story at 00:44 Geneva time on 31 Jan.

On 31 January, ISIL detonated one car bomb near a Shiite mosque in Damascus. As rescuers arrived, two ISIL suicide bombers detonated, killing and wounding more people. The initial death toll was approximately 30, but the death toll climbed to "more than 60" by the end of the day. [Associated Press](#); [CNN](#); [SOHR](#) (71 dead on 1 Feb). Assad's government blamed the attack on "terrorist organizations which are supported by governments of foreign countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar", and said the attack was intended "to disrupt the current attempts to start a Syrian-Syrian dialogue led by Syria" [SANA](#). Assad's government is also claiming that ISIL "... said in a statement that the bombing comes in support of the opposition delegation coming from Riyadh to participate in the talks with the government delegation in Geneva." *Ibid*.

[Reuters](#) reports: "the talks ran straight into trouble after Islamic State bombers killed more than 60 people near [Syria's] holiest Shi'ite shrine." This effect on the talks in Geneva is strange because ISIL is considered a terrorist organization by Assad's government, the opposition, the ISSG, and the United Nations. ISIL has *never* been included in the proposed ceasefire in Syria or included in the proposed negotiations in Geneva. Whatever ISIL does should *not* tarnish the Free Syrian Army or other moderate opposition delegates.

On 31 January, de Mistura went to the hotel where Hijab's Supreme Commission was staying in what de Mistura said was a "courtesy visit", and also described as an "short informal meeting". [U.N. Geneva](#); [U.N. News](#); [Russia Today](#). This was the *only* meeting with the opposition during the first three days of the Geneva negotiations.

On 31 January, the foreign ministers of Turkey and Saudi Arabia both publicly declared their support for Hijab's Supreme Commission, regardless of whether Hijab's group participated in the Geneva talks. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Hurriyet](#)(AFP). In my opinion, this is the *wrong* message to send to Hijab's Supreme Commission. A better message would be: abandon your

pre-conditions and begin negotiations with Assad's government. And if Hijab's Supreme Commission fails to negotiate a ceasefire, then de Mistura should replace them with a different Syrian opposition delegation.

On 31 January, the United Nations in Geneva announced that de Mistura would meet with the opposition at 11:00 Geneva time on Monday, 1 Feb and then meet with Assad's delegation at 17:00 Geneva time. [Daily Star](#).

U.N. Report by Secretary General

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. However, this month I am making an exception, because the reader should see what the Secretary General, a relatively unbiased observer, has to say about the rebels and jihadists (i.e., "non-state actors").

3. Widespread conflict and high levels of violence continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in December [2015]. Indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombings and ground attacks by Government forces and indiscriminate shelling by non-State armed opposition groups and designated terrorist groups continued to kill, injure and displace civilians. The conduct of hostilities by all parties continued to be characterized by a widespread disregard for the rules of international humanitarian law and the obligation of all parties to protect civilians.

....

7. Non-State armed opposition groups continued to launch mortars and shell Damascus city during the reporting period. According to sources on the ground, on 2 December, 3 civilians were reportedly killed and 26 others injured, including 14 students at the Al-Sham Higher Institute in the Rukn al-Din neighbourhood, which was hit by mortars. On the same day, a mortar struck the Civil Engineering College in the Baramkeh neighbourhood of Damascus city, injuring two students and a professor. According to reports by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, on 3 December, 14 mortars and rockets hit the capital, killing 3 persons and injuring 26 others. Later, on 8 December, 12 rockets and missiles hit a school, a hospital and sports facilities, injuring seven persons. On 12 and 13 December, 91 rockets and missiles hit mainly civilian areas, killing 15 persons and injuring 56 others. On 14 December, the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations in Geneva informed OHCHR that the "Beiruni" and "French" hospitals in Damascus had been hit on 8 December by rocket fire, killing one staff member and injuring another.

....

10. In Aleppo city, non-State armed opposition groups continued to shell civilian parts of Government-controlled areas. On 9 December, for example, at least 4 civilians were reportedly killed and more than 50 wounded when the Nile neighbourhood was shelled.

....

25. OHCHR also received reports of non-State armed opposition groups running parallel “justice systems” in areas under their effective control, which are not in compliance with international human rights standards, where civilians and other protected persons were subject to abductions, cruel and degrading treatment, and executions without due process.

....

48. Of the 4.5 million people living in hard-to-reach areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, some 393,700 remained besieged. This includes approximately 200,000 people in Dayr al-Zawr city who are besieged by ISIL; some 181,200 people who are besieged by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in various locations in eastern Ghutah and in Darayya and Zabadani, in Rif Dimashq; and some 12,500 people who are besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusrah Front in Fu’ah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate. Humanitarian access to people in besieged locations saw no improvement in 2015, with less than 1 per cent of people receiving food or non-food items per month, and around 3 per cent health assistance.

....

55. Prevention of the delivery of essential medical supplies and equipment, in particular to hard-to-reach areas, besieged areas and areas controlled by non-State armed opposition groups, continues to lead to loss of life and lack of access to life-saving medical assistance.

....

63. All parties to the conflict continued to deny access to humanitarian assistance throughout 2015, notwithstanding their obligations under international humanitarian law. In particular, I am deeply concerned about the horrific conditions facing the nearly 400,000 people who remain besieged across the country. The quantity of assistance reaching the besieged areas is pitiful, and in 2015, access to those areas shrank even further. The parties to the conflict need to lift the sieges and allow sustained and unimpeded access to the 4.5 million people living in areas classified as hard-to-reach. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has the primary responsibility to protect its civilian population.

Ban Ki-moon, "Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," United Nations

Security Council document [S/2016/60](#), 21 Jan 2016.

My comment is that some of these "non-State actors" are piously demanding that Assad stop attacking civilians, and demanding that Assad stop besieging rebel-controlled towns, when these "non-State actors" have committed — and are continuing to commit — the same violations of international law and the same violations of United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

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.

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.

I am no longer listing the Iraqi death toll on my HTML webpage, because the statistics from the Iraqi government are seriously incomplete and *not* credible. But, for what it is worth, the United Nations reported 849 Iraqis killed in "acts of terrorism, violence and armed conflict" during January 2016. [UNAMI](#).

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.

January 2016: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 11 January 2016, an ISIL car bomb exploded at a shopping mall in Baghdad. Then six ISIL gunmen stormed into the entrance to the mall. At least 18 people died and 50 were wounded. Separately, a, ISIL suicide bomber followed by a car bomb at a cafe in Muqdadiyah, Diyala province, killed at least 24 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 12 January the [Associated Press](#) suggested that ISIL was now concentrating on attacking Shiite civilians.

On 16 January 2016, three U.S. civilians were kidnapped in Baghdad. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 18 January, the Iraqi government began house-to-house searches for the missing americans. *The Washington Post* and *Iraqi News* report the three were visiting a well-known brothel when the kidnapping occurred. *The Post* also reports that the three were Iraqis, who were naturalized U.S. citizens. Other journalists reported the three were kidnapped from the home of their translator. But if they were native Iraqis, one wonders why they needed a translator. [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Iraqi News](#). On 19 January, [Reuters](#) reports that a Shiite militia kidnapped the three americans. On 21 January, the [Associated Press](#) reports that anonymous Iraqi and Western security officials are agreed that either the Asaib Ahl al-Haq or the Saraya al-Salam Shiite militias kidnapped the americans. The AP says the abduction "was the latest in a series of brazen high-profile kidnappings undermining confidence in the Iraqi government's ability to control state-sanctioned Shiite militias".

On 16 Dec 2015, a group of Qatari hunters were kidnapped in southern Iraq, and then they vanished in the lawless nation of Iraq.

On 20 January 2016, the [Associated Press](#) show reconnaissance satellite photographs taken on 31 March 2011 and 28 Sep 2014, and discovered that ISIL had destroyed St. Elijah's Monastery near Mosul. The Monastery was built in the year 590 and was the oldest Christian monastery in Iraq. The AP reports that ISIL destroyed the Monastery sometime "between August and September 2014." Note that the Iraqi government was apparently *not* aware of the destruction. Incidentally, the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division also desecrated the Monastery in 2003. The [Associated Press](#) reported on international condemnation of ISIL's destruction of this Monastery.

On 27 January, the [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) reported that an ISIL mass grave near Ramadi had been discovered with 40 bodies, including women and children.

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 1 Feb 2016, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Mosul" after 21 August 2015, 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 1 Feb 2016, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Ramadi" after 21 August 2015, 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.

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.

See also [Wall Street Journal](#) for 7 June 2015, which says "The ghost soldier problem was a factor in the Ramadi defeat, said Tariq Asal, a former Anbar police chief...."

Note that the ghost soldier problem was uncovered in November 2014, but the problem continued in the fall of Ramadi in May 2015. Apparently, Abadi was *not* able to end the "ghost soldier" problem in six months from November to May. I have seen no reports of criminal prosecutions of any of these corrupt army officers.

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.

January 2016

On 9 January 2016, Abadi pledged to end corruption in the Iraqi government during 2016. [Reuters](#). Previously, in August 2015, Abadi promised to end corruption, but he was frustrated by the opposition in the Iraqi parliament.

On 27 January, [Transparency International](#) issued their annual ranking of nations for corruption. Of 168 nations in their survey, Iraq was eighth from the bottom. Iraq was below Pakistan, Nigeria, Uganda, Cambodia, Yemen, Haiti, and Venezuela.

On 30 January, [Rudaw](#) reports that the oil refinery at Baiji — the largest oil refinery in Iraq — remains shut down after its liberation from ISIL in October 2015, owing to "looting and sabotage".

More U.S. 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. My essay for [December 2015](#) reported that the Iraqis quickly objected to foreign combat troops in Iraq, and the U.S. program stalled.

On 13 January, the [Pentagon](#) paraphrased what the U.S. Secretary of Defense told troops: "A specialized expeditionary targeting force announced in December is in place, preparing to work with the Iraqis to begin going after ISIL fighters and commanders". [Reuters](#) reports approximately 200 special operations troops have arrived in Iraq.

On 22 January, [Rudaw](#) reported that U.S. Special Forces were in Ramadi, helping the Iraqi army clear ISIL fighters.

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.

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. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown 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 December 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."
21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

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 19 Jan 2016, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of Dec. 15, 2015, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on Aug. 8, 2014, is \$5.53 billion and the average daily cost is \$11 million for 495 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 19 Jan 2016.

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-Raqqah". ISIL kidnapped 230 hostages on 7 Aug, the fate of the remaining 72 hostages is unknown.

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

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](#), [November 2015](#), and [December 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 2015, 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 allowed ISIL more time to entrench in Ramadi, including plant mines, install roadside bombs, and booby trap buildings — which made the liberation of Ramadi more difficult.

On 22 December 2015 — after 7 months of procrastination and postponement (!) — Iraqi troops finally began an assault toward the city center in Ramadi. The Iraqis were quick to declare victory in Ramadi on 28-29 Dec. However, approximately 700 ISIL fighters remained in or near Ramadi on 30 Dec 2015, and buildings and roads in Ramadi contained ISIL bombs and booby-traps. At the end of 2015, it was clear that Ramadi was *not* liberated from ISIL.

January 2016: Ramadi

On 2 Jan 2016, the Associated Press reported continuing battles in Ramadi:

Islamic State group militants continue to launch a series of counterattacks against Iraqi government forces on the edges of the western city of Ramadi days after the militant group was driven out of the city center, according to the U.S.-led coalition.

"The majority of these are outside downtown Ramadi to the north and east," and so far Iraqi government forces have successfully repelled every attack, said Baghdad-based coalition spokesman Col. Steve Warren.

....

Iraq's military says Islamic State militants on Friday [1 Jan] launched multiple suicide attacks on the outskirts of Ramadi.

Brig. Gen. Ahmed al-Belawi told The Associated Press on Saturday [2 Jan] that the militants stuck security forces with seven suicide car bombs in two areas outside Ramadi.

Sinan Salaheddin, "IS counterattacks target Iraqi troops in Ramadi," [Associated Press](#), 20:04 GMT, 2 Jan 2016.

On 3 January 2016, [Iraqi News](#) reports: "Anbar police chief Maj. Gen. Hadi Rseg announced on Sunday [3 Jan], that the security forces had managed to retake 80 percent of Ramadi".

Perhaps to show that ISIL is still alive, on 3 December, between 5 and 8 ISIL suicide bombers attacked Camp Speicher near Tikrit. Reuters says at least 15 Iraqi security forces were killed in the attack, Rudaw says at least 19 died. [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#).

On 5 January 2016, ISIL used explosives to destroy "large parts of the Ramadi General Hospital" before the Iraqi security forces arrived to "cleanse" ISIL from the hospital. [Iraqi News](#). My comment is that this is another example of violations by ISIL of international law, since attacks on hospitals are unlawful. On 7 January, [Iraqi News](#) reports that the Iraqi security forces liberated the Ramadi General Hospital, and killed seven ISIL suicide bombers in the Hospital.

On 4 January, ISIL began attacking the Iraqi town of Haditha, northwest of Ramadi. By night on 6 Jan, the [Associated Press](#) reports ISIL had killed "at least 45 Iraqi security forces and Sunni tribal fighters". See also [Reuters](#).

On 10 January, [Reuters](#) reported that the Iraqi army is clearing bombs only from "main streets and tactically important buildings" in Ramadi. Sometime "soon", "specialized bomb disposal teams from the police and civil defense force" would begin clearing bombs from buildings in Ramadi. Restoring infrastructure (e.g., electricity, water) and rebuilding Ramadi will occur *after* all of the explosives have been removed.

On 16 January, the [Washington Post](#) reported that Ramadi now faces two big problems. First,

"plans to secure the city with thousands of Sunni tribal fighters have stalled." Second, "Ramadi's reconstruction is likely to cost billions of dollars", which the Shiite government of Iraq can *not* afford to pay.

On 16 January, the United Nations report says that nearly 1500 buildings in Ramadi have been destroyed, and more than 3000 buildings in Ramadi are damaged. The U.N. compared satellite imagery of Ramadi in July 2014 and December 2015, so only gross damage visible from above is included in this report. [Associated Press](#).

On 28 January, [Iraqi News](#) reports that 95% of Ramadi is now liberated from ISIL. This news comes one month after Abadi personally toured Ramadi and declared victory over ISIL on 29 Dec 2015.

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.

**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.

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.

January 2016: Mosul

On 16 Jan 2016, [Reuters](#) reports an interview with the deputy prime minister of Kurdistan, in which the Kurdish leader says: "I don't think the Mosul offensive could happen this year [2016]. I don't think the Iraqi armed forces are ready and I don't think the (U.S.-led) coalition is confident in the ability of everyone to get ready in time for an offensive this year."

On 28 January, the top U.S. military officer in Iraq is worried that there may be a catastrophic collapse of Mosul Dam on the Tigris river. The Associated Press cites "a report in 2006 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers" for the conclusion that a collapse of the dam "would put Mosul — Iraq's second-largest city — under 20 meters (65 feet) of water and kill an estimated half a million people." Reuters reports that when ISIL briefly captured the dam in August 2014, ISIL "had stolen equipment and chased away technicians" who were maintaining the dam. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Meeting in Paris

On 20 January 2016, there was a meeting of the defense ministers of Australia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the USA in Paris. Here is their statement:

Paris, January 20, 2016

The text of the following statement was released by the defense ministers of Australia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States following a meeting co-hosted by France and the United States in Paris on counter-ISIL cooperation.

Australian Minister for Defense Marise Payne, French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian; German Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen, Italian Minister of Defense Roberta Pinotti, Dutch Minister of Defense Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, British Secretary of State for Defense Michael Fallon; and American Secretary of Defense Ash Carter led their respective delegations.

Today in Paris — at the invitation of French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian and U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter — we discussed opportunities to intensify and accelerate the counter-ISIL/DAESH military campaign in Iraq and Syria, our shared approach to defend against its global ambitions, and to ensure the protection of our citizens. ISIL/DAESH are on the back foot. But there is more we need to do.

We reaffirmed our governments' continuing substantial commitment to work together with the entire C-ISIL/DAESH Coalition to accelerate and intensify the campaign against ISIL/DAESH, in order to deliver a lasting defeat to this barbaric organization. We expressed our broad support for the campaign plan objectives, and the need to

continue gathering momentum in our campaign, as it moves into its next phase targeting ISIL/DAESH's vulnerabilities. We discussed military campaign requirements to expand efforts against ISIL/DAESH and committed to work together with other military and non-military contributors to fill these requirements. We agreed to review regularly the coalition's campaign plan and the progress in its implementation.

The military campaign is an essential part of our overall effort to defeat and destroy ISIL/DAESH, but it is not sufficient. We are committed to ensuring the coherence of our military actions with the comprehensive efforts to set the conditions for sustainable political stability in the region.

We thank all of our partners are helping us advance the military campaign against ISIL/DAESH and its infrastructure. We recognize in particular the dedication and steadfastness of local partner forces.

We endorsed Secretary Carter's proposal for defense ministers of the C-ISIL Coalition force contributing nations to convene their first Defense Ministerial, in February. "Joint Statement on Counter-ISIL Cooperation by the Defense Ministers of Australia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States," [Pentagon](#), 20 Jan 2016.

The [Associated Press](#) reported that the 7 Ministers agreed to "intensify and accelerate" the fight against ISIL. The Coalition hopes that local forces on the ground will liberate Raqqa and Mosul during the next 12 months.

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](#) cite the Russian claims of the daily number of airstrikes and the provinces hit by Russian airstrikes.

On 9 January 2016, an anonymous senior U.S. Government official told journalists that only 30% of Russian airstrikes in Syria were against ISIL. Further, the "imprecise [Russian] attacks are forcing the population to flee, fuelling Europe's refugee crisis". [Reuters](#).

On 15 January, Russia announced it had a new mission in Syria: to deliver humanitarian aid to towns besieged by insurgents. [Reuters](#). This comes after Syria had besieged Madaya and more than two dozen people there had died of starvation. (see [above](#))

On 30 January, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights posted a news article about the number of people killed by Russian airstrikes, since the Russian strikes began on 30 Sep 2015:

1. 1380 civilians (includes: "332 children, 195 women, 853 men and young men")
2. 1233 rebels and Nusra Front fighters

3. 965 ISIL

This is a total of 3578 dead, of whom only 27% are ISIL fighters. [SOHR](#); [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 January 2016: airstrikes

On Friday, 1 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: On Dec. 31, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria [sic] and Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 24 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, fighter-attack, and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, six ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL command and control node, seven ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL trench, and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED facility, five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed two ISIL heavy machine gun positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed three ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL command and control node, and six ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, 11 strikes destroyed nine ISIL bunkers, five ISIL-used culverts, and four ISIL-used bridges.

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

[Central Command](#), 1 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 1 Jan 2016.

2 January 2016: airstrikes

On Saturday, 2 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using fighter, fighter-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 25 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. [Sentence deleted by Standler, applying correction in 3 Jan CENTCOM press release.]

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL-used bridge.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes struck three ISIL gas and oil separation plants.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed five ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed three ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, nine strikes suppressed an ISIL fighting position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed 17 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL VBIED facility.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL heavy machine gun positions, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle, cratered two ISIL-used roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL weapons caches, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Tal Afar, four strikes struck destroyed six ISIL bunkers and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

[Central Command](#), 2 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 2 Jan 2016.

3 January 2016: airstrikes

On Sunday, 3 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and

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

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant and destroyed an ISIL technical vehicle, an ISIL excavator, two ISIL front end loaders, and damaged a separate ISIL front end loader.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Washiyah, one strike struck an ISIL weapons manufacturing and storage facility.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 18 ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL command and control nodes, two ISIL weapons caches, two ISIL tunnels, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL tactical vehicles, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), three ISIL buildings, two ISIL heavy machine gun positions, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL staging location, suppressed an ISIL VBIED, damaged an ISIL staging location, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL light machine guns and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL-used bridge.

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

[Central Command](#), 3 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 3 Jan 2016.

4 January 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 4 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 3, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq.

In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 25 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed five ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, five ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and five ISIL rocket rails. The strikes also suppressed two ISIL mortar positions and an ISIL VBIED, cratered an ISIL-used road, wounded three ISIL fighters, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED, four ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, 12 strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL excavator, four ISIL weapons caches, ISIL engineering equipment, three ISIL heavy machine guns, 12 ISIL assembly areas, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL-used bridge.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and four buildings and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed two ISIL machine gun positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed 10 ISIL bunkers.

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

[Central Command](#), 4 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 4 Jan 2016.

5 January 2016: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 5 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 4, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Ramadi, two strikes denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Haditha, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, three ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy machine guns, and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Kisik, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, six ISIL bunkers, two ISIL-used culverts, an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL weapons cache, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL mortar positions, five ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and suppressed three separate ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 11 ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL weapon caches, an ISIL command and control node, nine ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

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

[Central Command](#), 5 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 5 Jan 2016.

6 January 2016: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 6 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter, attack, ground-attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters building.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL vehicles, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and wounded six ISIL fighters.

- Near Kisik, five strikes destroyed two ISIL bunkers, nine ISIL fighting positions, 11 ISIL assembly areas, and suppressed a separate ISIL fighting position and an ISIL machine gun position.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket cache.
- Near Ramadi, eight strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL staging areas, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL front-end loader, six ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL rocket propelled grenade system, an ISIL recoilless rifle, three ISIL vehicles, and four ISIL heavy machine guns. The strikes also damaged an ISIL tactical vehicle, denied ISIL access to terrain, and wounded three ISIL fighters.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and damaged an ISIL bunker.

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

[Central Command](#), 6 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 6 Jan 2016.

One airstrike near Ramadi on 5 Jan was omitted, but included in the press release on 7 Jan.

7 January 2016: airstrikes

On Thursday, 7 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 6, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using fighter, attack, and bomber aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, fighter, fighter-attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, 14 strikes destroyed 24 ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL buildings, suppressed an ISIL vehicle's movement, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL staging facility and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed 30 ISIL rockets, an ISIL rocket rail, and an ISIL building.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL staging areas, two ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL fighting

- position, two ISIL vehicles, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL VBIED factory.
 - Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL bed down locations, an ISIL tunnel, and four ISIL assembly areas.
 - Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two large ISIL tactical units and destroyed 13 ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL heavy machine guns, four ISIL VBIED staging facilities, an ISIL staging area, three ISIL buildings, three ISIL tactical vehicles, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
 - Near Sinjar, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Additionally, one strike from Jan. 5 was not included on the Jan. 6 strike release.

Iraq

- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL building, and cratered an ISIL used road.

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

[Central Command](#), 7 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 7 Jan 2016.

8 January 2016: airstrikes

On Friday, 8 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 7, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using fighter, and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, fighter, and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets. Coalition military forces conducted one strike in Iraq in support of Coalition operations using fighter aircraft.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed a separate ISIL fighting position.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed three ISIL staging areas.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck inoperable Coalition equipment denying ISIL access in support of Coalition operations.
- Near Haditha, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Irbil, one strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tunnel, four ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL petroleum refinery.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 16 ISIL fighting positions, 13 ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL obstacle, an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) cluster, an ISIL house borne IED (HBIED), 11 ISIL vehicle borne IED (VBIED) facilities, three ISIL staging areas, two ISIL sniper positions, two ISIL tunnel entrances, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL light machine gun position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL command and control node.

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

[Central Command](#), 8 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 8 Jan 2016.

9 January 2016: airstrikes

On Saturday, 9 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes using fighter, bomber, and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL crane and an ISIL workover rig.
- Near Manbij, 12 strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 20 ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL vehicles, two ISIL buildings, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and a separate ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL weapon caches, and three ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 21 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL sniper positions, two ISIL recoilless rifles, an ISIL

vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility, two ISIL weapon caches, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Sinjar, one strike struck two separate ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL light machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL-used culvert and an ISIL fighting position.

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

[Central Command](#), 9 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 9 Jan 2016.

10 January 2016: airstrikes

On Sunday, 10 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 9, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes using fighter, attack, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL crane.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL buildings.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed 16 ISIL skid mounted gas and oil separation plants.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL bunker, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and damaged an ISIL building.
- Near Washiyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL building, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed five ISIL assembly areas and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL headquarters building and destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL

weapons caches, and two ISIL assembly areas.

- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL training facility, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL recoilless rifle, wounded three ISIL fighters, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL-used bridge.

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

[Central Command](#), 10 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 10 Jan 2016.

11 January 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 11 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using fighter, attack, 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 ground-attack fighter, bomber, 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 Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL pipeline fitter truck.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL cranes.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL bed down location, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL tunnel, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed three ISIL-used cranes and damaged a separate ISIL-used crane.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Haditha, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, one strike struck inoperable Coalition equipment denying ISIL access in support of Coalition operations.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL warehouse.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) facility and destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions and an

ISIL vehicle.

- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-used culvert.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL mortar positions, 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](#), 11 Jan 2016. The CENTCOM press release miscounted the total number of airstrikes in Iraq, text above corrected by Standler.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 11 Jan 2016.

12 January 2016: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 12 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 11, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and bomber aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed two ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike cratered three ISIL-used roads.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL bridge and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL cash distribution center and destroyed two ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and 20 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL command and control node and destroyed six ISIL staging areas.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), two ISIL front end loaders, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an

ISIL fighting position.

- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL-used bridge.

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

[Central Command](#), 12 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 Jan 2016.

11 January 2016: ISIL had money to burn or ISIL cashed out

On 11 Jan 2016, the U.S.-led coalition dropped two 900 kg bombs on a building in Mosul where ISIL stored cash. [CNN](#); [Reuters](#); [The National](#) in UAE.

On 14 January, at a press conference, the commander of CENTCOM said:

A few days ago, we conducted a strike on bulk cash storage facility in Mosul. It was a good strike. And we estimate that it served to deprive ISIL of millions of dollars. And it was not the first strike on a cash storage site. We struck several other cash storage sites in recent months, and we will continue to go after the enemy's finances. And combined with all of the other strikes that we've done on ISIL's gas and oil production and distribution capabilities and strikes against his economic infrastructure and the various sources of revenue, you can bet that he is feeling the strain on his checkbook.

You see, ISIL needs those funds to pay their fighters, to recruit new fighters and to conduct their various maligned activities. You know, we said from the outset of this campaign that to defeat ISIL, we're going to have to take away his ability to resource himself and we're going to have to curb the flow of foreign fighters coming into the theater. In addition to attacking and attriting his fielded forces and taking back ground that he once held in Iraq and Syria.

General Lloyd Austin, "Department of Defense Press Briefing by Secretary Carter at U.S. Central Command Headquarters, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida," [Pentagon](#), 14 Jan 2016.

And on 18 January, ISIL announced a 50% reduction in salaries to its fighters, owing to "exceptional circumstances". It is not known if the destruction of ISIL's cash on 11 Jan forced the cut in salaries. [SOHR](#); [Russia Today](#); [CNN](#); [The Guardian](#).

In his 20 January press briefing, the Operation Inherent Resolve spokesman in Baghdad said: QUESTION [by Tara Copp]: And Fox I believe reported, citing CENTCOM, that about \$45 million in cash was hit that day. I was wondering if you could verify that account and just how you were able to assess what — how much money has been hit?

And then last one would be, what kind of currency was found there? And if you can confirm that this — I guess, hitting the cash is having a negative effect on ISIL's ability to pay its fighters.

COL. WARREN: The amount of money, we don't have an exact count, we know it's in the tens of millions of dollars. Whether or not it was in dollars or dinars or a

combination of both we're not entirely certain, but we do know that we have impacted their ability to pay their fighters in the immediate term.

So this — you know, these cash strikes combined with our other strikes against their industrial base we believe are having an accumulative effect. I read recently in the Post that there's reporting that ISIL has had to cut the salaries of their fighters by half. I can't confirm that, but that's what I read in the newspaper.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 20 Jan 2016.

[Ms. Copp was confused. The \$45 million loss reported by Fox News was in a *second* airstrike on 18 Jan, see [below](#).]

Journalists loved to show the Pentagon's video of the airstrike that blew up ISIL's money. See, e.g., [CNN](#); [Fox News](#).

This is a good place to remind the reader that when ISIL captured Mosul in June 2014, ISIL stole approximately a half-billion U.S. dollars from banks in Mosul. Most of ISIL's income is from unlawful transactions, such as illegal sales of oil, and illegal sales of looted antiquities.

13 January 2016: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 13 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 12, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 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, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL building.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and an ISIL oil booster pump generator.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Abayad, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL bunkers, an ISIL-used tunnel, eight ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL supply cache, and six ISIL fighting positions.

- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL headquarters building, an ISIL weapons storage facility, an ISIL security headquarters building, and an ISIL-used bridge, and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, nine ISIL fighting positions, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker, an ISIL vehicle borne explosive device (VBIED), two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL vehicle, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

[Central Command](#), 13 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 13 Jan 2016.

14 January 2016: airstrikes

On Thursday, 14 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using bomber and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, ground-attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factory and an ISIL IED facility.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL vehicle, seven ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL-used culvert, disabled an ISIL front end loader, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 14 ISIL fighting positions, destroyed two ISIL recoilless rifles, 12 ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL sniper positions, and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL assembly area.

- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL weapons cache, and five ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL weapon caches.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed three ISIL fuel tankers and an ISIL command and control node.

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

[Central Command](#), 14 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 14 Jan 2016.

15 January 2016: airstrikes

On Friday, 15 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

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

Syria

- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed three ISIL tunnel entrances.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Balad, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL headquarters, and an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) factory and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL vehicles, nine ISIL assembly areas, two weapons caches, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL command and control node, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL heavy machine gun, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL staging area, cratered an ISIL-used road, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tikrit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

[Central Command](#), 15 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 15 Jan 2016.

16 January 2016: airstrikes

On Saturday, 16 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 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 rocket artillery and attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL-used bridge.
- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL bed down location, and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and wounded an ISIL fighter.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Kisik, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL-used culverts, 12 ISIL assembly areas, five ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL weapons cache, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL VBIED, four ISIL staging areas, cratered two ISIL-used roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed three ISIL assembly areas and an ISIL VBIED.

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

[Central Command](#), 16 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 16 Jan 2016.

17 January 2016: airstrikes

On Sunday, 17 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 26 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and ground-attack, attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, 10 strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL-used culvert and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, 34 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL weapons caches, three ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL bunkers, and wounded two ISIL fighters.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes struck an ISIL weapons manufacturing facility and an ISIL-used culvert and destroyed an ISIL crude oil heater and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL artillery piece, five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL heavy machine gun, suppressed an ISIL staging area, and cratered an ISIL-used road.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL-used bridge.

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

[Central Command](#), 17 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 17 Jan 2016.

18 January 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 18 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 25 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL underground facility.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and wounded an ISIL fighter.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL vehicles and wounded five ISIL fighters.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL headquarters building.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, 10 strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL communications facility, and an ISIL-used culvert and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL weapons caches, and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, eight strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL building, cratered two ISIL-used roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck two ISIL-used culverts and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

[Central Command](#), 18 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 18 Jan 2016.

19 January 2016: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 19 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 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 21 strikes coordinated

with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Kisik, two strikes produced inconclusive results.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, four ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL cash collection point.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, nine strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL sniper position, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL tunnel entrance and damaged an ISIL petroleum oil and lubricant tank.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL assembly area.

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

[Central Command](#), 19 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 19 Jan 2016.

18 January 2016: ISIL cashiered again or ISIL stash of cash trashed

On 19 January, [Fox News](#) reported that the equivalent of US\$ 90 million was in the Mosul building that was bombed on 11 Jan, and an additional US\$ 45 million was in a Mosul bank that was bombed on the night of 18 Jan. Fox did *not* say how the U.S. military knew the amount of the loss.

20 January 2016: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 20 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 19, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria [sic] and Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed ten ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL command and control node, and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL RPG system, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL building, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL tunnel entrance, two ISIL petroleum oil and lubricant trucks, an ISIL front end loader, suppressed an ISIL mortar system, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed four ISIL command and control nodes.

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

[Central Command](#), 20 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 20 Jan 2016.

21 January 2016: airstrikes

On Thursday, 21 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 20, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Ar Zawr, one strike destroyed four ISIL cranes.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, two ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed nine ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL weapons cache, two ISIL command and control nodes, and five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factory.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed

an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL home-made explosives (HME) cache, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL building, an ISIL petroleum oil and lubricant truck, and cratered an ISIL-used road.

- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed 14 ISIL fighting positions.

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

[Central Command](#), 21 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 21 Jan 2016.

22 January 2016: airstrikes

On Friday, 22 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 21, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and damaged an ISIL-used building.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck an ISIL-used bridge and two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), two ISIL staging areas, three ISIL front end loaders, an ISIL weapons cache, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

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

[Central Command](#), 22 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 22 Jan 2016.

23 January 2016: airstrikes

CENTCOM posted nothing at its website on the weekend, and no press release on airstrikes on Monday. Finally, Tuesday morning, CENTCOM posted four press releases on airstrikes, all with the same wrong title.

On Saturday, 23 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 22, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using fighter and attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Manbij, one strike cratered two ISIL-used roads.
- Near Washiyah, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 11 ISIL rockets, three ISIL vehicles, five ISIL assembly areas, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) factory.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL front end loader, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL staging area, three ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL heavy machine gun positions, an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar tube, and two ISIL light machine gun positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL light machine gun position.

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

[Central Command](#), 23 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 23 Jan 2016.

24 January 2016: airstrikes

On Sunday, 24 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and

Syria:

On Jan. 23, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using fighter, attack, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL structures and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL weapons storage area.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL staging areas, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fuel tank, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL petroleum, oil, and lubricant cache.

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

[Central Command](#), 24 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 24 Jan 2016.

25 January 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 25 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL-used earthen bridge.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed three ISIL cranes and damaged a fourth ISIL crane.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed two ISIL weapons caches and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed three separate ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL light machine gun.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL communications facility, and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL barge, an ISIL sniper position, two ISIL bunkers, two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL weapons cache, three ISIL buildings, three ISIL tactical vehicles, and cratered an ISIL-used earthen bridge.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.

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

[Central Command](#), 25 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 Jan 2016.

26 January 2016: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 26 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 25, 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 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed two ISIL cranes.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters building.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL mortar systems.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL weapons storage facility and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, nine strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area, two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL armored bulldozer, an ISIL fuel tanker, 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](#), 26 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 26 Jan 2016.

One airstrike near Sinjar Iraq on 25 Jan was reported on 27 Jan.

27 January 2016: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 27 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 26, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Raqqah, one strike destroyed six ISIL workover rigs.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL bunker, and damaged an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL sniper position, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL fuel truck, damaged a separate ISIL vehicle, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

Additionally, one strike from Jan. 25 was not included on the Jan. 26 strike release:

- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed ISIL mortar fire.

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

[Central Command](#), 27 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 27 Jan 2016.

28 January 2016: airstrikes

On Thursday, 28 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL improvised explosives manufacturing area.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and destroyed two ISIL cranes and two ISIL workover rigs.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL rocket caches, two ISIL rocket rails, four ISIL mortar tubes, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, eight strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL mortar position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL light machine gun, and five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

[Central Command](#), 28 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 28 Jan 2016.

29 January 2016: airstrikes

On Friday, 29 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 28, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and disabled an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL improvised explosives manufacturing area.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, two strikes struck an ISIL staging area and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL communications facility.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL bunker, cratered two ISIL-used roads, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Hit, one strike damaged an ISIL-used bridge.

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

[Central Command](#), 29 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 29 Jan 2016.

30 January 2016: airstrikes

On Saturday, 30 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 16 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL vehicles and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Al Hawl, three strikes destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, destroyed an ISIL tunnel system, and damaged a separate ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant and destroyed an ISIL front end loader, two ISIL excavators, an ISIL crane, an ISIL trenching machine, and an ISIL road grader.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Washiyah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL excavators and damaged a separate ISIL excavator.

Iraq

- Near Al Asad, one strike destroyed two ISIL home-made explosives facilities.
- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed three ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area and an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL fighting position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL command and control node and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes 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](#), 30 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 30 Jan 2016.

31 January 2016: airstrikes

On Sunday, 31 January 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 30, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL structure and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL crane.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike destroyed an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, an ISIL fighting position, and cratered an ISIL-used land bridge.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ramadi, seven strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL front end loader, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

[Central Command](#), 31 Jan 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 31 Jan 2016.

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 numbers

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.

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 2015, 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](#).

On 6 January 2016, the German government announced that a total of 1,091,894 migrants had registered in Germany during the 2015 year. Of these, 428,468 (39%) were from Syria. [Associated Press](#).

disenchantment & failure of assimilation

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.

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 1 January 2016, the [Washington Post](#) reported that some migrants to Europe were returning home to Iraq, more than 779 Iraqis in November 2015 alone. Reasons for returning include: "disillusioned with the lack of opportunities or homesick, while others were forced to go when their asylum claims were rejected." On 11 January, [Reuters](#) reports the Iraqi embassy in Berlin issued 1400 passports for migrants to return to Iraq since the end of October 2015.

On 1 October 2015, 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.

some immigrants are criminals

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 New Year's Eve, 31 Dec 2015, Muslim immigrants sexually assaulted more than 100 women in Cologne, Germany. (see [below](#)) At least six other cities in Europe experienced similar attacks, and journalists spoke of a "rape culture" amongst Islamic men.

On 15 January 2016, after multiple complaints of sexual harassment of women, the town of Bornheim, Germany banned adult Muslim men from the town swimming pool. [Reuters](#); [The Guardian](#).

On 20 January 2016, [Israel National News](#) reported that the German government had been concealing crimes committed by Muslim immigrants since June 2014.

fraudulent passports

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.

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 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015 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](#).

politics

At the middle of the immigration debacle in 2015, the German Chancellor, Dr. Angela Merkel, famously said that "asylum laws have no upper limit". [Associated Press](#) (5 Sep); [Politico](#) (1 Oct); [Deutsche Welle](#) (21 Nov); Commentators suggested that Dr. Merkel's absolute, "no limits" compassion for refugees had its origins in her moral upbringing as the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. My comment is that the asylum law has *no* limit because legislators forgot to put a limit in the law.

By 6 January 2016, Merkel was willing to reduce the flow of migrants to Europe. The Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) has demanded a limit of 200,000 migrants/year to

Germany, which would mean that 80% of the migrants who entered Germany in 2015 would need to be expelled. [Reuters](#).

On 29 November 2015, the European Union and Turkey reached an agreement in which Turkey promised to reduce the number of migrants to Europe and Europe agreed to pay Turkey US\$ 3.2 billion. On 7 January 2016, [Reuters](#) reports that the European Union says it is "a long way from being satisfied" with Turkey's efforts to limit migrants.

The wave of hundreds of sexual assaults and robberies by Islamic immigrants in Cologne, Hamburg, and more than 6 other cities on the night of 31 Dec 2015 (see in [below](#)) was the critical turning point in which many Germans went from welcoming refugees to wanting to expel immigrants. This incident showed that some immigrants were *not* going to conform to German concepts of law-and-order. Furthermore, the police waited 5 days to mention that Islamic immigrants were suspected of the assaults and robberies, a delay that does *not* inspire confidence in the German police.

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 for November cited many news sources, and my essay for [December 2015](#) cited 8 more news articles.

Sources in January 2016:

- "French identify another Paris attacker via DNA from body parts," [Reuters](#), 12:43 GMT, 15 Jan 2016. (Belgian-Moroccan Chakib Akrouh detonated in a flat on 18 Nov 2015. Also, "Fifty people ... are still in hospital.")
- "Video shows Paris attackers committing earlier IS atrocities," [Associated Press](#), 23:42 EST, 24 Jan 2016. (ISIL released a 17-minute video showing nine of the Paris attackers beheading or shooting captives in Syria.)
- "EU police warn that more attacks by IS militants are likely," [Associated Press](#), 19:00 GMT, 25 Jan 2016. (more about yesterday's video)

On 31 Jan 2016, police have failed to find Salah Abdeslam, who fled to Belgium after being involved in the 13 Nov 2015 attacks in Paris.

31 Dec 2015: Muslim immigrants run amok in Cologne, Hamburg, ...

On the night of 31 Dec 2015, a gang of 1000 immigrants of "Arab or North African" origin sexually attacked at least 90 women in Cologne (Köln), Germany, and also stole purses and cell phones. Political correctness is so strong in the German government, that the ethnicity of the attackers was first announced by police on 5 Jan 2016. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#);

[Associated Press](#); [The Telegraph](#) (cover-up alleged). The sexual assaults and robberies were bad enough, but then journalists reminded us that Islamic men perpetrated similar crimes during the "Arab Spring" demonstrations in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt in 2011. One journalist generalized in the [National Post](#) in Canada about a "rape culture" that exists amongst Islamic men. [Bloomberg View](#) published an article, titled "Germany Has the North African Disease".

On 8 January 2016, the German police announced they had 31 suspects, including "at least 18 asylum seekers" in the Cologne attacks. On 8 Jan there are 170 complaints of criminal conduct in Cologne, of which 117 (70%) are for sexual assault. The BBC and CNN reported that there were similar attacks in Helsinki, Kalmar Sweden, Salzburg, and Zürich on New Year's Eve. [New York Times](#); [BBC](#); [CNN](#). On 8 January, [Reuters](#) reported "similar but smaller-scale assaults on women" in Hamburg and Stuttgart.

My comment is that similar attacks on women in seven different European cities strongly hints at a "rape culture" amongst some Islamic men, which culture spread across Europe after an unorderly flood of migrants entered Europe.

On 8 January, [The Telegraph](#) reported that an "estimated 1,000 Iraqi asylum seekers" had gathered in Helsinki on the night of 31 Dec 2015, where "widespread sexual harassment" was reported. The deputy police chief in Helsinki said: "We have never before had this kind of sexual harassment happening at New Year's Eve." Similarly, the German Justice Minister referred to the attacks in Cologne as a "completely new dimension of organized criminality." [Deutsche Welle](#). The obvious conclusion is that allowing immigration from Arab or North African nations increase crime.

The English-language news media was silent about what happened in Hamburg, but the German-language [Schleswig-Holsteinischer Zeitung](#) on 8 Jan reported 108 complaints of criminal conduct (sexual assaults and robberies) during the New Year's Eve celebrations in Hamburg.

On 9 January, [The Telegraph](#) in London, England reported on the crimes in Cologne, and also remarked on the alleged orders for German police *not* to publicly announce crimes involving immigrants.

Angela Merkel for the first time signalled a change in her "open-door" refugee policy on Saturday, as police admitted that a "majority" of those suspected of sex attacks in Cologne were asylum-seekers or illegal immigrants.

New figures released disclosed the scale of the violence in the city on New Year's Eve, which showed 30 more sexual assaults than were previously reported.

Cologne Police said that 379 offences were committed on that night, of which 150 were sexual assaults.

"Those in focus of criminal police investigations are mostly people from North African countries," police said in a statement. "The majority of them are asylum-seekers and people who are in Germany illegally."

Justin Huggler, "Germany will deport migrants who break law, warns Angela Merkel as

thousands join anti-Islam protest," [The Telegraph](#), 17:39 GMT, 9 Jan 2016.

On 10 January, the criminal debacle continued to worsen, as [Reuters](#) reported: "Attacks on women in Cologne and other German cities on New Year's Eve have prompted more than 600 criminal complaints, with police suspicion resting on asylum seekers," On 10 Jan, there were a total of 516 complaints in Cologne and 133 complaints in Hamburg.

On 11 January, the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia issued a report on what happened on New Year's Eve in Cologne. Reuters reported:

A report from the Interior Ministry in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state, where Cologne lies, said 516 criminal complaints had been registered, 237 of which were of a sexual nature.

A separate report from the Cologne police gave graphic descriptions of the crimes, listing case after case of women surrounded by gangs of men who put their hands in the victims' pants and skirts, grabbed them between the legs, on the buttocks and the breasts, often while stealing their wallets and cell phones.

A total of 19 suspects have been identified, all foreigners.

NRW Interior Minister Ralf Jaeger spoke of "serious failures" by the police, who were significantly outnumbered but never called for reinforcements.

He also criticised them for refusing to communicate in the days after New Year's Eve that the vast majority of the perpetrators were people with migration backgrounds, blaming this on misguided "political correctness".

"More than 1,000 Arab and North African men gathered on New Year's Eve near Cologne cathedral and the main train station. Among them were many refugees that came to Germany in the past months," Jaeger told a special parliamentary committee in NRW.

Noah Barkin And Michael Nienaber, "Merkel under pressure as Cologne police detail assaults," [Reuters](#), 01:29 GMT, 12 Jan 2016.

7 Jan 2016: terror attack in Paris

One terrorist entered a police station in Paris on 7 Jan 2016. The terrorist was shot dead by police before the terrorist could harm anyone. The Associate Press noted that this attack was almost to the minute a one-year anniversary of the attacks on the office of *Charlie Hebdo*.

This terrorist:

- carried a meat cleaver
- wore a explosives vest
- yelled "Allahu akbar!"
- carried a document with an emblem of the Islamic State group and "an unequivocal claim of responsibility in Arabic".

Police shot the terrorist twice and he died in the police station. The explosives vest was fake.

There was a mystery about the identity of the dead terrorist. His fingerprints matched a robbery suspect who was arrested in 2012 or 2013. The robbery suspect identified himself in 2012 or 2013 as Ali Sallah, from Casablanca, Morocco, who was born in 1995. But the dead terrorist in Paris appeared older than 20 years. And Reuters reports: "a sheet of paper found on his body gave a different name, and a Tunisian nationality." [Associated Press](#) (7 Jan); [Reuters](#)(8 Jan); [Associated Press](#) (8 Jan identity problem); [Reuters](#)(8 Jan, identity problem).

On 9 January, German police announced that the Paris terrorist — whoever he was — had lived in an apartment for asylum-seekers in Recklinghausen, Germany. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) tells us that the terrorist "painted the symbol of Islamic state on the wall of two rooms." Also, Reuters reports he used *seven* different aliases.

One terrorist who harms no one is rather insignificant. I mention this attack because it repeats a pattern seen previously, mostly recently in the 13 Nov 2015 attacks in Paris: when Islamic immigrants with an unknown identity perpetrate a terror attack. Indeed, on 8 Jan, two of the ten attackers in Paris continue to have unknown identities.

11 Jan 2016: attack in Marseille

On 11 January 2016, a 15 year old Turkish citizen of Kurdish ethnicity used a machete to attack a Jewish teacher on a street in Marseille, France. The teacher survived the attack. Reuters reported the Marseille prosecutor said: "He claimed to have acted in the name of Allah and the Islamic State, repeating several times to have done on behalf of Daech (Islamic State)". FRANCE24 reported the Marseille prosecutor said the attacker "has the profile of someone who was radicalised on the Internet". The urchin's family was not aware he had been radicalized. Witnesses reported that the violent anti-Semitic urchin yelled "allah hu akbar" before he slashed the Jewish teacher. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [FRANCE24](#); [Forward](#).

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 January 2016, the possibility of peace in Syria looks grim for the foreseeable future.

ISIL has had effective fighters in Syria since mid-2013. The Syrian Kurds are the only ground forces in Syria that can defeat ISIL. Obama has been reluctant to cooperate with Syrian Kurds, because the Turkish government considers the Kurds to be terrorists. Instead, Obama planned to train and equip the so-called "moderate rebels" in Syria, an effort that *planned* to train 15,000 rebels by January 2018. Meanwhile, effective troops on the ground were needed in Syria in January 2014 to prevent ISIL from capturing cities and infrastructure, and were needed in Syria beginning in September 2014 to complement the U.S. airstrikes. By 26 Sep 2015, fewer than 130 rebels have completed their training, and both batches of U.S.-trained rebels have performed poorly in Syria. On 9 October 2015, the U.S. finally ended the training of moderate rebels to fight against ISIL in Syria. This lack of competent ground forces in Syria is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

Beginning in 2013, Obama and Kerry, along with the United Nations Secretary General, have repeatedly uttered the slogan that there is "*no* military solution" in Syria. But what the foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, USA, etc.) have actually done is pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military solution. The situation dramatically worsened on 30 Sep 2015, with the beginning of massive Russian airstrikes on the Free Syrian Army and Nusra Front in western Syria. There is an incredible amount of hypocrisy by the foreign meddlers in *talking* about a political solution according to the Geneva Communiqué of 2012, while actively engaging in continuing — and escalating — warfare.

End of Syria

Since October 2013, I have been advocating in my essays that Europe and the USA actively support Assad in his fight against terrorists. But it is increasingly clear that neither Europe nor the USA will support Assad. And, beginning in December 2014, it is becoming clear that Assad's resources are stretched too thin for him to win militarily against a formidable array of terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front). We have been here before. When the USA deposed Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, the result in Iraq was anarchy, followed by civil war. And when NATO airstrikes helped depose Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, the result was again anarchy and civil war. And so, when Assad leaves power, the Syrian government will collapse, anarchy will prevail, and each terrorist organization — already present in Syria since 2012-2013 — will rule a small part of former Syria and continue fighting with each other. In retrospect, some nations should be ruled by a strong tyrant (e.g., Hussein, Gaddafi, Assad), because a transition to democracy quickly degenerates into fragmentation, anarchy, and civil war.

Back in June 2014, Lakhdar Brahimi — the second U.N. negotiator for Syria — predicted Syria will become "a failed state, with warlords all over the place." (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria, at section titled: "Brahimi Interview".)

It should be an immense scandal that Obama's idealistic obsession with "supporting democracy" (i.e., opposing Assad) in Syria led to:

- the deaths of *more* than 250,000 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure,
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- approximately 4,400,000 refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and a flood of several hundred thousand migrants to Europe in August-September 2015. ([LA Times](#), 8 Sep 2015)

The "SCPR Alienation and Violence Report 2014", cited in my essay for [March 2015](#), contains an eloquent description of the destruction of Syria.

The peace negotiations sponsored by the United Nations have moved at a snail's pace since mid-2013 and there have been no significant results. The United Nations (e.g., Ban and de Mistura) are now trying to solve the problem that existed in the years 2011 and 2012: convert Assad's dictatorship to a democratic government. But, since June 2014, the current big problem is ISIL's creation of a caliphate in Syria, Iraq, and eventually other nations. Another current problem is Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda) creating an emirate in Syria. Other current problems are numerous jihadist organizations who want to create an Islamic government to replace Assad's secular government. Looking at all of these current problems, I conclude that Assad is better than any of the alternatives amongst the insurgents.

The Syrian government — regardless of who leads it — does *not* have the resources to defeat the multiple terrorist insurgencies. And the continuing civil war and its destruction of buildings, electricity supply, and other infrastructure is continuing to deplete resources of Syria.

Note that, consistently since mid-2013, *none* of the insurgent groups in Syria want to attend negotiations. That alone will kill any possible political solution for the Syrian civil war.

Conclusion for Iraq

The Syrians have an effective government and an effective military. In contrast, during 2014 the Iraqi Parliament slowly formed a new government (during an existential crisis) and the Iraqi army was unable to expel ISIL from towns and cities. Iraq — only slightly better than Yemen, Somalia, and Libya — is now a failed nation. These facts make the Iraqi government weaker than the Syrian government.

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

The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable to prosecute army officers for desertion at Mosul on 10 June 2014 (see [above](#)), and unable to determine who killed innocent civilians in repeated bombings in or near Baghdad.

I conclude that the government of Iraq is dysfunctional and unworthy of assistance. But the Iraqi people do *not* deserve to suffer at the hands of the barbaric ISIL terrorists. Furthermore, ISIL in Iraq and Syria must be annihilated to protect neighboring nations from future invasion by ISIL terrorists, as ISIL expands their caliphate.

In June 2014, the Iraqi army was exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout in Ramadi. It will take years to fix these defects in the Iraqi army, while effective troops on the ground are needed *now* — truly were needed back in January 2014 — to prevent ISIL from capturing more cities and infrastructure. In September 2015, it was obvious that the Iraqi army and Shiite militia in Iraq are unable — or unwilling — to liberate either Fallujah, Mosul, or Ramadi from ISIL. This lack of competent ground forces in Iraq is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism

Beginning in August 2014, my essays on Syria and Iraq have had a section titled "[Islamic Public Relations Problem](#)", in which I have chronicled reaction by Muslim clerics and the need for these clerics to *continually* condemn Islamic terrorism.

Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

These facts clearly show that an interpretation of Islam is central to the ideology of the terrorists who have infested Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, The problem is "Islamic terrorism" — the *use of terrorism* to further goals that are justified by an interpretation of the Islamic religion.

To defeat the *idea* of Islamic terrorism, and to stop young Muslims from joining terrorist organizations, it is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism in the name of Islam, and especially condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government. Instead, Muslim clerics have only sporadically condemned Islamic terrorism, typically after some atrocity committed by Islamic terrorists.

Instead of writing only in the Arabic language, websites of major Islamic organizations (e.g., Al-Azhar University in Egypt) should also post webpages in French and English languages to discourage Europeans and non-Arabs from joining Islamic terrorist organizations.

Just to be clear, Western Civilization is *not* at war with *all* Muslims. I suggest that Western Civilization — *and* also mainstream Muslims everywhere — *should* be at war with Islamic terrorists. Indeed, mainstream Muslims are most affected by Islamic terrorism, as death tolls in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq show.

This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria29.pdf>
begun 1 Jan 2016, last modified 1 Feb 2016.

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

[my homepage](#)