

Syria & Iraq: February 2016

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 27 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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

- [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.

Beginning with the monthly report for November 2015, the United Nations has effectively concealed those reports. For example, the United Nations Security Council website for 2015 lists neither the November nor the December 2015 report from OPCW. On 1 March 2016, the U.N. Security Council website for 2016 lists neither the January nor the February 2016 report from OPCW. On 1 March 2016, the ReliefWeb website lists the October 2015 OPCW report as the most recent report, despite the fact there are four more recent reports. I do not know why the United Nations is concealing these reports.

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 2015, 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.

On 12 February 2016, the JIM issued its first report, which says they will investigate the following cases:

1. Kafr Zita on 11 and 18 April 2014, involving chlorine
2. Talmenes on 21 April 2014, involving chlorine
3. Qmenas and Sarmin on 16 March 2015, involving chlorine
4. Marea on 21 Aug 2015, involving mustard gas (allegedly used by ISIL).

The JIM may also investigate two other cases:

5. Daraya on 15 Feb 2015, involving Sarin nerve gas
6. Binnish in Idlib province on 23 March 2015, involving chlorine.

[Associated Press](#); [U.N. News](#); [U.N. SecGen](#).

The first report of the JIM is U.N. Security Council document [S/2016/142](#), which became publicly available on 24 Feb, almost two weeks after journalists reported its content. The first report, at ¶42, lists 23 incidents in which OPCW had "confirmed with utmost confidence exposure to a chemical substance." The JIM decided to investigate the incidents listed in the previous paragraph, see ¶¶46, 43, and 47 of their report.

On 22 February 2016, the JIM also considered investigating alleged use of chemical weapons at Al Tamanah, Idlib province, on 29-30 April 2014 and 25-26 May 2014. [Associated Press](#).

I comment that when the USA proposed the JIM in July 2015, apparently no one realized that reports from the JIM would arrive during delicate peace negotiations with Assad's government. If the reports anger Assad, then Assad could delay negotiations, and the Syrian

civil war would continue. A continuation of the civil war for just one month would kill more than 4000 people, *many* times the total number of people who were allegedly killed in *all* of the alleged uses of toxic gases in Syria. That is why peace negotiations are more important than investigation of use of chemical weapons.

In forensic investigations, police *know* that it is essential to begin collecting and preserving evidence immediately after a crime occurs. But the JIM will be investigating crimes that occurred more than six months ago, and, in the case of Kafr Zita, two years ago. This delay by the United Nations reduces the credibility of the findings by 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

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.

On 15 February 2016, [Reuters](#) reports that OPCW had concluded that mustard gas was used by ISIL in Iraq during August 2015. This one news story ends three months of silence by journalists on this topic.

On 17 February 2016, [Rudaw](#) reports that ISIL fired mortar shells containing mustard gas at the Peshmerga in Iraq on 17 Feb.

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](#).
10. On 6 January 2016, **North Korea** detonated a fourth nuclear weapon, in another blatant violation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. On 7 February 2016, North Korea apparently launched a nonfunctioning satellite into orbit in a forbidden test of ballistic missile technology.

Deaths in Syria

On 23 Feb 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a new cumulative death toll for the first time since 16 Oct 2015.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 271,138 persons since the rise of the Syrian revolution in March 18th 2011, the date of the first person killed in Daraa countryside, until February 22nd 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 122,997 civilians, including:
 - 13597 children
 - 8760 female over the age of 18
- 43,891 Rebel and Islamic fighters
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2561
- Regime soldiers and officers: 55,042
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, al-Ba'eth battalions, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 37966
- Militiamen from Hezbollah guerrilla: 1025
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Filastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 3809
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian and many other nationalities of fighters fighting with ISIS, al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham organization, al-Khadra'a Battalion, the Islamic Turkestan Party, Junud al-Sham al-Shishan and the Islamic movements: 44254
- Unidentified dead people documented by photos and videos: 3484

It is worth noting that the numbers do not include the fate of over 20,000 of missing detainees people inside regime prisons and thousands of others who disappeared during the raids and massacres by the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them.

These statistics do not include also the more than 5000 abductees from the civilians and fighters inside ISIS jails from Deir Ezzor tribes who were kidnapped from their areas.

This statistics also do not include the fate of more than 1500 fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions, the “Islamic State” organization, Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant), YPG and local fighters loyal to these parties who were kidnapped during the clashes between these parties.

We also would like to refer that this statistics also do not include the fate of more than 6000 captured and missing person from the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them, nor the fate of about 2000 kidnapped person by the rebel and Islamic factions, the “Islamic State” organization or Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant) on charge of cooperating with the regime forces.

The statics also do not include hundreds of non-Syrian Kurdish fighters who were killed fighting with YPG in Syria.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimate the real number of casualties from the rebel battalions, the Islamic battalions, Junud al-Sham, The Turkestan Islamic Party, the “Islamic state” organization, Jund al-Sham, Al-Nusra Front, Jund al-Aqsa organization, al-Umma Brigade, al-Battar battalion, al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar army, and the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them of Syrian, Arab and Asian nationalities to be approximately 95,000 more than the documented numbers, due to the extreme discretion by all parties about the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

And we in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights consider the silence of the International community for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria encourages the criminals to kill more and more Syrian people, because they have not found anyone that deter them from continuing their crimes that injured more than 2 million people, some of them with permanent disabilities, and more than 11 million Syrian people were displace both internally and externally, and destroying the infrastructure and private and public properties.

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

well as those who transformed a revolution for dignity to a sectarian and ethnic civil war.

"More than 370000 people are thought to be killed since the rise of Syrian revolution," [SOHR](#), 23 Feb 2016. [Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

When I add the numbers in the bulleted list above, I obtain a total of 315,029, probably because SOHR omitted the 43,891 rebel and Islamic fighters. But — given previous death tolls and approximately 4000 deaths/month — 271,000 is a plausible total, while 315,000 is too high.

I do not know if the 370,000 dead in the title is a typographical error when SOHR intended to say 270,000. It could be that SOHR was including the estimated 95,000 deaths "due to the extreme discretion by all parties about the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria".

On 1 March 2016, the the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published the death toll for the month of February 2016.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 4802 people in February 2016.

The death toll is as follows:

- 1109 civilians, including 234 children and 156 women, distributed as follows:
 - 488 civilians including 127 children and 80 women were killed by aerial bombardment by Russian and Syrian warplanes,
 - 2 civilians were tortured to death in regime prisons,
 - 23 civilians including 15 children and 4 women died due to poor life conditions,
 - 96 civilians including 19 children and 22 women were killed by shells fired by IS, rebels SDF, and YPG.
 - 27 civilians including 5 women were executed by the IS,
 - 127 civilians including 27 children and 29 women were killed by suicide attacks in different areas, and
 - 285 civilians including 46 children and 16 women were killed in different circumstances such as aerial bombardment by the coalition warplanes, regime's bombardment, IEDs, Snipers, or by unknown militiamen.
- Syrian fighters of YPG, Rebel and Islamist factions: 724.
- Non-Syrian fighters of IS, Jabhat al-Nusra, Jaysh al Muhajereen wal Ansra Army and the Islamist factions: 1080.
- Defected soldiers: 6.
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 743.
- Militiamen of the People's Committees and NDF as well as informers: 568.
- Hezbollah militiamen: 18.
- Non-Syrian pro-regime fighters who are from the Shiite Sect: 113.
- Unidentified victims: 42

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimate 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 300 of soldiers and fighters more than the documented number because of reticence about casualties by all parties, the difficulties of reaching to the outback and the difficulties to investigate about those who have died inside the regime or IS jails.

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

"About 5000 including 400 children and women killed in February, 2016," [SOHR](#), 1 Mar 2016. [Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

When I add the numbers in the bulleted list above, I obtain a total of 4403. I do not know why SOHR has a total of 4802.

On 11 February 2016, the [Guardian](#) newspaper in the U.K. says that Syrian Centre for Policy Research reports 470,000 people have been killed in the Syrian civil war. About 70,000 of these deaths were due to lack of medical care, starvation, lack of drinking water, etc.

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* 272,300.

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 March 2016, the last news on this topic was the above-cited report on 25 August 2015. 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 8 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 2015 essay (see end of section "U.S. Reaction to Turkey"), I listed five 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 a sixth 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."

When the Kurds moved west of Euphrates River, Erdogan gave the order for Turkish artillery to begin shelling the Kurds on 13 February 2016. Russia and Syria complained to the United Nations Security Council, and the USA asked Turkey to stop shelling the Kurds. (See [below](#).) The shelling was not only a violation of Syria's sovereignty, but also an escalation of military activity at a time when the United Nations was attempting to arrange a ceasefire in Syria. This shelling of Kurds is a seventh reason why Turkey is an ally from Hell.

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.

My essay for [January 2016](#) explained that Assad's recent successes on the battlefield made Assad unlikely to compromise during peace negotiations in Geneva.

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 had 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.

**Future of Assad must be decided by Syrians
not by foreign meddlers**

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 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."

Peace Conference in Geneva

My essays for [December 2015](#) and [January 2016](#) chronicled the creation and history of Hijab's Supreme Commission, the opposition delegation that was supposed to negotiate in Geneva. But Hijab's Supreme Commission refused to negotiate until all of the following pre-conditions (i.e., demands) had been satisfied:

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

Hijab's Supreme Commission arrived in Geneva on 30 Jan, the day *after* the negotiations were scheduled to begin. There was *only one* meeting with the opposition during the first three days of the Geneva negotiations, and that was a "short informal meeting" when de Mistura went to the opposition's hotel for a "courtesy visit". I concluded that the opposition was obstructing and delaying the peace negotiations.

1 February 2016 (day 4 in Geneva)

The United Nations office in Geneva released a transcript of a brief press conference by de Mistura on the afternoon of 1 Feb.

Good evening, you probably heard, and I am sure you did, the comments made by the spokesperson for the HNC. We had a two-hours meeting with the HNC. As far as we are concerned their arrival to the Palais des Nations and initiating the discussion with us is the official beginning of the Geneva talks.

Of course we do respect very much and we heard very clearly their very clear position. They feel, and they told you, that there is a priority from their point of you and probably you must have heard it, of having successful talks, Intra-Syrian talks in order to reach what has been communicated in the Geneva Communiqué and the resolution 2254.

At the same time they are insisting, and they are not the only ones, that the Syrian people, while we are having a Syrian talks on the future of the political solution, they deserve to hear and see facts on the ground, in reduction of the violence, in the fact of the detainees, in the fact of the besieged areas.

We feel that they have a very strong point, because this is the voice of the Syrian people asking for that. When I meet the Syrian people they tell me don't just have a conference, have also something that we can see and touch while you are meeting in Geneva.

We are going to meet tomorrow morning with the government. And I am planning to invite again tomorrow afternoon the HNC in order to go deeper into the issues they raised and their own concerns. Let me simply say one thing. There was in Vienna a very special momentum but there were also some indications that gave us, me and

especially the Secretary-General the feeling that this exercise of Geneva Intra-Syrian talks is going to be different from the previous ones, one because we are in 2016, two because the people have been suffering enough and three that they need to see something concrete apart from long painful difficult negotiation.

And there was one point that came out in Vienna and I will like to indicate it clearly, there was a message in the Vienna meetings, that when the Geneva talks will actually start, in parallel there should be a serious discussion about a ceasefire. That is not something that I can discuss, this is something to be discussed at a level of the ISSG, those countries involved in saying that. So here comes the challenge, we are starting officially the Geneva talks we are listening with attention to the concerns of the HNC and we are going tomorrow to discuss and listen to the concerns of the government. The discussions are starting but meanwhile the challenge now is let's also have the capacity of discussing this different levels, time to discuss about a ceasefire.

Tomorrow we will have another day, we will go deeper and following that I will be able to update you. Meanwhile, the talks have started.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of the Press Stakeout of the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 1 Feb 2016.

My comment is that pushing Assad and Russia to stop bombings, without also pushing the rebels/jihadists into a similar reduction of hostilities, could motivate Assad to walk out of the peace conference. As the U.N. Secretary General's monthly reports on Syria make clear, *both* Assad *and* the insurgents are violating U.N. Resolutions and violating international law — and *all* parties should cease this bad conduct. What is really needed is a ceasefire by *all* parties, both Assad, Russia, *and* insurgents. The opposition's demand that only Assad and Russia cease military activities, without a corresponding cessation by insurgents, is blatantly unfair and unreasonable. (See my discussion, [below](#).)

One needs to be concerned when de Mistura publicly says "We feel that [the opposition] have a very strong point" when the United Nations Resolutions actually call on *all* parties to obey international law, but the opposition wants only Assad to obey international law. De Mistura is supposed to be a neutral mediator, and *not* support one side against the other.

In the next to last paragraph, de Mistura calls on the ISSG to arrange a ceasefire. That would be appropriate for nations to call on Russia to stop airstrikes on civilians and hospitals in Syria. But the parties in Geneva can arrange a ceasefire between Assad's military and the rebels/jihadists, without the involvement of foreign meddlers in the ISSG. [Reuters](#) wrote a news article about de Mistura's claim that he was *not* empowered to arrange a ceasefire. But on 25 Jan 2016, de Mistura publicly declared that arranging a ceasefire was one of his three priorities. Further, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, §6, "[r]equests the Secretary-General to lead the effort, through the office of his Special Envoy and in consultation with relevant parties, to determine the modalities and requirements of a ceasefire as well as continue planning for the support of ceasefire implementation...." Clearly, de Mistura has the authority to arrange a ceasefire. My impression is that de Mistura is stalling for time, to prevent the immediate collapse of the Geneva talks.

It is too optimistic to say that the peace talks "have started", when the opposition's

preconditions for negotiating have not yet been satisfied. The peace talks will really begin when both sides sit in the same room and negotiate in good faith, with a sincere desire to end the civil war. Further, note that the peace talks were scheduled to begin on 29 January 2016, and Assad's delegation did meet with de Mistura on that day. Now de Mistura seems to want to redefine the start date as 1 Feb, to cover up the late arrival of the opposition delegation.

In response to a question from *The New York Times*, de Mistura said: "It's crucial that no one should be feeling excluded...." Yet the Syrian Kurds have been excluded from this peace conference, probably because of threats by the Turkish government to quit the ISSG. Later, Reuters asked: "And when you said no one is excluded, I have to ask: what about the Kurds?" De Mistura ignored that question.

Out of curiosity on 1 February, I looked at the cost of rooms at the Hotel Intercontinental in Geneva. Their cheapest room is 330 CHF per night, which is equivalent to US\$ 333. So it could cost at least US\$5000/night to reserve 15 rooms for one delegation. While a delegation may get a discount for reserving many rooms for more than one week, the delegation is also probably not requesting the cheapest available rooms.

On 1 February, Assad's government seemed to approve a United Nations request for humanitarian aid deliveries to Syrian towns of Madaya, al-Foua, and Kefraya. Madaya is besieged by Assad, the other two towns are besieged by rebels. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). These three towns were the subject of an aid agreement on 11 Jan 2016, but that January agreement apparently disintegrated. The 1 Feb agreement is a tiny step in satisfying the opposition in Geneva.

2 February 2016 (Day 5 in Geneva)

On 2 February, Reuters reports unhappiness in Assad's delegation to the Geneva talks, and that the parties were "not yet ready" for talks.

Staffan de Mistura announced on Monday [1 Feb] the formal start of the negotiations, but [Syrian] government delegation chief Bashar al-Ja'afari said the U.N. envoy had now realised conditions were not ripe for indirect "proximity talks" with government and opposition delegations in separate rooms.

"The circumstances on the formalities are not yet ready. We are in the preparatory stage before the official launch of indirect negotiations," Ja'afari told reporters after a 2-□ hour meeting with de Mistura.

"To prepare the official launch we have to have the presence of the two delegations, but on the other side the delegation has not been finalised."

John Irish And Tom Miles, "Syrian government says too early for talks, opposition avoids U.N.," [Reuters](#), 17:22 GMT, 2 Feb 2016.

On 3 February, [Reuters](#) added: "Bashar al-Ja'afari said after two and a half hours of talks that the envoy had yet to provide an agenda or list of opposition participants."

My comment is that concern over "formalities" and procedure can often be a tactic to avoid

discussing substantive issues.

At 12:30 Geneva time on 2 February, the Associated Press reported a brief remark by the chief negotiator for the opposition, as he departed from his hotel for a meeting with other opposition delegates.

Mohamed Alloush, of the Army of Islam militant group, which is part of the HNC, told reporters at a Geneva hotel Tuesday [2 Feb] that "the situation in the ground has not changed and as long as the situation stays like that there is no optimism from our side and no good intention to reach a solution by the regime."

He told reporters that the opposition group was still discussing whether to meet with U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura in the coming days. He did not elaborate, and left reporters for a meeting with the opposition group.

"The Latest: Opposition has 'no optimism' for peace talks," [Associated Press](#), 11:52 GMT, 2 Feb 2016.

At 21:50 Geneva time on 2 February, the Associated Press reported that Assad's government allowed humanitarian aid into the rebel-held al-Tal suburb of Damascus, "in what appeared to be a goodwill gesture".

Opposition official Ahmad Ramadan dismissed the aid shipment to al-Tal as an empty gesture, saying "the only way" to save the negotiations is for "the United Nations and the United States to force an end to bombardment and the targeting of civilians."

....

De Mistura kicked off what he called a second day of peace talks by hosting a government delegation for the second time since Friday. He said he would meet with the main opposition group later in the day.

But opposition figures said they had no scheduled meeting with de Mistura on Tuesday [2 Feb], and condemned what one member called the "crazy escalation" by Syrian and Russian forces around Aleppo.

Jamey Keaten & Bassem Mroue, "Syria allows aid into rebel-held area as peace talks stall," [Associated Press](#), 20:50 GMT, 2 Feb 2016.

In the above story, the Associated Press headline said the peace talks in Geneva had "stalled". Reuters had a headline that said the talks in Geneva "faltered" on 2 February.

U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura announced the formal start on Monday of the first attempt in two years to negotiate an end to a war that has killed 250,000 people, caused a refugee crisis in the region and Europe and empowered Islamic State militants. But both opposition and government representatives have since said the talks had not in fact begun and fighting on the ground raged on without constraint.

....

The opposition cancelled a meeting with [de Mistura] on Tuesday [2 Feb] afternoon, and issued a statement condemning "a massive acceleration of Russian and regime military aggression on Aleppo and Homs", calling it a threat to the political process.

[See [Reuters](#): opposition cancels 17:00 meeting with de Mistura.]

....

The main Syrian opposition council said after meeting de Mistura on Monday [1 Feb] it had not, and would not negotiate unless the government stopped bombarding civilian areas, lifted blockades on besieged towns and released detainees.

....

But the chances of success [of the Geneva negotiations], always very slim, appear to be receding as the government, supported by Russian air strikes, advances against rebels, some of them U.S.-backed.

Tom Perry, Suleiman Al-Khalidi, & John Irish, "Syrian army threatens to encircle Aleppo as talks falter," [Reuters](#), 20:56 GMT, 2 Feb 2016.

On 2 February, de Mistura issued a press statement that said today he "will issue invitations to Syrian women and civil society representatives, to contribute to the United Nations-facilitated talks, being held in Geneva between representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition." "The [Independent Women's Advisory] Board will initially be composed of a group of 12 women chosen by several Syrian women organizations through their own consultative process." [U.N. Geneva](#). My comment is that this is the fifth day of talks in Geneva (including the weekend), the talks could collapse at any time if the opposition delegation departs, and de Mistura is concerned about having more women present.

3 February 2016 (Day 6 in Geneva)

At 19:00 Geneva time on 3 February 2016, the Associated Press reported that de Mistura had announced a "temporary pause" to the peace talks in Geneva. The talks may resume on 25 February 2016.

The U.N. envoy for Syria has announced a "temporary pause" in peace talks in Geneva amid intensified fighting, saying the process will resume later this month.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting with opposition leaders, Staffan de Mistura insisted "this is not the end, and it is not the failure of the talks."

De Mistura said both sides were "interested in having the political process started," and that he had set a new date of Feb. 25 for the resumption of the talks.

"UN envoy announces 'temporary pause' to Syria peace talks," [Associated Press](#), 17:59 GMT, 3 Feb 2016.

Reuters says de Mistura is now characterizing the negotiations that began on 29 Jan as "preparatory talks".

U.N.-mediated talks to end the war in Syria are on pause until Feb. 25, U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura said on Wednesday, saying the talks had not failed but needed immediate help from international backers led by the United States and Russia.

"I have concluded frankly that after the first week of preparatory talks there is more work to be done, not only by us but by the stakeholders," he told reporters after meeting the opposition delegation at their hotel.

John Irish, "U.N. adjourns Syria talks, asks big powers for help," [Reuters](#), 18:11 GMT, 3 Feb 2016.

Later, Agence-France Presse reported that Hijab was continuing his demand for at least humanitarian aid *before* the opposition will return to Geneva.

Syria's main opposition group will not return to peace talks until its humanitarian demands are met, chief coordinator Riad Hijab said Wednesday, after the UN suspended negotiations in Switzerland until February 25.

The group "will leave Geneva tomorrow (Thursday) and will not return until the humanitarian demands are met or (we) see something on the ground," Hijab told reporters.

"Syria opposition vows no return to talks 'until humanitarian demands met'," [Daily Star](#), 20:50 GMT, 3 Feb 2016.

The United Nations in New York City issued a news story that said:

Just two days after declaring the official start of delayed intra-Syrian talks in Geneva to end five years of bloody warfare, the United Nations mediator suspended them for three weeks today following differences between Government and opposition delegations on the priority of humanitarian issues.

"I have been asking even before issuing the invitations that there is an immediate implementation of a humanitarian initiative, even before the talks start," UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura told journalists, citing such issues as lifting sieges and providing access for humanitarian aid to all the places which are at the moment unreachable. The UN cannot allow simple procedural matters to actually become more important than actually the results of humanitarian situation of the Syrian people who have been waiting for us to deliver this time, not a conference, but something concrete for them.at the moment unreachable.

"I was told and reassured that they were going to take place during the talks. Well, I have been hearing from the Government that they had some procedural issues before talking about humanitarian side. I have been hearing from the opposition that they are urgently feeling the need for the Syrian people."

He stressed that the suspension was only "a temporary pause" and not the end or failure of the talks, noting that both sides insist they are interested in having the political process begin. He set 25 February for the next session.

"UN mediator suspends intra-Syrian talks for three weeks," [U.N. News](#), 3 Feb 2016.

Finally, the United Nations office in Geneva posted a press release at its website. The entire press release said:

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, has announced a recess in intra-Syrian talks as of the end of Friday, 5 February. The talks are to resume

in Geneva no later than 25 February, and possibly much earlier. In the interim period, the Special Envoy shall undertake intense consultations with concerned stakeholders, including women and civil society.

During the course of this week's preparatory phase it was made clear to all parties that the agenda is Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). However, the Special Envoy expected to see progress on the implementation of a number of possible humanitarian initiatives, both within the talks and on the ground. Substantive discussions on these matters in Geneva were held up by unresolved procedural issues.

"In recessing the talks the United Nations make it clear that the alleviation of the suffering of the Syrian people remains our top priority, and the Secretary-General has reiterated this very important point on several occasions," the Special Envoy said. "The United Nations is not prepared to hold talks for the sake of talks. Such talks can only be meaningful if they also deliver immediate tangible benefits to the Syrian people," Mr. de Mistura emphasized.

"I sense a strong commitment on the part of many of our international partners to ensure that these humanitarian obligations are implemented. I shall call on the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) to address these and other matters, including the call for a national wide ceasefire to be launched in parallel to talks, in the upcoming ISSG meeting next week," he added.

Mr. de Mistura will leave tomorrow [4 Feb] to attend the London conference [for donations to refugees from Syria's civil war].

"Press Release of the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 3 Feb 2016.

Last, the United Nations office in Geneva posted a transcript of de Mistura's press conference on 3 February.

First of all let me say that my obligation to open these talks on behalf of the Secretary-General in January came from a resolution, a Security Council resolution, well they instructed me to start the talks. We were ready; the agenda has been also ready 2254. I made it clear at the Security Council, on behalf of the Secretary-General and in public speeches that the talks will not be meaningful, will not be meaningful, unless they will also be accompanied by a tangible benefit for the Syrian people. We have said it many times. This is why I have been asking and I have been asking even before issuing the invitations that there is an immediate implementation of humanitarian initiative, even before the talks start. I was told and reassured that they were going to take place during the talks.

Well, I have been hearing from the government that they had some procedural issues before talking about humanitarian side. I have been hearing from the opposition that they are urgently feeling the need for the Syrian people.

Based on that, based on that, I concluded frankly that after the first week of preparatory talks, and they are talks, and the talks have started, you can call them as you want, but they were talks, but there is more work, more work, to be done. Not only by us, we

have done our part, but by the stakeholders, who have been telling us, go and start this initiative, while in fact, they the Security Council and the ISSG, are now expected to address some of the issues pending, one in particular, what are these talks going to make as a difference to the Syrian people.

From the first day I have indicated that I am not prepared to hold talks for the sake of talks and the Secretary-General has said the same. The UN cannot allow simple procedural matters to actually become more important than actually the results of humanitarian situation of the Syrian people who have been waiting for us to deliver this time, not a conference, but something concrete for them. I therefore, have taken this decision to bring a temporary pause, temporary pause, this is not end and it is not the failure of the talks - why, they came and they stayed, not only but both sides insisted on the fact that they are interested in having the political process started. I already fixed a date for the next talks, 25th of February, for I find that this stage is very important to give an opportunity to those who have been insisting that the talks take place that they also address the issues which have been pending and unresolved, those who are asking and will be asking for the ISSG to convene as soon as possible, hopefully already in Munich, the Security Council to meet and we convene in Geneva, again, on the 25th of February.

The whole matter is, again, are we here to have another Geneva conference without any result for the Syrian people, or are we serious about what we have been saying, that while we are having a conference, talking about the future, and political future of Syria, and the new constitution, and the new elections, the Syrian people will see and expect me and they expect all of us to produce something while we are talking. Since I am not seeing that, I have to be honest and say with myself, it is time now to have a pause only a pause and give time for this to happen.

Thank you very much.

....

QUESTION by Xinhua: What are your feelings, are you disappointed, are you frustrated, what are you going to do know?

de Mistura: I'm not frustrated, I'm not disappointed, I have been long enough with the UN to know that when you have a five-years war and have had so many difficult moments, you have to be determined but also realistic and when you see things going in a certain direction, you take — we are the convener, we manage the conference, we decide when the conference producing results or not and if they don't produce results we need to go deeper, that's what we are doing. Thank you.

"16.02.03 - Transcript of the Press Stakeout of the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 3 Feb 2016.

Meanwhile, Russia vows to continue airstrikes in Syria. [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). Worse, Russia continues to pretend that they *only* bomb Nusra Front and ISIL. However, there is abundant credible evidence that Russia is mostly attacking moderate rebels (e.g., Free Syrian

Army) and jihadists, as well as slaughtering civilians — as chronicled in my essays beginning in October 2015.

So who do we blame for the collapse of the negotiations in Geneva on 3 February?
My answer:

1. Assad for continuing to bomb civilian areas and for continuing to besiege rebel-controlled towns.
2. Russia for bombing moderate rebels, jihadists, and civilians.
3. Rebels and jihadists for using mortar shells to attack civilians, and for besieging some towns controlled by Assad's government.
4. Saudi Arabia and Turkey for assembling Hijab's Supreme Commission, and for publicly declaring on 31 Jan (see my [essay](#)) that they would support the opposition delegation even if the opposition withdrew from the Geneva negotiations.
5. *All* of the foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the USA,) who continue to supply munitions to the Syrian civil war.
6. The 17 nations in the ISSG who declared on 14 Nov 2015 that the target date for the Geneva negotiations to begin was 1 Jan 2016, despite *no* evidence that either Assad or the opposition was willing to negotiate, and despite *no* agreement on how to enforce a ceasefire in Syria. Further, the ISSG simply ignored all of the difficult decisions (e.g., future of Assad, who should represent the opposition, who is a terrorist,), pushing those difficult decisions to someone else to decide at some future date.
7. Hijab's Supreme Commission that began issuing preconditions (i.e., demands) as soon as it was formed on 11 Dec 2015. Those preconditions prevented the opposition delegation from attending peace negotiations, and scuttled the whole negotiation process.
8. Wimpy United Nations that issued a series of Security Council Resolutions with demands that the U.N. can *not* enforce. In particular, the U.N. can *not* enforce a ceasefire in Syria.

With so many blameworthy parties, it is difficult to see how anyone can revive the negotiations into a credible political process. In my opinion, the one hero in this debacle is de Mistura for having the courage to undertake impossible negotiations, and doing his best to make the negotiations succeed in spite of the bad behavior by the parties to the negotiations and in spite of the bad behavior by some of the nations in the ISSG.

Hijab misread U.N. Resolution 2254

Hijab's Supreme Commission has made United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 the basis for its demands that Assad stop attacking civilians, stop besieging, and release political prisoners. So what does Resolution 2254 really say?

Section 12 specifically says:

Calls on *the parties* to immediately allow humanitarian agencies rapid, safe and unhindered access throughout Syria by most direct routes, allow immediate, humanitarian assistance to reach all people in need, in particular in all besieged and hard-to-reach areas, release any arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and

children, ...

Section 13 specifically says:

Demands that *all parties* immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment, ..., and further demands that *all parties* immediately comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law as applicable;

[Italics added by Standler in three places.]

Note that these sections are binding on *both Assad and* the opposition. However, the opposition only demands that Assad meet his obligations under this Resolution, without the opposition meeting their obligations under this Resolution.

I note that neither journalists nor commentators are exposing this misreading of Resolution 2254 by Hijab's Supreme Commission. But this misreading is critically important, because it underlies the demands by the opposition. Those unsatisfied demands caused the opposition to refuse to engage in negotiations in Geneva.

Further, the opposition demands that Assad do these confidence-building measures, without the opposition doing anything to increase Assad's confidence in the ability of the opposition delegation to end the misconduct of insurgents in Syria. The misconduct by insurgents is documented in the United Nations Secretary General's monthly reports to the Security Council.

I remember two years ago, on 26 Jan 2014, when the opposition and Assad agreed in Geneva on delivery of humanitarian aid to Homs. However, the first delivery of aid did not occur until 8 Feb 2014, because the insurgents in Homs refused to recognize the agreement in Geneva. So the United Nations renegotiated with the insurgents in Homs. And once a ceasefire was agreed in Homs, the ceasefire was repeatedly violated. (See my essays for [January 2014](#) and [February 2014](#).) As a result of this history, it is necessary for the opposition negotiators to prove that the insurgents in Syria will honor agreements reached in Geneva.

4 February 2016

Zeina Karam, the Associated Press bureau chief in Beirut Lebanon, wrote an insightful analysis of why the Geneva talks collapsed.

It was hardly unexpected that the Syrian peace talks in Geneva would break off in recrimination.

But the speed in which it happened — only two days after the U.N. had declared them officially open — was a stark indication of just how unattainable peace in Syria remains.

On Wednesday [3 Feb], few hours after the government said it had broken a siege of two government-held villages in northern Syria and cut off one of the last rebel supply lines to Turkey, the U.N. announced a "temporary pause" in the talks, saying they would resume in three weeks.

The opposition blamed the "criminal regime" of President Bashar Assad and its ally Russia. Assad's government blamed the "amateur" opposition and its Saudi and Turkish backers. U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura blamed the international community for not doing its part.

In the eyes of many observers of the 5-year-old war, the lack of progress in the talks was a reflection of the continued unwillingness by all sides to make any of the concessions needed to advance the peace process.

....

Despite a U.N. Security Council resolution endorsing a road map for a peace process, the warring sides were still stuck on the same procedural issues and definitions that saw negotiations to end the conflict falter in 2014. The major stakeholders — the United States and Russia — have no mechanism to enforce such a road map.

....

Richard Gowan, a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said it also sends a message to the Islamic State group, which has used the war to take over territory in Syria, that the government and the rebels are not going to get their act together and really come after them seriously any time soon.

Zeina Karam, "Analysis: Pause in Syrian talks shows peace remains elusive," [Associated Press](#), 19:05 GMT, 4 Feb 2016.

Soon after the collapse of negotiations in Geneva, the foreign ministers of France, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, U.K., and the USA made public statements blaming other nations for the collapse of the negotiations. See, e.g., [BBC](#); [Gulf News](#)(AFP); [Arutz Sheva](#). *None* of these nations blamed themselves, although I believe that all of these nations were partly responsible for the collapse. I am *not* wasting my time to document this self-serving propaganda from these foreign ministers.

The cost of the civil war in Syria is often measured in the more than 266,000 deaths, which continue at more than 4000/month. Another cost is caring for the refugees who have flooded neighboring countries. The United Nations estimated that Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey will require approximately US\$ 9 billion in humanitarian aid during the 2016 year. [Associated Press](#) (aid underfunded); [Associated Press](#).

5-10 February 2016

On 5 February, John Kerry answered a question about Syria at a press conference with the President of Columbia.

QUESTION [from Lesley Wroughton from Reuters]: Thank you. Mr. Secretary, good morning — or is it afternoon by now. What can you do before the Munich meeting next week to keep the Syria peace talks from totally collapsing? You've come under criticism that you're believing in the Russians too much over opposition who you convinced to go to the peace talks, yet the Russians bombed — was bombing the very parties at the table. Is Russia pretending to pursue diplomacy while actually seeking a military solution?

SECRETARY KERRY: So first of all, let me just say that neither Russia nor Assad nor the supporters of Assad are at this moment in compliance with the United Nations Resolution 2254 that they voted for — that at least Russia voted for. Obviously, Assad didn't have a vote. That resolution calls for in December — on the 18th of December called for immediate access for humanitarian assistance to all Syrians in all parts of the country. Neither the Assad regime nor the supporters have made that happen.

Secondly, it also calls for an end to all aerial bombardment and all artillery bombardment of civilians, and that should have ended, according to the United Nations resolution that Russia voted for, and it hasn't. Moreover, there is evidence that is clear that Russia is using what are called free-fall bombs — dumb bombs, as they are known. They are not precision bombs, and there are civilians, including women and children, being killed in large numbers as a consequence. Hospitals have been hit, civilian quarters have been hit, and in some cases after the bombing has taken place, when the workers have gone in to try to pull out the wounded, the bombers come back and they kill the people who are pulling out the wounded.

This has to stop. Nobody has any question about that. But it's not going to stop just by whining about it. It's not going to stop by walking away from the table or not engaging. You have to have a negotiation to arrive at the modalities of all parties complying and providing the access and providing for a ceasefire.

Now, the next days will tell the story of whether or not people are serious or people are not serious. We are engaged right now as I talk, yesterday in direct discussions, in order to determine whether or not access could be quickly provided. A number of modalities for providing that humanitarian access are being discussed. And the modalities of a ceasefire itself are also being discussed, and the Russians have made some constructive ideas about how a ceasefire, in fact, could be implemented. But if it's just talk for the sake of talk in order to continue the bombing, nobody's going to accept that. And we will know that in the course of the next days.

As you know, the parties met in Geneva. The parties came to the table. Under the UN auspices, we are not at the table, but we obviously are following it closely and are engaged with the opposition and with the other members of the International Syria Support Group, which includes Russia and Iran and others. And so we are pushing in the direction of trying to get the full implementation of Resolution 2254.

Now, these talks have not, quote, "failed" or "stopped." They have interrupted at the judgment of the UN envoy, who made the decision to suspend them while the

modalities of the access of humanitarian assistance and potential ceasefire are worked out. And that makes sense, particularly since we have a meeting scheduled in Munich on the 11th in a few days, where the entire International Syria Support Group will come in order to see whether or not these parties are serious.

So as I said, we will know in the next few days who is serious and who is not. And that has always been the intention of the diplomatic process. The diplomatic process has to use the tools that are at its disposal. Diplomacy is the opposite of the actual pointing of a rifle and the pulling of a trigger. It is the effort to come to an agreement and to find a way forward that ends the pointing of the rifle and the pulling of the trigger.

And that is precisely what we're engaged in right now. I believe that over the course of the next few days, we will know the answer to the question you've asked — whether or not it's an effort to delay. If it's an effort to delay, the talks will not go forward. If it's an effort simply to game the process, then as I have said from day one, it will not end. The war will not end under those circumstances.

And when I was in Russia, I said very directly to President Putin, in the next month or two you and others who support Mr. Assad are going to have to make some very fundamental decisions about the way forward. Because if all you're trying to do is leave Assad in place, the war will not end and there will be more terrorists created, more violence, and it will be even harder to hold Syria whole and united as a single country.

So that's our mission. That's the purpose of these talks. And as I say, we will have a much better sense in the next few days of how serious each part is.

Russia has indicated to me very directly they are prepared to do a ceasefire. The Iranians confirmed in London just a day and a half ago they will support a ceasefire now. We now have to have all the other members of this — all the other parties come to the table and acknowledge that they too are prepared to do that. And as of this moment, we don't have that full acknowledgement.

"Press Availability with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos," [U.S. State Dept](#), 5 Feb 2016.

On 5 February, the [Washington Post](#) began a news article with the observation that "The Obama administration has found itself increasingly backed into a corner by Russian bombing in Syria that [U.S.] diplomacy has so far appeared powerless to stop."

On Sunday, 7 February, an editorial in the [Wall Street Journal](#) began with the remark: "President Obama and John Kerry are lucky the presidential primaries are occupying Washington's attention, because otherwise more people might notice the human and strategic catastrophe unfolding in Syria."

It is not just the primary elections in the U.S. presidential contest. There is a long list of trouble spots in the [world](#) that requires the attention of diplomats and governments, most recently North Korea.

On 8 February, Bloomberg News posted an insightful article that explains that Assad now has the advantage on the battlefield.

After five years of war and a quarter-million dead, President Bashar al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies now have the upper hand in Syria, and they're seeking to drive home a growing battlefield advantage rather than negotiate.

.... ... in northern Syria, where Assad's forces — backed by pro-Iranian fighters and Russian planes — are moving closer to winning the most decisive victory of the war by recapturing Aleppo.

....

That doesn't mean the war is over, or even likely to end anytime soon. But the conflict is narrowing toward a contest between Assad and the jihadists: opposition groups labeled as more moderate, backed by Western powers and their Middle Eastern allies, face being squeezed out.

....

Meanwhile, the U.S. has urged allies that support armed opposition groups, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, to reduce weapons shipments as a way to pressure insurgents into peace talks, the [Washington Post](#) reported on Friday [actually on Thursday, 4 Feb]. It cited rebel commanders who said that's left them vulnerable to the Russian-backed offensive.

Selcan Hacaoglu, Henry Meyer, & Dana Khraiche, "Advantage Assad After Five Years of War in Syria," [Bloomberg](#), updated 09:23 EST, 8 Feb 2016. (Link added by Standler.)

My comment is that Obama's policy in Syria, since mid-2011, has been an obsession with deposing Assad. But Assad has already outlasted Hillary Clinton, and in another 12 months Assad will have outlasted both Obama and Kerry. The moderate rebels who were favored by Obama and Western Europe to replace Assad are being defeated by Assad. As the Bloomberg article above notes, the real choice is now between Assad and the Islamic extremists (i.e., jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL). The U.S. government may be beginning to realize that Assad is the least-worst choice, something that some commentators publicly said back in 2013 (as chronicled in my essays).

On 10 February, Reuters in the U.K. issued a hard-hitting news story, full of assertions by anonymous diplomats.

Major powers meeting in Germany on Thursday [11 Feb] aim to revive Syria peace efforts, but with Russia backing a government push for a military victory, opposition delegates and Western officials see little hope of a diplomatic breakthrough.

....

But one U.N. diplomatic source said Russia was "stringing Kerry along" in order to provide diplomatic cover for Moscow's real goal — to help Assad win on the battlefield instead of compromising at the negotiating table. "It's clear to everyone now that Russia really doesn't want a negotiated solution but for Assad to win," said the

diplomatic source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

....

This has caused alarm among U.N. and Western officials, who believe the goal of the Russian-Syrian-Iranian campaign is to destroy the opposition's negotiating power in Geneva, kill them on the ground, and secure the first major military victory since Moscow began bombing opposition forces in Syria in September. "It'll be easy to get a ceasefire soon because the opposition will all be dead," a Western diplomat told Reuters. "That's a very effective ceasefire."

....

Other Western officials said Kerry overestimated his influence and ability to bring the Russians around.

....

Diplomats said Kerry was taken aback by the sudden shift in the Russian position from apparently supporting efforts to replace Assad to throwing its military might behind him. "You couldn't sabotage the process more than what the Russians have already done," said a senior Western official. "I don't see any hope today."

John Irish & Louis Charbonneau, "Scant hope of Syria peace breakthrough as Russia pounds rebels," [Reuters](#), 10:41 GMT, 10 Feb 2016.

On 11 February, the Associated Press reported on "a look at the key players [in the Syrian civil war] and their next possible moves:"

UNITED STATES As the Syrian government gains ground, will the U.S. escalate its role and arm rebels to try to reverse the situation? That seems unlikely. The U.S. has spent millions of dollars on programs to support and train moderate opposition fighters, but those programs have either failed or accomplished little. The Russian intervention has dwarfed the U.S. role to the point that many rebels now seem convinced that Washington and Moscow are somehow cooperating to keep Assad in power.

"A look at what's next for the major players in Syria's war," [Associated Press](#), 18:54 GMT, 11 Feb 2016.

My comment is that, since the end of 2013, Obama and Ban Ki-moon have been repeating the slogan "there is no military solution in Syria". But the Russians and Assad are vigorously, and successfully, pursuing a military solution. After the Russians, Assad, and Hezbollah destroy the Free Syrian Army, one wonders if the foreign meddlers will then unite to help destroy the jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL. Fortunately for the Free Syrian Army, it is probably hyperbole that Russia can destroy them in the next three weeks, given that the Free Syrian Army still exists after more than four months of Russian airstrikes.

In my essay for [October 2015](#), I tersely concluded: "With the massive Russian airstrikes that began on 30 September 2015, and the failure of Russia to convene a third peace conference since April 2015, it is clear that the Russian government is *not* interested in a negotiated end to the Syrian civil war." I repeated that conclusion in November and December 2015, then

discontinued the section in my monthly essays on a possible third negotiation session in Moscow.

The Reuters news story quoted above hints that the Free Syrian Army (FSA) will be destroyed on the battlefield. By pursuing a futile civil war for five years, the FSA has given Assad no choice except to destroy the FSA. That is a reasonable end for these rebels, who have been characterized by words like "disorganized" and "fragmented" since mid-2013. As mentioned [above](#), the FSA has been leaderless since June 2015, as the result of the failure of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) to make a decision. My previous essays have chronicled numerous failures by the SNC — including delaying the previous Geneva negotiations that began in January 2014 and making numerous demands that frustrated negotiations — which indicate that the SNC is *not* qualified to operate the Syrian government.

My essay for [December 2015](#) (in the section titled "Syrian National Coalition fading?") reported that the Syrian National Coalition was becoming less important, and opposition politicians inside Syria were gaining prominence in the peace process.

The 34 members of Hijab's Supreme Commission includes 9 members of the Syrian National Coalition and 8 members from the Free Syrian Army. In other words, *half* of Hijab's Supreme Commission is composed of members who represent neither the Syrian people nor the majority of insurgents fighting in Syria. When it was formed in December 2015, Hijab's Supreme Commission immediately issued three preconditions (i.e., demands) that must be satisfied by Russia and Assad, before it would participate in negotiations in Geneva. In January 2016, Hijab's Supreme Commission demanded it be the *only* opposition delegation in Geneva. These demands not only scuttled the Geneva negotiations, but also interfered with de Mistura's efforts to make the opposition more representative of the Syrian people. As a result, I suggest that Hijab's Supreme Commission be banned from attending the Geneva negotiations, and that de Mistura appoint an opposition delegation that is representative of the Syrian people and insurgents fighting on the ground.

ISSG Meetings

Previous 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 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](#).)

11 Feb 2016 ISSG Meeting

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. That was inadvertently achieved when the Geneva negotiations suddenly collapsed on 3 February.

u On 5 February 2016, Russia promised to present "new ideas" at the ISSG meeting in Munich Germany on 11 Feb 2016. Russia is facing international criticism for increasing its airstrikes in Syria, especially near Aleppo, during the peace negotiations in Geneva. [Associated Press](#).

At night on 10 February, [Reuters](#) and the [Associated Press](#) tersely reported that Russia had proposed a ceasefire in Syria to begin on 1 March 2016. Kerry wants the ceasefire to begin now. My comment is that Kerry should compromise and accept the Russian offer, 1 March is only 20 days from 10 Feb. Kerry, of course, is afraid that Russia and Assad will annihilate the moderate rebels during the next 20 days. But the moderate rebels had an opportunity to negotiate their surrender in January 2014, and again in January 2016, and both times they refused to negotiate. I don't want to avoid a ceasefire that would benefit millions of civilians in Syria, in order to save a few tens of thousands of disorganized, fragmented, unreasonable rebels who have repeatedly frustrated negotiations in Geneva.

Kerry and Lavrov arrived in Munich on the afternoon of 10 February, and began private discussions about a ceasefire in Syria. On the night of 11 February (at about 20:00 local time), the ISSG meeting began. Two task forces were formed: one on a temporary truce ("cessation of hostilities"), the other on delivery of humanitarian aid. Russia and the USA will continue negotiating a temporary truce, which is scheduled to begin on approximately 19 Feb. The Syrian parties to the negotiations in Geneva will negotiate a ceasefire later. The six-hour ISSG meeting ended at about 02:00 local time on 12 Feb. [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#); [The Guardian](#) (blog).

The full-text of the statement issued by the ISSG in Munich is included at [rbs0.com](#)

Note that ¶ 10(d) of the statement indicates that "persistent non-compliant behavior" (e.g., violations of truce) could result in the non-compliant party being excluded from the truce. In other words, Russia and Assad would be free to attack the non-compliant party, along with attacking — according to ¶ 10 — Daesh (ISIL), Nusra Front, "or other groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United Nations Security Council." This may motivate some rebel groups to abandon cooperation with Nusra Front.

After the ISSG meeting, Kerry, Lavrov, and de Mistura held a press conference. The U.S. State Department posted a [transcript](#) of that press conference.

12-26 Feb 2016 ISSG Task Forces

On Friday, 12 Feb 2016 de Mistura's office in Geneva issued a press release about the first meeting of the ISSG task force on humanitarian aid to Syria.

[Geneva,] 12 February 2016

In accordance with the decision of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), the United Nations hosted today the first meeting of the Task Force on Humanitarian Access in Syria, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Jan Egeland, Senior Advisor to the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura.

The meeting was attended by representatives of all ISSG members. The purpose of this initial meeting was to agree on how the Task Force and its members can ensure that immediate access is granted to the civilian populations in besieged and hard to reach areas in line with the agreement reached by the ISSG at Munich.

In order to accelerate the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid, sustained delivery of assistance is expected to begin this week to besieged areas where civilians are in desperate need of assistance. Humanitarian access to these most urgent areas will be a first step toward full, sustained, and unimpeded access throughout the country.

“Once we get clearance by concerned parties, the U.N. and its humanitarian partners will be able to reach the civilians in need within the coming days,” Mr. de Mistura said.

“Next week we plan to have a second meeting of this Task Force, in order to assess the progress made, and maintain the pressure for incremental and unimpeded aid deliveries,” he said.

“We have already submitted requests for access to the parties surrounding besieged areas,” said Egeland. “We expect to get such access without delay. Finally, the civilians who have been deprived of their basic right of humanitarian access for so long, will have hope,” he added. “Let us not fail them.”

"Office of the Special Envoy for Syria Press Release," [U.N. Geneva](#), 12 Feb 2016.

Back on 22 September 2015, Jan Egeland was appointed chairman of the working group on "safety and protection". None of de Mistura's four working groups met, because they were replaced by the ISSG pushing the parties to negotiations in Geneva. But Egeland remains active on de Mistura's staff.

Note the third paragraph of the ISSG Statement in Munich says "sustained delivery of

assistance shall begin this week". Further, the third paragraph of the Task Force press release says the delivery of humanitarian aid "is expected to begin this week". That can only mean delivery will begin on Saturday, 13 Feb, which is the last day in the week on the calendar used in the USA. Other sources say Russia will supply cargo airplanes for airdrops to cities not reachable by trucks, because the U.S. does not want to fly airplanes in airspace controlled by Assad and Russia.

On 13 February, Lavrov told journalists at the Munich Security Conference that he was 49% confident that the promised "cessation of hostilities" would occur in Syria by 19 February. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

If the temporary truce fails, it will likely be because of continued:

1. Russian airstrikes (especially around Aleppo),
2. Assad's airstrikes and fighting by Assad's army,
3. fighting by more than 1000 different groups of rebels or jihadists,
4. Turkish artillery fire at the Kurds in northern Syria.

Meanwhile, there is talk of Saudi Arabia and UAE sending special forces into Syria to attack ISIL near Raqqa. In short, the peace negotiations in Geneva and the ISSG meeting in Munich have *intensified* the civil war in Syria.

On 14 February, the [U.N. News](#) posted a story about the delivery of food to Palestinian refugees near the Yarmouk camp in Syria. Yarmouk was captured by ISIL on 1 April 2015, and has received *no* humanitarian aid since June 2015. But journalists are *not* reporting any other deliveries of humanitarian aid, making the Munich agreement on 11 Feb another diplomatic failure.

On 15 February, Russian airstrikes destroyed two hospitals and a school in Syria. (See [below](#).) It is hypocrisy for Russia to attend the ISSG meeting and agree to stop attacks on civilians, then go bomb two hospitals and a school. Russia defiantly announced it would continue bombing near Aleppo, even after a cessation of hostilities was agreed. [Reuters](#).

On 15 February, Assad says a ceasefire would be "difficult" to implement, especially by 19 Feb. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#).

On 16 February, de Mistura was in Damascus for talks with the Syrian foreign minister, Walid al-Moallem, about delivery of humanitarian aid to besieged towns. The [Associated Press](#) reports the Syrian government "has agreed to allow aid into the rebel-held towns of Zabadani and Moadamiyeh." Later, [Reuters](#) reported: "The Syrian government has approved access to seven besieged areas [Deir al-Zor; Foua and Kafraya in Idlib; and Madaya, Zabadani, Kafr Batna and Mouadamiya al-Sham in rural Damascus] and U.N. convoys are expected to set off in days". But the Syrian Arab News Agency ([SANA](#)) reported that the Syrian government will "continue" to attempt to deliver humanitarian aid to towns "in the areas controlled by the terrorist groups", which I think means towns besieged by insurgents. The SANA article says nothing about delivery of humanitarian aid to towns besieged by Assad's military.

On 16 February, the meetings currently are scheduled as follows. The ISSG humanitarian aid task force met on 12 Feb and will meet again on 18 Feb. De Mistura still "intends to resume [the Geneva negotiations] by 25 February, and earlier if possible". [U.N. News](#). The ISSG ceasefire task force that was formed on 12 Feb has not yet had its first meeting. [U.S. State Dept.](#) The first meeting of the ISSG ceasefire task force will be on Friday, 19 Feb, the same day the ISSG initially agreed the cessation of hostilities should become effective. [Reuters](#).

On 17 February, deliveries of humanitarian aid resumed to *five* towns in Syria. But three of those towns (i.e., Madaya, Foua, and Kfarya) were the subject of a previous agreement with Assad on 11 January. On 27 January, the United Nations reported 18 towns were besieged and in urgent need of humanitarian aid. So there is little actual progress on the critically important problem of humanitarian aid.

At night on 17 February, [Reuters](#) reports that trucks of humanitarian aid today reached five besieged towns in Syria: "Madaya, Zabadani and Mouadamiya al-Sham near Damascus which have been under siege by government forces, and the villages of al-Foua and Kefraya in Idlib province, which are surrounded by rebel fighters." See also [U.N. News](#); [U.N. Geneva](#).

On 19 February, the ISSG task force on the cessation of hostilities met for the first time. The meeting began in the evening in Geneva and continued past midnight. Journalists did *not* report what happened during the ISSG task force meeting. One exception was that the [Washington Post](#) tersely reported at 00:41 GMT on 20 Feb: "the United States and Russia tried to agree on rules covering where the shooting would stop and where it would be allowed to continue." But the ISSG agreement a week earlier seemed clear that a cessation of hostilities would be everywhere in Syria, except at locations of ISIL or Nusra Front terrorists. It was *no* surprise that the 19 Feb cessation of hostilities that was announced in Munich on 12 Feb failed to materialize.

On 15 February, the Russian news agency, Interfax, cited a Russian Foreign Ministry official who defiantly said that Russia would continue its airstrikes in Aleppo province "even if a ceasefire agreement in Syria is reached". This declaration was repeated on 19 February, but without the limitation to Aleppo. [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Reuters](#); [Bloomberg](#). Russia reaches this contradictory result (i.e., a ceasefire with continuing airstrikes) apparently by declaring everyone and everything — including moderate rebels, jihadists, civilians, hospitals, schools — to be terrorists. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §8 permits attacks on terrorists during a ceasefire in Syria.

On 20 February, Hijab's Supreme Commission announced it was willing to have a ceasefire for two or three weeks, possibly renewed, *if* — here come the conditions and demands —

1. Assad and *all* of his allies (e.g., Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, etc.) stop their attacks in Syria,
2. Assad stops sieges of towns in Syria,
3. "humanitarian aid is delivered to those in need" everywhere in Syria,
4. Assad releases political prisoners, including women and children,

5. end attacks on Nusra Front. (Reuters explains: "Nusra fighters are fighting alongside other rebel groups in some areas, including Idlib.")

[Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP). The end of attacks on Nusra Front is a *new* demand, and contrary to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §8. My comment is that Hijab's demand about Nusra *may* be the opposition's response to the 12 Feb Munich statement by ISSG, ¶ 10(d), which was discussed above. (Late at night on 21 Feb, I searched Google News, the Saudi Press Agency, and PR Newswire to attempt to find the original statement by Hijab, but it is apparently not posted on the Internet in the English language.)

My comment is that a truce will be very difficult to obtain, even if it only involves Assad, Russia, the moderate rebels, and the two jihadist groups in Hijab's Supreme Commission. By including Nusra Front in the truce, the opposition pushes the truce out-of-reach, because neither Assad, Russia, nor the ISSG will negotiate with Nusra. The continuing demand for Assad to release all of his political prisoners also frustrates both (1) obtaining a truce and (2) participation of the opposition in negotiations in Geneva. Hijab's Supreme Commission is *not* cooperating with the ISSG and de Mistura, instead Hijab's group is making the peace process more difficult. I conclude that the opposition wants *neither* a truce *nor* negotiations in Geneva, probably because the opposition still hopes for a total military victory over Assad.

On 21 February, Assad announced his conditions for a cessation of hostilities in Syria:

1. insurgents do *not* re-group during the cessation of hostilities, and
2. foreign nations stop sending munitions and fighters to insurgents.

[SANA](#) (Question 4); [Reuters](#).

Assad did *not* say whether Russia and Iran would stop supplying munitions to Assad's military during the truce. Because Assad no longer has control of most of Syria's borders, it will be difficult for Assad to enforce his second condition.

On 21 February, Kerry announced that Russia and the USA "have reached a provisional agreement in principle on the terms of a cessation of hostilities [in Syria] that could begin in the coming days." The next step is for Russia to discuss the provisional agreement with Assad's government and Iran, while the USA discusses the provisional agreement with Hijab's Supreme Commission, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other anti-Assad nations in the ISSG. [U.S. State Dept](#); [Reuters](#).

On 22 February at 16:00 GMT, the Associated Press cited anonymous U.S. government officials as saying that Russia and the USA had agreed to a "cessation of hostilities" between Assad and the opposition, to begin at midnight Damascus time on 26 Feb. [Associated Press](#). The agreement excludes both ISIL and Nusra Front, who will continue to be targeted by both the USA and Russia. Violations of the truce will be reported to the ISSG task force that is co-chaired by Russia and the USA (i.e., the two major foreign nations who are bombing in Syria!). Note that the 27 Feb start date is only 3 days before the 1 March start date that Russia proposed on 10 Feb, so Russia prevailed on that issue. The U.S. State Department posted a copy of the [agreement](#) and I posted a copy at my website: [rbs0.com](#) See news reports at:

[Associated Press](#)(17:55GMT); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(22:13GMT).

On 23 February at 12:02 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) reported that late at night on 22 Feb, Hijab's Supreme Commission said "it 'agrees to a temporary truce' as long as the main opposition's demands are met." That means their "'acceptance of the truce is conditional' to the Syrian government ending its siege of 18 rebel-held areas, releasing detainees and the cessation of aerial and artillery bombardment." Those are the three demands that Hijab's Supreme Commission has made since its creation on 11 Dec 2015.

No one is mentioning the huge problem of convincing more than 1000 different rebel or jihadist groups to stop shooting. The Russian/USA draft cessation of hostilities agreement on 22 Feb says all of these rebels and jihadists must "cease attacks with any weapons, including rockets, mortars, and anti-tank guided missiles".

On 23 February, Syria accepted the proposed cessation of hostilities. [SANA](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 24 February at 10:30 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Hijab's Supreme Commission "is seeking guarantees and clarifications from the United States about the mechanism for the implementation of the agreement."

On 24 February, the [LA Times](#) suggested the cessation of hostilities was "dead on arrival", because it allowed Russia and Assad to continue to attack Nusra Front. But Nusra Front operates in the same areas as the Free Syrian Army, and the two groups cooperate. That means there could be no truce in the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama — places where Nusra Front is active. See also [The National](#) in the UAE.

On the night of 24 February, [Reuters](#) quoted a statement released by Hijab's Supreme Commission: it "views a temporary two-week truce as a chance to establish how serious the other side is in committing to the points of the agreement." See also [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 26 February, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council:

2. Three weeks [since I last briefed this Council on 5 February 2016] and as a result of the heavy-lifting by members of the ISSG — in particular its co-chairs — of the two Task Forces which have been formed in Munich on 12 February 2016, we have aid delivered in the last 10 days to almost 110,000 people. 200 trucks were moving inside Syria to reach people with aid. The first WFP test air drop in Deir Eizzor took place, in order to reach an area of 230,000 people under siege by Daesh. Perhaps most importantly, we have a provisional agreement on the terms of a cessation of hostilities as announced by the Russian and US co-chairs at the beginning of this week. This cessation of hostilities is in fact meant to come into effect in about one hour from now at 00:00hrs Damascus time.

....

9. To date, the task force members, we believe, have lived up to their commitment in Munich by using their influence with the parties to ensure an increased flow of assistance — not enough, but quite an increase. These remarkable efforts were not

without difficulties or still some serious delays — that is why the task force is addressing those. We are still waiting for approval for aid delivery for an additional 170,000 people. Simplifying approval procedures by the government has yet to occur. We had a meeting yesterday between the UN team and Deputy Foreign Minister Mekdad. I have personally addressed these issues with the Syrian Government during my visit to Damascus last week and I will continue to follow these matters closely, because of their vital importance and follow-up to Munich.

....

22. We have so far together maintained the ISSG momentum. It now needs to be sustained. Both Task Forces are making progress. Let's admit it. Not enough, but progress. That was unimaginable only two months ago. The outcomes from both are first steps, but a first step towards sustained and unimpeded access throughout Syria; and a first step towards a more durable nationwide hopefully ceasefire. I cannot over emphasise how important determined and sustained political will is to the good faith implementation of this cessation of hostilities for making this agreement hold.

Staffan De Mistura, Special Envoy for Syria, "Briefing to the Security Council pursuant to Resolution 2254(2015)," [U.N. Geneva](#), posted on 27 Feb 2016.

At about 16:00 EST (23:00 Damascus time) on 26 February, the United Nations Security Council in Resolution 2268 unanimously endorsed the draft Russian/USA cessation of hostilities. [U.N. News](#); [UNSC](#); [Reuters](#). Copy of Resolution 2268 at [rbs0.com](#). On the morning of 26 Feb, [Security Council Report](#) commented: "Council members generally accept that the discussion between Russia and the US has determined the substance of the draft resolution and that there was little room to make significant changes to what has been already achieved through a very sensitive and high-level negotiating process."

Summary of Who is Misbehaving in Syria

By 18 February it seemed that every nation is condemning another nation for misconduct in Syria:

- The USA condemned the escalation of Russian airstrikes, and Obama asked Putin to stop bombing moderate rebels in Syria. [Associated Press](#)(14Feb); [Reuters](#)(14Feb); [Associated Press](#)(16Feb). On 14 February, Hijab, the head of the opposition's Supreme Commission for the negotiations in Geneva, criticized Russia for continuing airstrikes in Syria. [Associated Press](#).
- The United Nations and the USA criticized the 15 Feb Russian airstrikes on hospitals and schools in Syria. (See [below](#).) The French foreign minister said the Russian attacks were "war crimes". [France24](#); [Reuters](#).
- Turkey says Russian airstrikes in Syria that "intentionally targeted civilians" are "war crimes". [Hurriyet](#); [Daily Sabah](#); [Anadolu Agency](#).

On 13 February 2016, Turkey began artillery shelling of Kurds in northern Syria, because the Kurds crossed west of the Euphrates river. (Turkey had unilaterally declared that west of the Euphrates is a Kurd-free zone.) Russia and Syria criticized the Turkish attacks on the Kurds. [Reuters](#)(16Feb); [Reuters](#)(17Feb); [RIA-Novosti](#)(17Feb); [SANA](#)(14Feb).

- The USA asked Turkey to stop shelling Kurds in Syria.
 - A. [White House 14Feb](#) (On 13 Feb: "The Vice President ... urged Turkey to show reciprocal restraint by ceasing artillery strikes in the area.");
 - B. [State DPB 16Feb](#) ("... we've also urged Turkey to cease ... its artillery fire across the border.");
 - C. [State DPB 17Feb](#) ("we've ... conveyed to the Turkish Government that it should cease its artillery fire across the border.");
 - D. [State DPB 18Feb](#) (Kirby: "We also asked Turkey to stop shelling across the border.");
 - E. [White House 19 Feb](#) ("Obama ... urged Turkey to show reciprocal restraint by ceasing artillery strikes in the area.");
 - F. [State DPB 22Feb](#) ("... we have made it clear to Turkey while we understand their concerns about the YPG, we want it to stop its shelling.")

- The United Nations Secretary General on 17 Feb submitted a report to the Security Council, in which the Secretary General said the peace negotiations in Geneva "risk derailing" by both (1) military escalation in Syria and (2) threats of foreign troops in Syria. [Associated Press](#). I repeatedly searched for a copy of the Secretary General's report, and on 1 March I finally found it at [S/2016/152](#). The full remark by the Secretary General is: "The escalated military activity [in Aleppo province] by several parties and the threats to resort to the further use of force risk derailing efforts to find a sustainable political solution and the ability of my Special Envoy to credibly reconvene the talks." The escalation is by Russia, Assad, and Turkey. The threats are by Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Turkey.

27-29 Feb 2016 Cessation of Hostilities

Only 97 of the more than 1000 rebel and jihadist groups in Syria formally agreed to the "cessation of hostilities". So I was surprised to learn that the truce was being observed in most of Syria on 27 Feb. Perhaps this means that the rebels and jihadists are really tired of battle, despite their belligerent rhetoric.

On 25-26 Feb, Russia increased the number of airstrikes in Aleppo and suburbs of Damascus, in a final attempt to control more land. Then, on 27 Feb, Russia grounded its airplanes in Syria. (See [below](#).)

Here is a bibliography that I prepared after 01:30 GMT on 28 Feb, about the first day of the cessation of hostilities that began at 22:00 GMT (24:00 Damascus time) on 26 Feb. (It is important to wait until late in the day to collect URLs of news stories, so news agencies and newspapers can

replace early versions with a final version, and so temporary stories can be deleted.) In chronological order:

- "The Latest: Mixed reports as cease-fire takes hold in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 23:12 GMT, 26 Feb 2016. (At 01:00 Damascus time, "The Associated Press reporters in the Syrian capital, Damascus, have not heard sounds of any explosions since three minutes before the Russia and U.S.-brokered cease-fire took effect across Syria at midnight.")
- "US, Russia-brokered cease-fire goes into effect across Syria," [Associated Press](#), 24:19 GMT, 26 Feb 2016. ("There were also some reports of violations, which could not be independently confirmed, but they appeared to be relatively limited. Significantly, there were no immediate reports of any airstrikes.")
- "Syrian ceasefire begins but US expecting violations," [The Guardian](#), 07:09 GMT, 27 Feb 2016. ("A monitoring group said early on Saturday [27 Feb] that fighting appeared to have stopped across most of western Syria,")
- "The Latest: UN envoy says Syria cease-fire 'reassuring'," [Associated Press](#), 17:14 GMT, 27 Feb 2016. ("The U.N. envoy for Syria says the situation after the first day of a U.S. and Russian-brokered cease-fire is 'quite reassuring.' Staffan de Mistura says 'the first night and first day certainly gave the impression that everyone is serious in their commitment to keep on going with this cessation of hostilities.' ")
- "Cease-fire brings relative quiet to Syria despite breaches," [Associated Press](#), 17:25 GMT, 27 Feb 2016. ("A cease-fire brought relative quiet to parts of Syria for the first time in years on Saturday, offering civilians rare respite from Russian and Syrian government airstrikes despite some limited breaches of the agreement brokered by Washington and Moscow.")
- "Syria's cease-fire is working, at least for now," [Washington Post](#), 20:18 GMT, 27 Feb 2016. ("The unthinkable happened in Syria on Saturday as an internationally mandated truce unexpectedly took hold across much of the country, raising hopes that the beginning of an end to the five-year-old crisis may be in sight.")
- "Guns fall silent in Syria," [Reuters](#), 23:41 GMT, 27 Feb 2016. ("Guns mostly fell silent in Syria and Russian air raids stopped on Saturday, the first day of a cessation of hostilities that the United Nations has described as the best hope for peace in five years of civil war.")

28 Feb 2016: second day

The second day of the cessation of hostilities, 28 Feb, also went well. Scattered, small violations of the truce show that renegade soldiers are still functioning. Here is a bibliography that I prepared after 15:00 GMT on 29 Feb, about the second day of the cessation of hostilities. In chronological order:

- "Fragile Syria ceasefire enters second day," [The Guardian](#), 12:41 GMT, 28 Feb 2016.

("Syria's fragile ceasefire has entered its second day with reports of scattered airstrikes and bombings, but overall the slowdown in fighting — regarded as the most successful effort yet to reduce the bloodshed in the five-year civil war — appeared to be holding.")

- "'Terrorist groups' shell areas in Syria's Latakia province - SANA," [Reuters](#), 15:31 GMT, 28 Feb 2016. ("Syria's state news agency said 'terrorist groups' fired dozens of mortars into rural areas of the country's coastal Latakia province.")
- "Opposition activists report airstrikes in northern Syria," [Associated Press](#), 17:50 GMT, 28 Feb 2016. (Russian (?) airstrikes on two villages near city of Aleppo; separately Turks fire artillery at Kurds in Tal Abyad. Hijab claims: "24 cases of shelling and five cases of ground attacks [by Russian, Iranian and government forces]. Russian warplanes carried out 26 airstrikes on Sunday [28 Feb] alone targeting rebels that are abiding by the truce.")
- "The Latest: Saudi FM says Syrian forces violating cease-fire," [Associated Press](#), 18:29 GMT, 28 Feb 2016.
- "Syria's opposition tell U.N. Ban continued govt truce violation would hamper peace talks," [Reuters](#), 20:10 GMT, 28 Feb 2016. ("Syria's opposition said that what it called continued violations by the Syrian government and its allies of a U.S.-Russia truce deal would make the resumption of U.N.-backed negotiations 'unattainable'. Syrian military sources deny violations.")
- "All sides report Syria ceasefire breaches as UN prepares to deliver aid," [The Telegraph](#), 23:14 GMT, 28 Feb 2016. ("Anti-government forces and Russia traded accusations of ceasefire breaches in Syria during the second day of a shaky truce. Russian planes attacked several sites in northern Syria, according to activists.")

29 Feb 2016: third day

- "UN chief: Syria ceasefire holding 'by and large'," [Al-Arabiya](#), 13:58 GMT, 29 Feb 2016. ("On Monday [29 Feb], [Asaad al-Zoubi, head of the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee's delegation to peace talks] told Al Arabiya's sister channel Al Hadath that the fragile truce is facing a 'complete nullification' because of President Bashar al-Assad government's attacks.")
- "Turkish artillery hit Islamic State positions in Syria on Sunday, official says," [Reuters](#), 16:48 GMT, 29 Feb 2016. ("Turkish artillery hit as many as 10 Islamic State targets inside Syria on Sunday, a military official said on Monday [29 Feb].")
- "The Latest: NATO chief says Syria cease-fire largely holding," [Associated Press](#), 18:48 GMT, 29 Feb 2016.
- "UN chief: Syria cease-fire holds despite growing breaches," [Associated Press](#), 19:03 GMT, 29 Feb 2016.

- "First test for Syrian truce after breaches reported on both sides," [The Guardian](#), 19:06 GMT, 29 Feb 2016. ("The Syrian ceasefire is facing its first serious test after Syrian opposition leaders claimed it was close to collapse and the French government called for a meeting of the monitoring body amid allegations that Syrian and Russian forces had seriously breached its terms.")
- "Syrian opposition says government wrecking truce deal," [Reuters](#), 22:57 GMT, 29 Feb 2016. ("The cessation of hostilities drawn up by Washington and Moscow faced 'complete nullification' because Syrian government attacks were violating the agreement, [Asaad al-Zoubi, head of the High Negotiations Committee's delegation to the peace talks] ... said.")

Geneva talks postponed to 7 March

At 22:06 GMT on 18 February, [Reuters](#) reported that the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* quoted de Mistura as saying: "I cannot realistically send out invitations to new talks in Geneva on Feb 25, but we intend to do so soon. We need 10 days' preparation." De Mistura wants both an [expansion](#) of the delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria *and* a truce, before resuming negotiations in Geneva. At 10:15 GMT on 19 Feb, the [Associated Press](#) also reported the indefinite postponement of talks in Geneva. See the later [Associated Press](#) news article.

Remarkably, on 19 Feb, neither the U.N. office in Geneva, the U.N. News Centre, nor the U.N. Secretary General posted a press release at their websites on the postponement of the negotiations in Geneva.

My comment is that the 14 Nov 2015 meeting of the ISSG in Vienna set a target date of 1 Jan for the beginning of Syrian negotiations. We will soon be *two months* past that target date, and negotiations have *not* yet begun. Admittedly the opposition appeared in Geneva for a few days (31 Jan to 3 Feb), but they refused to negotiate, because their preconditions (i.e., demands) had not been satisfied.

The events chronicled above show the complexity of obtaining a truce. In recent weeks, Russia, Assad, and — beginning 13 Feb — Turkey have all escalated military activities. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Turkey have threatened to send ground troops into Syria. These recent acts have worsened an already grim situation.

On 22 February, after Russia and the USA proposed a "cessation of hostilities" that begins on 27 Feb, de Mistura told [Reuters](#): "We can now relaunch very soon the political process which is needed to end this conflict".

On 26 February, the day before the cessation of hostilities is scheduled to begin, de Mistura announced the negotiations in Geneva would resume on 7 March and continue for three weeks — provided that the cessation of hostilities is observed. [Associated Press](#) (21:20 GMT on 26 Feb); [Reuters](#) (22:56 GMT on 26 Feb); [Associated Press](#) (00:11 GMT

on 27 Feb); [Reuters](#) (02:11 GMT on 27 Feb); [The Guardian](#).

Astoundingly, when I looked on the night of 26 Feb, the United Nations office in Geneva had posted *no* press releases from de Mistura after 18 Feb 2016. This lack of updates at the U.N. website frustrates a search for definitive statements about the peace negotiations and cessation of hostilities. In particular, nothing about the failure to resume negotiations on 25 Feb, and nothing about the resumption on 7 March, appears at the U.N. website in Geneva.

AFP Interview with Assad

On 11 February, Assad was interviewed by Agence France-Presse (AFP). To put the interview into context, the ISSG foreign meddlers in Munich were about to discuss a ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, with neither Assad's government nor the Syrian opposition present during the ISSG discussions. Because this interview gives rare insight into Assad's thinking, I am quoting most of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) transcript of that interview:

Question 1: How do you feel when you see tens of thousands of your citizens starving, running away from hunger, from their areas, which are being shelled by your Russian allies, and trying to cross the borders to Turkey? And how do you feel when you see the pictures of them drowning in their attempt to cross the seas?

President Assad: If we talk about emotions, I belong to this people; and it is self-evident that I have the same feelings my people have. Any scene of suffering is painful to all of us as Syrians. But as an official, the question for me is less about emotions than about what I, as an official, should do, being responsible before my people.

However, when the cause of this suffering is the terrorists, not the Russian shelling, as claimed by Western media, and when one cause for migration is the almost five-year-old embargo against the Syrian people, naturally my, and every Syrian official's first task is to fight terrorism essentially using Syrian capabilities, but also using our friends' support in the fight against terrorism. That's why I say the problem of Syrian refugees abroad, as well as the problem of hunger inside Syria, as you referred to it, is a problem caused by terrorism, Western policies, and the embargo imposed on the Syrian people.

Question 2: Mr. President, since you are talking about actions rather than emotions, can we talk, or at least think, about the possibility of putting an end to shelling civilian populations in order to alleviate the suffering of these civilians, and also lifting the blockade imposed on certain areas?

President Assad: The conflict has been, since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, about who wins the support of the people in Syria. Consequently, it doesn't make sense for us to shell civilians if we want to win them to our side. This is in theory. Practically, while moving around in Syria, you will find that in any area under the control of the state, all sections of Syrian society, including the families of the militants, are being cared for by the state. What is more is that in a city like Raqqa, which is under the full

control of Daesh (ISIS), the state continues to pay the salaries of employees and send vaccines for children. So, it doesn't make sense for the state to shell civilians while doing all the above, unless we are talking about mistakes which happen in every battle. The general rule is that there are innocent victims in every war. This is a rule of thumb in wars, but this is definitely not the Syrian state's policy.

Question 3: Mr. President, what do you say to those emigrating to Europe? Do you ask them to come back?

President Assad: I would like to ask every person who left Syria to come back.

Question 4: Mr. President, will the Syrian state regain control over Aleppo in the next few days? If so, what is next? Is it extending full control to Lattakia, Aleppo, and Idleb?

President Assad: The battle in Aleppo now is not about regaining control over Aleppo, because the Syrian state is there; but the main battle is about cutting the road between Aleppo and Turkey; for Turkey is the main conduit of supplies for the terrorists.

Question 5: Do you think, Mr. President, that you can regain control over all Syrian territory? And what is the timeframe you have for that now?

President Assad: Regardless of whether we can do that or not, this is a goal we are seeking to achieve without any hesitation. It makes no sense for us to say that we will give up any part. The timeframe is dependent on two scenarios. Suppose that the problem is purely Syrian, i.e. that Syria is isolated from its surroundings, we can put an end to this problem in less than a year by moving on two fronts: fighting terrorism and political action. The second scenario — which is the case now — taking the shape of continuing supplies to terrorists through Turkey, Jordan, and partly from Iraq — because Daesh (ISIS) exists in Iraq with Saudi, Turkish, and Qatari support — naturally means that the solution will take a long time and will incur a heavy price. So, it is difficult to give a precise answer about the timeframe.

Question 6: Can't you say precisely how many years you need to restore peace to Syria?

President Assad: The question is: for how many years will Turkey and Saudi Arabia continue to support terrorism. That is the question. And when will the West put pressure on these countries to stop supporting terrorism.

Question 7: Mr. President, can we know who is your main enemy? Is it the so-called moderate opposition and the Islamists, or is it Daesh (ISIS)? I'm asking because everybody can see that you are targeting, with your shelling and blockade, the areas under the control of this opposition and these Islamists. Who are your real enemies?

President Assad: I don't think that the term "opposition" can be used, in France or anywhere else in the world, to describe somebody carrying a weapon. Opposition is a

political act. Suppose that you mean to say “moderate terrorists,” this is a different term. Saying that, you mean that they do not belong to Daesh (ISIS), al-Nusra, or to these extremist groups. Obama said that the moderate opposition is a fantasy. Biden said the same thing. But what’s more important is reality which says that such an opposition is non-existent. Most of the militants belong to extremist groups, such as Daesh (ISIS), al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Cham, and others. So, my answer is that every terrorist is an enemy. We respect every political opposition; and we do have political opposition inside Syria. They adopt tough positions against the state, and we are not attacking them.

Question 8: I would like to get this straight. As far as you are concerned, there’s no difference between these armed groups, on the one hand, and Daesh (ISIS), al-Nusra, and others, on the other?

President Assad: Legally speaking, there is no difference. The state will confront all those who carry weapons. It will not ask them about their ideology. But the difference is that the extremist groups refuse to have any dialogue with the state. They believe that they will fight, die, and go to heaven. This is their doctrine. The other groups are not ideological. Most of them have been misled. They got involved in dialogue with the state later. Some of them have laid down their weapons, and some are actually fighting with the Syrian Army today. We grant them amnesty in return for laying down their weapons.

Question 9: Mr. President, what do you think of Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Cham? They did negotiate with you, and went to Geneva.

President Assad: They went as part of the opposition formed by Saudi Arabia, because it is Saudi Arabia which supports terrorism worldwide. So, it is only natural for the representatives of Saudi Arabia to be terrorists, not politicians.

Question 10: So, you will not negotiate with those.

President Assad: In principle, direct negotiations were not supposed to take place in Geneva 3. They were supposed to take place through de Mistura. And here we should be precise: we are not negotiating with Syrians, but with representatives of Saudi Arabia, France, the UK, and others. So, if you mean Syrian-Syrian dialogue, the answer is naturally no. Dialogue with these people is not a Syrian-Syrian dialogue at all. A Syrian dialogue is that conducted with Syrian groups which have grassroots in Syria, like the political opposition in Syria, for instance. Any persons calling themselves opposition but belong to foreign states or foreign intelligence services do not represent Syrians in the dialogue, and simply we do not consider them Syrian.

Question 11: You said that you were going to negotiate. All those who went to Geneva were based outside Syria. Can you explain?

President Assad: No, some of them are based inside Syria, and some live outside Syria but they are involved in politics and have supporters in Syria. I’m not talking only

about terrorists, I'm talking about people who have been formed in a foreign state and act on behalf of a foreign state.

Question 12: Mr. President, you talked about a Syrian opposition inside Syria. My question is: don't you think that had you been more tolerant in dealing with this opposition in the past, you would have avoided this conflict? Don't you bear part of the responsibility?

President Assad: We do not claim that we did not make mistakes in Syria. This is natural in any state. And we do not claim that we, in the Middle East, have reached a stage of significant political openness. We were moving in that direction, not very quickly, and maybe slowly. Back to your question, the more radical segments of the opposition inside Syria, which attack the state, have not been imprisoned or prosecuted by the state, neither before or after the crisis. So, I don't know what is meant by tolerance in this case.

....

Question 22: Mr. President, you know that there have been many accusations to your government and to you personally, most recently by the UN investigation committee, which accused you of genocide, which is a crime against humanity.

Last month, the UN Human Rights High Commissioner spoke about blockading a number of your cities, like the town of Madaya, and accused your government of committing war crimes, and also about crimes he says you commit by throwing barrel bombs on civilians. Aren't you concerned that you will one day face an international court?

President Assad: First, you know that UN institutions express balance among the superpowers and the conflict among them.

And these organizations are now basically controlled by Western powers. That's why most of their reports are politicized and serve a political agenda. The evidence is that these organizations haven't said anything about clear massacres perpetrated by terrorist groups against innocent civilians in Syria. What refutes the reports of these organizations is that, first, they do not provide any evidence, and this is the case in general. Second, there is a logic for things: if Western states and rich Gulf states are against an individual; and this individual is killing his people, how would he withstand for five years in these circumstances? That's why I'm not concerned about these threats or these allegations.

Question 23: You said that these reports and institutions do not provide any evidence. But don't you believe that these reports are correct, particularly the latest report by the UN committee about the death of thousands of prisoners in your prisons? There are eyewitnesses in this case.

President Assad: No, there is a difference between individual crimes having been

committed and having a state policy of systematic killing. I said that innocent people die in the war. That is true, but war crimes are committed when orders are given to follow a policy of committing massacres for certain purposes. Had this been true, people would have fled from state-controlled areas to the areas controlled by armed groups. What is happening is the exact opposite: everybody moves to the state-controlled areas.

....

Question 25: Mr. President, do you still really intend to negotiate with the militants, or are you thinking of crushing them militarily?

President Assad: We have fully believed in negotiations and in political action since the beginning of the crisis; however, if we negotiate, it does not mean that we stop fighting terrorism. The two tracks are inevitable in Syria: first, through negotiations, and second through fighting terrorism. And the two tracks are separate from each other. "President al-Assad speaks to AFP on Syrian and regional developments," [SANA](#), 12 Feb 2016.

The AFP news article is posted at [Global Post](#), amongst other websites.

Buried in this long interview is a terse remark by Assad (Question 8) that ISIL and Nusra Front — and maybe some jihadists — "believe that they will fight, die, and go to heaven." That is a critically important observation, as it indicates the religious dimension of part of the Syrian civil war, which has Shiite Muslims (e.g., Assad, Hezbollah, and Iran) fighting against Sunni Muslims.

Since I began writing essays on Syria in September 2013, I have believed that Assad is the least-worst leader for Syria. That does *not* mean that Assad is a good person. Assad does *not* seem to grasp that his overreaction to political demonstrations in March 2011 began the current civil war in Syria. Assad clearly understands that various foreign nations are obsessed with removing him from power, and those nations continue to send munitions to the rebels and/or jihadists in Syria. Assad repeatedly mentions Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but there has also been substantial support for the rebels by Qatar and the USA. Assad mentions Qatar only once, in his answer to Question 5.

In questions 22-23, Assad seems to deny that his government has committed a long series of violations of international law: attacking civilians, torturing opponents in prisons, denying humanitarian aid to besieged towns, etc. Assad's denials are either propaganda or delusions. Sadly, such violations have been common in many nations (Russia and communist China are flagrant examples) and the United Nations has been powerless to punish those violations.

Negotiating with Assad will be more difficult because of Assad's refusal to accept various facts and responsibilities in Syria.

In Question 5, Assad seems to say he will continue fighting until Assad again controls all of Syria. On 18 February, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations publicly rebuked Assad, because Assad was "out of step" with Russia. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

An end to the Syrian civil war would come quickly if foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, USA) would stop sending munitions to rebels and jihadists in Syria. But those foreign meddlers are all obsessed with deposing Assad, so they are unlikely to stop sending munitions.

Further, the border between Turkey and Syria needs to be sealed, to prevent the flow of foreign fighters and munitions into Syria. But Turkey has made only token efforts to seal the border, despite repeated pleas from the U.S. Government. The military campaign by Russia and Assad in February 2016 appears designed to seal the Turkey-Syrian border from the Syrian side. Obviously, if Russia and Assad seal the border, that will choke the flow of munitions to all insurgents, and make it easier for Assad to win the civil war.

Since Turkey shot down a Russian airplane on 24 Nov 2015, Russia has been looking for ways to retaliate against Turkey. The recent Russian military support for Kurds in northern Syria is a way to really irritate Turkey. Using Kurds to help seal the Syrian border with Turkey not only chokes the flow of munitions to insurgents in Syria, but also empowers the Kurds and grieves Turkey.

U.N. Reports

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights established an Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria in the year 2011. The following is quoted from their Report in February 2016:

16. Most parties to the conflict continue to employ siege warfare on neighbourhoods and localities (albeit to different degrees) in combination with continuous bombardment. Whenever the tactical circumstances have allowed, the sieges have been imposed in an attempt to force opponents and their supporting communities to surrender or to extract political concessions.

17. The conflict has devolved into a multisided proxy war steered from abroad by an intricate network of alliances. States, entities and individuals outside the Syrian Arab Republic have supported all sides, profoundly shaping their operational capabilities and performance. Paradoxically, the international and regional stakeholders that are ostensibly pushing for a peaceful solution to the war are the same that continue to feed the military escalation.

....

19. The Russian Federation has intensified its involvement through the deployment of an air force group in Latakia, reportedly pursuant to a request from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. Since beginning its air strikes on 30 September 2015, the Russian forces have provided — in coordination with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic — close air support to ground operations conducted by the State forces and their supporting militia, enabling their expansion in large areas. Besides the Al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra and some of its tactical allies, the air strikes have also

targeted the anti-government armed groups battling pro-government forces initially in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic before extending its strikes to all other restive governorates. Russian sorties also attacked ISIS command centres, logistical assets and training camps in Ar Raqqa, Homs and Dayr az-Zawr.

20. Simultaneously, spillover effects, including border insecurity and the outflow of refugees, have spread beyond neighbouring countries, affecting other regions of the world and confirming the risk of the internationalization of the conflict. The sectarian schism sustained by extremist actors on different sides has also contributed to the recent escalation between regional powers.

....

32. Growing in complexity, the Syrian conflict has involved an increasing number of belligerents on a multitude of interconnected front lines. While no party seems able to achieve “victory”, all appear to have sufficient capacity to sustain operations for the foreseeable future, perpetuating death and destruction along the way.

....

58. The targeting of hospitals, medical personnel and transport, and the denial of access to medical care remain an ingrained feature of the Syrian conflict. Interviewees from across the country emphasized the long-standing paucity of medical care available to the sick and wounded, resulting in an increase in deaths and permanent disabilities.

59. That civilians have little or no access to medical care is largely the result of the deliberate destruction of health-care infrastructure by warring parties. In areas under bombardment, only minor injuries were treated locally. For governorates with access to neighbouring countries, there is a continuous flow of medical transport rushing injured civilians over the border.

60. Government forces targeted hospitals and medical clinics in areas not under their control. Of the 33 hospitals open in Aleppo city in 2010, fewer than 10 are still functioning. Attacks on health-care infrastructure resulted in little or no medical help being available for serious injuries. A survivor of a rocket attack on Kafr Hamra neighbourhood, Aleppo city, on 29 October described a young relative dying while en route to Turkey to receive treatment.

....

148. The humanitarian space is shrinking daily. Flagrant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continue unabated, aggravated by blatant impunity. The stipulations of relevant Security Council resolutions (see annex VI) remain largely unheeded and unimplemented. Crimes against humanity continue to be committed by government forces and by ISIS. War crimes are rampant.

"Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic," [A/HRC/31/68](#), 11 Feb 2016.

On 22 Feb 2016, the [Associated Press](#) summarized the above-quoted report:

In a swipe at the U.S., Russia and their allies, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria said the international powers and regional countries ostensibly pushing for a peaceful solution are the same nations that "continue to feed the military escalation."

I am pleased that someone finally spoke the Truth and recognized the hypocrisy of the USA, Russia, and other nations.

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, in January and February 2016, 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"). Here is part of the February 2016 report:

3. Widespread conflict and high levels of violence continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in January. Indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombings and ground attacks by Government forces, supported by its allies, and indiscriminate shelling by non-State armed opposition groups and designated terrorist groups, [footnote 1: On May 2013, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra Front were designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council in accordance with resolution 1267 (1999). The two groups operate in the Syrian Arab Republic.] 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.

....

6. on 16 January, ISIL cut off the water supply to Aleppo governorate from Al Khafseh water treatment facility on the Euphrates River affecting some 2 million people.

....

8. Non-State armed opposition groups also launched several attacks in Damascus and Rif Dimashq, with the city of Damascus subjected to continued shelling. According to information received by OHCHR, non-State armed opposition groups struck populated areas in the capital, killing and injuring many civilians and damaging infrastructure and residential buildings. For instance, on 6 January, nine civilians were killed and at least 36 were injured when several mortar rounds fell on al-Shaalan, Abu Rummana, Hamra and Baghdad Street.

....

18. The scale and severity of abuses and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including abductions, summary executions, and deaths in custody, remained grave during the reporting period. On 8 February, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic launched a report entitled “Out of sight, out of mind”, detailing how Syrian civilians have been arbitrarily arrested, unlawfully detained, taken hostage, or kidnapped since the conflict began by all parties to the conflict. The report describes how thousands of detainees held by the Syrian Government have been beaten to death, or died as a result of injuries sustained as a result of torture. The report also details the acts of other parties to the conflict including non-State armed opposition groups, Nusra Front and ISIL, including cases of cruel treatment, executions, torture, murder and summary executions.

....

40. Of the 4.6 million people living in hard-to-reach areas, some 486,700 people remained besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic. This includes some 274,200 people besieged by the Government of Syria in various locations in Rif Dimashq; 6,000 people besieged by the Government of Syria and non-State armed opposition groups in Yarmouk; some 200,000 people in Dayr al-Zawr city who are besieged by ISIL; and some 12,500 people who are besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusra Front in Foah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate.

....

43. In Madaya (and Buqayn) in Rif Dimashq, some 42,000 people remain besieged by Government forces. Reports of severe malnutrition continue to be received. In Foah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate, some 12,500 people remain besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusra Front. Joint United Nations/ ICRC/SARC convoys delivered assistance sufficient for one month to Madaya, Foah and Kafraya on 11, 14 and 18 January as part of the Four Towns Agreement. After initially gaining access to Madaya, the United Nations and ICRC/SARC submitted repeated requests to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for clearance for safe and unimpeded access to return with additional supplies, training teams and technical experts to address the situation on the ground. Although some approvals have been granted, including the entrance of SARC mobile clinics, approval for sustained and unfettered access remains pending. On 4 February, the United Nations and ICRC/SARC submitted a further request to the Syrian authorities for a convoy to the towns covered under the Four Towns Agreement.

44. In Zabadani in Rif Dimashq, some 700 people remain besieged by Government forces. On 18 January, assistance for 1,000 people was delivered to Zabadani.

45. In Daraya in Rif Dimashq, about 4,000 people remain besieged by Government forces. The United Nations has been unable to deliver assistance to Daraya since

November 2012.

....

49. United Nations and health partners received reports — which are in the process of being verified by the United Nations and partner organizations — of 13 attacks on medical facilities in January. Multiple attacks on medical facilities in February have already been reported. For example, on 15 February, UNICEF received reports of attacks against four medical facilities in February, two of which were in Azaz, Aleppo and two in Idlib.

50. Physicians for Human Rights released its report in January on attacks on medical facilities in 2015. A total of 112 attacks on medical facilities were documented from January through November 2015, making it the worst year on record for attacks on medical facilities, surpassing the 89 attacks in 2012. In total, Physicians for Human Rights has documented 336 attacks on 240 separate medical facilities between March 2011 and November 2015. According to Physicians for Human Rights, Syrian Government and Russian forces are responsible for over 90 per cent of these attacks.

....

55. A total of 34 United Nations staff members, 30 of whom are UNRWA area staff, 1 from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1 from UNICEF; 1 from UNHCR/United Nations Office for Project Services; and 1 from OCHA continue to be detained or missing. Five UNRWA staff members were released in 2015 and one released recently. The total number of humanitarian workers killed in the conflict since March 2011 is 85. This includes 17 staff members of the United Nations, 51 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, 8 volunteers and staff members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and 9 staff members of international non-governmental organizations. Of the 85, 19 have been killed since 1 January 2015.

56. As this conflict enters its sixth year, targeted and indiscriminate attacks against civilians, residential areas and civilian infrastructure have continued unabated and with near complete impunity. Since the start of the year, thousands of civilians have been killed, injured or displaced by the ongoing violence and the parties' disregard for the basic tenets of international humanitarian law. **Even as the United Nations talks commenced in Geneva at the start of February, I was shocked by the scenes of thousands of people fleeing for their lives from the unrelenting aerial bombardment in Aleppo governorate.** There can be no justification or defence, for continuously failing to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Such attacks are unacceptable and unlawful and I call on the parties to immediately halt all actions that can result in civilian loss of life or damage to essential infrastructure.

57. The recent report published by the independent international commission of inquiry on deaths in detention in Syria is another stark and gruesome reminder that violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law continue to be perpetrated on a daily basis by all parties to the conflict. Detainees held by the Government were beaten

to death, or died as a result of injuries sustained as a result of torture. Others perished as a consequence of inhuman living conditions. Non-State armed opposition groups and listed terrorist groups took individuals hostage and subjected detainees to serious abuses, including torture and summary executions. Such actions are reprehensible and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. There must be accountability for these and other crimes.

58. I am extremely concerned about the incredibly dire situation facing the 486,700 people living in horrific conditions under siege in Syria. The continued reports of high levels of malnutrition and numbers of death due to lack of basic medical care emanating from besieged areas are shocking and cause for deep concern. The main responsibility for this immense suffering lies with the party imposing a siege. It is, however, shared by those who put civilians in harm's way by using them as shields for military activities or by those who take advantage of their suffering by taking bribes or selling food at exorbitant prices. Persons protected under international humanitarian law, particularly civilians and the wounded and sick, must be allowed to leave besieged areas, should they wish to do so. I remind all parties that the deliberate starvation of civilians as a method of warfare constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law and could amount to a war crime.

59. Despite their international legal obligations and the demands of the Security Council, all parties to the conflict continue to obstruct humanitarian assistance to those most in need and to withhold consent for operations in an arbitrary manner. Notwithstanding the valiant efforts of humanitarian organizations and staff that continue to assist millions of people, millions more are still left with no or insufficient access as a result. I call on the parties and those Member States with influence on them to urgently and without any hesitation or dilution take all necessary steps to bring sustained access throughout the country, particularly in besieged or hard-to-reach areas. The United Nations remains committed and ready to deliver aid and protection for civilians, wherever and wherever they are, based on need and vulnerability and not on political considerations.

60. On 29 January, my Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, commenced intra-Syrian talks in Geneva between representatives of the Syrian Government and the High Negotiations Committee. Consultations also took place with women, civil society groups and other national stakeholders. On 3 February, my Special Envoy announced he was to recess talks as of 5 February because of unresolved procedural matters and the dramatically deteriorating humanitarian situation on the ground. However, the fact that all relevant Syrian actors did come to Geneva ready to discuss the end of the conflict and the future of their country, is in itself positive and should be supported. I look forward to the resumption of the intra-Syrian talks.

61. I welcome the sustained momentum and resolve to put an end to the Syrian conflict demonstrated by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), whose ministers gathered in Munich on 11-12 February. I support their agreement to establish two task forces to ensure that all in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria are assured sustained access, as well as to implement a nationwide cessation of hostilities, in

parallel with steps towards a political transition process. The United Nations shall do its utmost to support the implementation of the agreements reached by the ISSG as part of the implementation of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) in all its aspects. The Syrian conflict has long gone beyond the abilities of the Syrians themselves to end it. The time has come for the international community to put their differences aside, for all parties to act with restraint and redouble efforts towards a political solution, lest the world is prepared to deal with the repercussions of this war inside Syria and far beyond.

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/2016/156](#), 18 Feb 2016. [In ¶56, the original underlined one sentence, which I changed to boldface.]

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.

My comment is that the Secretary General rewrote history in ¶ 60, when he said: "However, the fact that all relevant Syrian actors did come to Geneva ready to discuss the end of the conflict and the future of their country," The fact is that the opposition refused to negotiate, because their pre-conditions (i.e., demands) had not been met. De Mistura traveled to the opposition's hotel for meetings, because the opposition delegation refused to come to the United Nations offices in Geneva.

Looking at attacks on hospitals, humanitarian aid workers, and civilians leads one to the conclusion that the parties to the Syrian civil war are barbarians. It will be difficult for these barbarians to behave in a civilized way at peace negotiations and in the future governance of Syria.

ISIL kidnaps Christians in Syria

Assyrians on 23 February 2015

On 23-24 Feb 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, ISIL continues to hold 210 Assyrian Christians, as cited in my essay for [May 2015](#).

On 17 June 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, 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 2015, 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.

On 22 Feb 2016, all of the remaining hostages — approximately 42 people — were released by ISIL after a ransom was paid. [Associated Press](#); [AINA](#).

Qaryatain on 7 August 2015

On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured Qaryatain in the Homs Province of Syria, after a long battle with Assad's army. [SOHR](#).

On 7 August 2015, 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 2015, [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 2015, ISIL released 15 Christians after they paid the jizya. [AINA](#).

On 22 Feb 2016, [AINA](#) reports that ISIL continues to hold 179 Assyrians it captured in Qaryatain.

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. Since November, I have chronicled mostly civilian deaths caused by Russian airstrikes.

On 11 February 2016, the Russian military reported they flew a total of 510 sorties in Syria during the past 7 days, 4-11 Feb. The Russians claim to have destroyed "1,888 terrorist facilities in the provinces of Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, Deir ez-Zor, Deraa, Homs, Hasakah, and Raqqah." [RIA-Novosti](#); [TASS](#); [Reuters](#).

Here is one example of the kind of propaganda that Russia is spewing. On 10 Feb, the U.S. accused Russia of bombing two hospitals in Aleppo. On 11 Feb, Russia agreed the hospitals had been bombed, but said two U.S. A-10 warplanes did the bombing. [Pentagon](#) on 10 Feb; [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#). It is not plausible that the U.S. would fly aircraft into airspace (e.g., Aleppo) that is dominated by Russian and Syrian military aircraft. From the beginning of the U.S. airstrikes in Syria, the U.S. has bombed ISIL targets in eastern and northern Syria, areas that Assad had abandoned. From the beginning of the Russian airstrikes in Syria, the U.S. had carefully avoided Russian aircraft, including negotiating a de-confliction agreement. It is difficult for nations to negotiate with Russia, when Russia fabricates fictitious "facts" to conceal Russia's misconduct.

Moreover, Russia continues to claim that their airstrikes *only* hit Nusra and ISIL. But the

Truth is the Russian airstrikes have mostly targeted moderate rebels, and a substantial number of civilians have been killed by Russia. Listening to Russian propaganda is an "Alice in Wonderland" experience in which words do *not* have their normal meaning.

Russian Airstrikes on Hospitals

On 15 February, Russian airstrikes hit at least two hospitals and a school in Syria. One Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)-supported hospital was located in Marat Numan in Idlib province. A children's hospital in the town of Azaz in Aleppo province was also bombed. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [MSF](#); [SOHR](#). The director of UNICEF was "appalled" at the attacks on four hospitals. [U.N. News](#). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said: "We are gravely concerned about these abhorrent and repeated attacks on medical facilities in the Syrian conflict." [U.N. News](#).

At the United Nations Daily Press Briefing in New York City on 15 February, the U.N. denounced the attack on the hospitals in Syria:

Question: Farhan, thank you. Does the Secretary General have any reaction to the attacks on four medical facilities in Syria, apparently two in Aleppo and two in Idlib that definitely caused casualties?

Deputy Spokesman [Farhan Haq]: Yes, on that, what I can say is that the Secretary General is deeply concerned by reports of missile attacks on at least five medical facilities and two schools in Aleppo and in Idleb, which killed close to 50 civilians, including children, and injuring many. Such attacks are a blatant violation of international laws. Among other consequences, they are further degrading an already devastated health-care system and preventing access to education in Syria. These incidents cast a shadow on the commitments made at the International Syria Support Group meeting in Munich on the 11th of February. We must capitalize on the agreements reached and translate them into action if the credibility of, and confidence placed in the International Syria Support Group and the international community are to be justified.

"Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 15 Feb 2016.

On 15 February, the U.S. State Department spokesman issued the following press statement: The United States condemns airstrikes conducted in and around Aleppo today against innocent civilian targets, including a hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières and the Women's and Children's hospital in Azaz city.

That the Assad regime and its supporters would continue these attacks, without cause and without sufficient regard for international obligations to safeguard innocent lives, flies in the face of the unanimous calls by the ISSG, including in Munich, to avoid attacks on civilians and casts doubt on Russia's willingness and/or ability to help bring to a stop the continued brutality of the Assad regime against its own people.

We call again on all parties to cease attacks on civilians and take immediate steps to grant humanitarian access and the cessation of hostilities that the Syrian people

desperately need.

John Kirby, "Airstrikes in Northern Syria," [U.S. State Dept](#), 15 Feb 2016.

More Russian Airstrikes

On 16 February, Russia boasted of "444 sorties, hitting 1,593 terrorist targets in the provinces of Deir ez-Zor, Daraa, Homs, Homs, Latakia[,] and Aleppo from February 10 to February 16." [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 24 February, Russia announced only 62 sorties, which struck 187 targets in Hama, Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Aleppo, and Homs provinces of Syria during 22-23 Feb. [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). Russia claims to have decreased the number of their airstrikes in Syria, in response to the "cessation of hostilities" negotiated on 22 Feb and effective beginning 27 Feb. [Reuters](#).

A quick calculation with the data in the previous paragraph shows an average of 63 sorties/day that hit 228 targets/day during 10-16 Feb, so the number of sorties is now approximately half the previous rate, and the number of targets per day is now 40% of the previous rate.

Well, the Russians piously *claim* they are reducing airstrikes in Syria, but on 26 Feb the [Associated Press](#), [Reuters](#), and [Reuters](#) report heavy Russian airstrikes in the city of Aleppo and suburbs of Damascus on the last two days before the cessation of hostilities.

On 26 Feb, the Spokesman for the U.N. Secretary-General commented on the recent increase in military activity in Syria:

... first of all, I think we've seen, of course, in the last day and today an increase of military activity across the board in Syria. It's, unfortunately, not surprising, and it happens, in many cases, in the hours prior to cessation of hostilities, there is an increase in military activity. It's tragic, but it's, unfortunately, not surprising. We have seen statements by the Russian Federation saying that they would obviously — that they are fully supporting the cessation of hostilities. We've seen the statements by the Government. We've seen the statements by the ISSG (International Syria Support Group) members. The meeting there is an ISSG meeting focusing on the cessation of hostilities currently going on or just winding down in Geneva. I am sure Mr. de Mistura will be able to provide more after his meeting with the Security Council.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 26 Feb 2016.

After the cessation of hostilities began at midnight on 26 Feb, Russia grounded its airforce in Syria on 27 Feb "to avoid any possible mistakes". But, in the future, Russia is expected to resume bombing Nusra Front and ISIL in Syria. [RIA-Novosti](#); [The Guardian](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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 670 Iraqis killed in violence during February 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.
-

February 2016: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

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 16 Jan 2016, three U.S. citizens were kidnapped in Baghdad, and they disappeared. On 16 Feb, all three were freed by Iraqi security forces. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 25 February, the [Associated Press](#) reported that two ISIL suicide bombers had killed 15 people in Baghdad.

On 28 February, two ISIL suicide bombers in Baghdad killed at least 70 people. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 29 February, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a funeral in Diyala province, killing at least 40 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

During February 2016 there were fewer reports by the Associated Press or Reuters about terrorist attacks in Iraq, compared to previous months. My reading of *Iraqi News* shows the terrorist attacks continue, but typically each attack only kills a few people. *Iraqi News* combines the dead and wounded into one number, although my opinion is that death and injury are distinctly different.

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 March 2016, I searched Google News for the query `Iraq prosecution Mosul`, 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 March 2016, I searched Google News for the queries `Iraq prosecution Ramadi` and `court martial Ramadi`, 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 2015 stalled in October 2015.

More U.S. troops in Iraq

On 1 December 2015, 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 2016, 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.

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](#), [December 2015](#), and [January 2016](#).

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* completely liberated from ISIL.

By 28 Jan 2016, there was an estimate that 95% of Ramadi was then liberated from ISIL, but many ISIL explosive devices remained in Ramadi.

February 2016: Ramadi

On 9 February — more than 40 days after Iraq declared victory in Ramadi — the Iraqi army finally cleared all of the ISIL fighters out of Ramadi and its suburbs. [Associated Press](#); [Rudaw](#). However, the Iraqi government can not afford the cost of restoring water and electricity to Ramadi. The United Nations also requested donations from foreign nations to pay for the cost of removing ISIL explosives in Ramadi. [Reuters](#).

On 15 February, the United Nations says 5700 buildings in Ramadi need repairs, and 2000 buildings have been destroyed. [Reuters](#).

On 22 February, the United Nations again said that lack of funding was hindering disarming ISIL's improvised explosive devices in Ramadi. [Associated Press](#).

Throughout February 2016, nearly every day there were continuing airstrikes near Ramadi to attack ISIL. (See [below](#).)

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.

February 2016: Mosul

On 12 February 2016, [Reuters](#) reports that the Iraqi army was moving troops near Mosul, in preparation for the liberation of Mosul.

Wall around Baghdad

In medieval times, walls were built around cities and castles to prevent invaders from entering. On 3 February, the Iraqi army began building a wall and a trench around Baghdad. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 6 February, Iraqi prime minister Abadi rejected the wall ("Baghdad is the capital of all Iraqis and remains for them all and no fence or wall can isolate or prevent the rest of the citizens from entering it"), but approved reorganising checkpoints. [Abadi](#); [Reuters](#). On 7 February, the prime minister's office said a symbolic "wall ... of an increased number of checkpoints around the city" would be built. [Associated Press](#).

I am sorry they did not build the wall, and put a moat outside the wall, with alligators swimming in the moat to eat Islamic terrorists. (I am joking.)

Anti-ISIL Coalition Meets in Brussels

On 11 February 2016, the defense ministers of 28 nations met in Brussels to talk about the Coalition to defeat ISIL. [DoD News](#); [DoD News](#).

I posted a copy of their [Statement](#) at my website.

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 a Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahrum](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See 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](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least

57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.

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

In February, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of January 31, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$6.2 billion and the average daily cost is \$11.5 million for 542 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

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

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 February 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 1 February 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Jan. 31, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack and fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 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 destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL tunnel systems.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed three ISIL front end loaders.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, two ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL staging areas, two ISIL rocket rails, two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and an ISIL VBIED facility.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL fighting positions.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 1 Feb 2016.

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

2 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 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 three ISIL excavators.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck two ISIL gas and oil separation plant well heads.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL training facility and destroyed three ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, three ISIL front end loaders, and an ISIL homemade explosives cache.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL checkpoint and destroyed an ISIL homemade explosives cache.
- Near Qayyarah, six strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL staging areas, an ISIL vehicle, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL weapons cache, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

3 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, four strikes struck four gas and oil separation plants.
- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed seven ISIL weapons caches, three ISIL assembly areas, and 14 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility, and an ISIL logistics facility.
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL recruiting station, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL assembly area, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL fighting positions, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

4 February 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, four ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 16 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL assembly area, ISIL engineering equipment, and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Qayyarah, six strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL command and control nodes, six ISIL vehicles, seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar tube, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed ISIL engineering equipment, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL tactical vehicle, eight ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL rocket propelled grenade systems, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL staging area, and 11 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

5 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 4, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using ground-attack,

attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL command and control node.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket position, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL boat.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL improvised explosives device (IED) facility.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL weapon caches, three ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL rocket positions, an ISIL weapons cache, and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL staging areas, four ISIL weapon caches, an ISIL bed down location, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL weapons cache, and two ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Tikrit, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

6 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately 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.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and four ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and eight ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL recoilless rifle, and an ISIL fuel transporter, six ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL front end loader, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Sinjar, 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](#), 6 Feb 2016.

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

7 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 6, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven 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 ground-attack, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL anti-air artillery position.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed three ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun, two ISIL vehicles, and eight ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL command and control node, two ISIL weapons caches, and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), an IED cluster, an ISIL staging area, two ISIL bed down locations, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Sinjar, 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](#), 7 Feb 2016.

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

8 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 7, 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 nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL rocket position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL tactical vehicle, an ISIL VBIED, and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.

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

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

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

One airstrike near Ramadi, Iraq on 7 Feb was included in the 9 Feb press release.

9 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 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 Kobani, 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 and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, seven strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and three ISIL staging areas and destroyed two ISIL rockets, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL front-end loader, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL-used bridge.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar tube, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL logistics facility and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL staging area, and two ISIL boats and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket fire position.

Additionally, one strike from Feb. 7 was not included on the Feb. 8 strike release:

Iraq

- Near Ramadi, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL boat.

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

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

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

10 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 9, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 15 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun position, an ISIL VBIED facility, and cratered an ISIL-used road.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed two separate ISIL mortar positions.

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

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

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

11 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and

Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using fighter aircraft. Separately in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Coalition military forces also conducted one strike in Iraq in support of Coalition operations using fighter aircraft.

Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL structure.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint, seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Coalition military forces conducted one strike in Iraq in support of Coalition operations using fighter aircraft:

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck inoperable Coalition equipment denying ISIL access in support of Coalition operations.

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

[Central Command](#), 11 Feb 2016.

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

12 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 11, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria [sic] and Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 21 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL supply cache, two ISIL assembly areas, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL machine gun, an ISIL bed down location, an ISIL command and control node, and two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facilities.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.

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

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

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

13 February 2016: airstrikes

On Saturday, 13 February 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria. CENTCOM redesigned its website: same information, new look.

On Feb. 12, 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 against ISIL targets. Additionally 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 Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike cratered an ISIL-used road.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL crane.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed four ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL

- fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL excavator, and an ISIL vehicle.
 - Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL staging areas, an ISIL bed down location, and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
 - Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

14 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally 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 Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) cache and six ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed two ISIL rocket positions.
- Near Mosul, 12 strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL headquarters, two ISIL financial storage centers, and two ISIL financial distribution centers and destroyed 12 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Ramadi, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL staging areas, three ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.

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

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

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

15 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 14, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 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 Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL crane.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL supply cache, four ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Samarra, one strike destroyed three ISIL tactical vehicles and an ISIL crane.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

16 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, six strikes struck an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL headquarters, three ISIL weapons storage facilities, and an ISIL barracks.
- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings and damaged a separate ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed seven ISIL rocket rails and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Al Qaim, nine strikes struck an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) facility, an ISIL logistics facility, an ISIL staging area, two ISIL internet cafés, two ISIL headquarters, and an ISIL media headquarters.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL heavy machine guns, and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL weapons cache, and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL bunker.

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

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

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

17 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, four ISIL buildings, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes cratered an ISIL-used road.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL supply cache and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL bed down locations, an ISIL command and control node, two ISIL-used bridges, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel.

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

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

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

ISIL cash depleted

On 17 Feb, Col. Steve Warren — the spokesman for the U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve in Baghdad — said there have now been a total of 10 airstrikes on "Daesh cash collection areas". Warren said about the amount of cash destroyed: "we believe it's in the hundreds of millions of dollars". [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 16 February, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL had reduced salaries.

Also on 17 Feb, Canada announced its six CF-18 fighter jets had flown their last bombing mission in Iraq on 14 Feb. The six airplanes will now return to Canada. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP);

[National Post](#); [Globe&Mail](#).

18 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar position, three ISIL buildings, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed nine ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an inoperable piece of partner nation equipment, at the request of the Iraqi government, in order to prevent its capture by ISIL forces.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Mosul, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL light machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

19 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL workover rig.
- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL vehicles and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed eight ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed 13 ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL weapons storage facility and destroyed 12 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL excavator, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL staging areas.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

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

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

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

20 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 19, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, attack, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL armored front end loader.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL main gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece and three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and three ISIL rocket systems.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL petroleum, oil, and lubricants site, and two ISIL command and control nodes.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility, five ISIL staging areas, and an ISIL bed down location.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel system.

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

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

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

21 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 20, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, nine strikes struck eight separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, six ISIL buildings, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Hawl, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL structures.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed an ISIL culvert bridge and two ISIL-used logistics routes.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL supply caches, an ISIL mortar system, 16 ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL weapons production facility and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, 10 strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL logistical facility, an ISIL fuel storage location, an ISIL mortar booster factory, an ISIL explosive factory, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factory and destroyed nine ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL command and control nodes, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

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

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

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

22 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 21, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted five strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, four ISIL buildings, four ISIL vehicles, and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Al Hawl, two strikes destroyed two ISIL-used bridges.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed three ISIL buildings and two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes struck three ISIL-used logistics routes.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

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

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

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

23 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 22, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes using ground-attack, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL buildings and suppressed two ISIL sniper positions and two ISIL fighting positions and damaged an ISIL building.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, five strikes struck six ISIL gas and oil separation plant wellheads.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed two ISIL buildings.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL supply cache and an ISIL staging area.

Near Kisik, seven strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, three ISIL staging areas, an ISIL headquarters, an ISIL bed down location, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

- Near Makhmur, one strike destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL light machine gun position.
- 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 Feb 2016.

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

24 February 2016: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 24 February 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Feb. 23, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using ground-attack, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted four strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL buildings, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL fighting position, and suppressed a separate ISIL mortar system.
- Near Al Hawl, seven strikes destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL building, two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL vehicles, and suppressed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL heavy machine gun and cratered two ISIL-used roads.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike suppressed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed two ISIL weapons caches and five ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 24 Feb 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 24 Feb 2016.

25 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes struck an ISIL modular refinery and an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Al Hawl, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL buildings and an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) production and storage facility.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Kisik, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, nine strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL improvised weapons factory, an ISIL IED factory, an ISIL mortar factory, and an ISIL VBIED facility and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions, and ISIL vehicle, an ISIL light machine gun, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- 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](#), 25 Feb 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 Feb 2016.

26 February 2016: airstrikes

On Friday, 26 February 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and

Syria:

On Feb. 25, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes struck an ISIL petroleum, oil, and lubricant separation vessel and an ISIL gas and oil separation plant and crude oil collection point.
- Near Al Hawl, eight strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL vehicles, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL staging area and an ISIL weapons storage area.
- Near Al Hasakah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil tanker.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL light machine gun, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL artillery system, an ISIL staging area, two ISIL supply caches, and damaged an ISIL staging area.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes suppressed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL bunkers.

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

[Central Command](#), 26 Feb 2016.

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

27 February 2016: airstrikes

On Saturday, 27 February 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq

and Syria:

On Feb. 26, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using ground-attack, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally 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.

Syria

- Near Tal Abyad, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Al Hawl, five strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings and an ISIL vehicle born improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL front end loader, and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL VBIED facility, and an ISIL weapons storage facility and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and two ISIL rocket fire positions.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

28 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes using ground-attack, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL improvised weapons assembly area.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Tal Abyad, 10 strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 23 ISIL buildings, and suppressed two ISIL tactical units, an ISIL mortar position, eight ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun position, and an ISIL rocket fire position.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area, and two rocket rails.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Makhmur, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL rocket rails, and suppressed an ISIL rocket fire position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL financial distribution center.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL fighting position, and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket fire position and an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

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

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

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

29 February 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 28, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter and remote piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant.
- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL buildings, an ISIL fuel tanker, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and seven ISIL vehicles.

- Near Mar'a, three strikes destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Abyad, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle, and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL front end loader and an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket fire position.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL VBIED factory.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL staging areas, and two ISIL petroleum, oil, and lubricant trucks.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 29 Feb 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 [September 2015](#) mentions a 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.

- My essay for [November 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Paris that killed 130 people on 13 Nov 2015.
- My essay for [December 2015](#) describes an Islamic terror attack in San Bernardino, California on 2 Dec 2015.
- My essay for [January 2016](#) describes Muslim immigrants running amok in Cologne, Hamburg, and at least five other European cities on the night of 31 Dec 2015.

Some of 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.

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 disenchanting 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 disenchanting 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. 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 at least 5 other cities on the night of 31 Dec 2015 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.

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 29 February 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/syria30.pdf>
begun 1 Feb 2016, revised 1 March 2016.

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

[my homepage](#)