

Syria & Iraq: March 2016

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 28 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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 13 March, the USA was on Daylight Savings Time, which makes Boston -4 hours from GMT. The U.K. went on summer time on

27 March. Damascus is +3 hours from GMT (summer time). Baghdad and Moscow are each +3 hours from GMT.

Every day, I checked the websites of

- the Associated Press,
- Reuters in the United Kingdom,
- [Al-Arabiya](#) middle east section,
- the Pentagon and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM),
- 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.

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" (IS), 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 2 April 2016, the U.N. Security Council website for 2016 lists neither the January, February, nor the March

2016 report from OPCW. 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 2015, [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."

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 four months of silence by journalists on this topic.

More chemical weapons in Iraq

On 8 and 12 March 2016, ISIL launched attacks with chemical weapons in the village of Taza, south of Kirkuk. The chemicals were delivered with mortar shells and rockets. Numerous civilians were injured, although different sources report different numbers. One 2-year old girl died from exposure to the chemicals. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(12March); [Rudaw](#).

My comment is that new incidents of chemical weapons use are accumulating in Iraq faster than OPCW can investigate them.

Syria

Peace Negotiations in Syria

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 ten* 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 15 March 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a new cumulative death toll.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 273520 persons since 18/03/2011, which witnessed the fall of the first martyr in Daraa, until 15/03/2015.

The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 79585 including:
 - 13694 children and 8823 female over the age of 18,
 - 13475 tortured to death in regime prisons including (108 children and 53 women), and
 - 2167 were executed by IS.
- YPG, the rebel and Islamist fighters: 44288 including 912 rebels who have been tortured to death in regime prisons and 266 militants were executed by IS.
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2574
- Arab fighters from Gulf countries, Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, Palestine, Jordan, Sudan and other Arab countries, as well as fighters from Europe, Russia, China, India, Chechnya, Afghanistan, America and Australia who fight with “Islamic State”, al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, al-Khadra’ battalion, Jund al-Sham Movement, Junud al-Sham al-Shishan, the Islamic Turkestan Party and other Islamist factions: 44992
- Regular regime soldiers and officers: 55435
- Combatants from People’s Committees, Syrian Social Nationalist Party, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informant, the “Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta”, al-Baath battalion and the Palestinian Liberation Army: 38208
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al

Felastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 3897

- Fighters from Hezbollah: 1041
- Unidentified dead people (documented by photos and footages): 3500

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

The numbers also do not include more than 2000 fighters from the YPG, IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic battalions and rebel battalions who were kidnapped during clashes among the mentioned parties.

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

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

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

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of non-Syrian casualties from the IS, al-Nusra Front, Islamic factions, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, al-Ummah Brigade, the Islamic Turkestan Party, al-Battar Battalion, Jaysh al-Muhajereen and al-Ansar, Jund al-Sham, rebel battalions, regular forces and pro-regime militants to be approximately at 95000 more than the documented number due to the extreme discretion by all sides on the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

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

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

"About 2 millions and half killed and wounded since the beginning of the Syrian Revolution," [SOHR](#), 15 Mar 2016.

On 27 March 2016, SOHR released casualty figures for the first month (i.e., first 30 days) of the cessation of hostilities, which began on 27 February 2016. Their data is divided into two parts: one for locations covered by the cessation of hostilities, the other for locations *not*

covered.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was able to document the **death of 646 people in a month of ceasefire in Syria, in the places which is considered as truce areas**, since the 27th of February 2016 and until the 27th of March 2016, and among the total human losses are[:]

- 122 fighters from the rebel and Islamic Factions Killed in shelling by the regime and in the aerial bombardment and in the clashes against the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them,
- also 174 civilian citizens were killed, including[:]
 - 41 children under the age of eighteen, and 34 citizen woman over the age of 18, [and 95 men,] including[:]
 - 4 children and 4 citizen woman and 30 men were killed by snipers, and
 - 14 children and 8 citizen woman and 14 men were killed when shells launched by Jabhat al-Nusra and the factions on Sheikh Maqsood neighborhood at Aleppo and on other places in in the cities and towns of Syria, and
 - 9 children and 15 citizen women and 29 men were killed in the bombing of warplane on the countryside of Damascus, Idlib and Aleppo and other areas, and
 - 11 children and 7 citizen women and 22 men were killed in the shelling by the regime forces on areas in Rif Dimashq, Homs, Idlib, Latakia and other areas in Syria, and
- 200 members from the regime forces and NDF, and
- 32 fighters from Asayish, YPG and SDF, and
- 27 fighters from the Islamic factions and Jabhat al-Nusra and Caucasians fighters, and
- 91 fighters from al-Nusra and the Islamic Turkestan party.

While the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 200 members from the regime forces and the NDF loyal to them, they were killed in the northern countryside of Latakia, in the southern countryside of Hama and in the eastern Ghouta.

Also in the northern countryside of Latakia 91 fighters from the Islamic Turkestan Party and Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant) were killed.

Also 32 YPG and SDF fighters, and 27 fighters from the Islamic factions, Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant) and Caucasians fighters were killed in clashes between both parties in the vicinity of Sheikh Maqsood neighborhood in Aleppo.

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the **death of 1723 people in a month of the truce in Syria, in the areas which are not covered by the truce**, where the “Islamic state” exists or in contact with these areas in the provinces of Al-Raqqah, Aleppo, Al-Hasakah, Deir Ezzor, Damascus, Rif Dimashq and the countryside of Hama and Homs and other areas, since the 27th of February until the 27th of March

2016, and among the total casualties are[:]

- 33 fighters from Jabhat Thowwar Syria and
- 129 fighters from the Islamist factions including 67 non-Syrian fighters, and
- 189 civilian citizens including 42 children under the age of 18, and 39 citizen women over the age of 18, and
- 38 people executed by the “Islamic state” and Islamic factions and other factions including 2 children, and
- 437 members from the regime forces and NDF, and
- 97 fighters from the Syrian Democratic Forces, and
- 739 members from the “Islamic State” organization, and
- 50 citizens including 10 children died affected by injuries they had before the start of the truce, and
- 11 person were killed by the gunfire of the Turkish Border Guard.

Also the Observatory documented the death of 10 citizens, they are the 6 children from the city of Douma in Damascus died due to poor health conditions and the lack of necessary treatment and medication, and a child and 2 men from the town of Madaya and the city of Darayya they died also due to poor health conditions and the lack of necessary treatment and medication.

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the execution of 9 people, they are:

- 2 men executed by the Courthouse in Horan in the countryside of Daraa on charges of “Killing and robbery in exchange for money”, and
- a man was executed by Nusra Front on charges of “belonging to the Islamic state” in the northern countryside of Homs, and
- 2 men executed by an Islamic faction in Kafr Takharim in the northwestern countryside of Idlib on charges of “cooperating with the regime, and providing the coordinates of headquarters, and planting improvised explosive devices”, and
- 4 people executed by the Courthouse in Homs and Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant) on charge of “involving in killing and spreading the ideas of the “Islamic State”

Also SOHR documented the death of a man inside Asayish prisons, and activists from the area and relatives of the victim accused Asayish force of killing him under torture

The Observatory also documented the execution of 28 people by the “Islamic State”, they are[:]

- a brother of an opposition figure from Deir Ezzor, he was executed by the organization in the town of Tal Abyad in the northern countryside of Al-Raqqah, and
- 15 people including a citizen woman and two children were executed by the organization in the town of Hammam al-Turkmans south of Tal Abyad, and
- a man from al-Mayadin executed by the organization in Gharanij in Deir Ezzor, and
- a man killed in the countryside of Al-Raqqah where local sources accused the

- “Islamic State” of executing him, and
- 2 were executed by organization in the countryside of Deir Ezzor, and
- 2 persons (a poet and his son) executed on charge of “apostasy” in the countryside of Deir Ezzor, and
- 6 people were executed in Menbej city on charge of “apostasy”

Also 140 members at least from the “Islamic State” were killed during their attack on the city of Tal Abyad and its countryside and on the area connecting Mabrouka with Ras al-Ayn (Sri Kaneh) and the outskirts of Ayn Isa in the northwest countryside of Al-Raqqah during the first three days of the Truce, where they were killed in clashes against the Syrian Democratic Forces and in the bombing by the warplanes of the International Coalition, also 20 members were killed during clashes against the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Islamic factions in the countryside of Aleppo and Al-Hasakah and in the south of the capital Damascus.

[Also] 47 fighters from The Syrian Democratic Forces were also killed during an attack by the “Islamic State” on the city of Tal Abyad and its countryside and on the area connecting Mabrouka in the countryside of Ras al-Ayn (Sri Kaneh) and the outskirts of Ayn Isa in the northwestern countryside of Al-Raqqah, and 46 members from The Syrian Democratic Forces were killed during the shelling and clashes against the “Islamic state” in the countryside of Aleppo and Hasaka, and about 20 one of them their bodies were hanged by the “Islamic State” in its controlled areas.

Also 542 members from the “Islamic State” were killed during the bombing and raids by the warplanes and the clashes against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them in the countryside of Homs, Hama and Aleppo, 58 members of them were killed on the road between Aleppo — Khanasser — Athrayya in the southern eastern countryside of Aleppo within the first three days of the truce, and 67 non-Syrian fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions were killed in clashes against the regime forces in the countryside of Latakia and Aleppo.

Also 437 members from the regime forces, Hezbollah and fighters from Syrian, Arab and Asian nationalities were killed during clashes against the “Islamic state” on the road between Aleppo — Khanasser — Athrayya in the southeastern countryside of Aleppo during the first three days of the truce and in the countryside of Hama, Homs and Deir Ezzor, including 33 in the southern eastern countryside of Aleppo only.

Also 62 fighters from the Islamic factions were killed, 6 of them were killed during the shelling and clashes against the “Islamic state” in al-Dumayr city east of the capital Damascus and the rest were killed in clashes and bombing elsewhere.

Also 50 civilians including 10 children died affected by injuries they had before the start of the truce in the bombardment by warplanes and the shelling by the regime forces and the fall of shells, and other circumstances in several areas of Syria.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also documented the death of 11 persons, 7 of them are still unidentified, all of them were killed by gunfire of the Turkish Border Guards when they were crossing from the provinces of Latakia and Idlib to Turkey.

"More than 170 civilians are among the almost 650 people killed in a month of truce in Syria," [SOHR](#), 27 March 2016. [Formatting as indented lists added by Standler. Material in square brackets added by Standler. Boldface in two places added by Standler.]

SOHR did *not* comment on these data, but 646 + 1723 is a total of 2369, about half the usual monthly death toll in Syria. Obviously, the cessation of hostilities has made a huge difference in death rates. The death rate would go lower if ISIL (i.e., "Islamic state") and Nusra were exterminated, and if violations of the ceasefire would stop.

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* 273,500.

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 2 April 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 9 months to choose a leader for the Free Syrian Army, during an existential war.

Nusra captures U.S.-supplied weapons

On 13 March, Nusra Front captured the town of Maarat Numan in Syria, including a warehouse full of weapons the USA had supplied to the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The [Associated Press](#) reports: "The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group, said Nusra seized anti-tank missiles, armored vehicles, a tank, and other arms from [Division 13 of the FSA], which has received weapons, training, and money from the U.S. government."

[Reuters](#) reported that Nusra seized only "light weapons and ammunition", but *no* anti-tank missiles and *no* mortars.

This is *not* the first time that jihadists or terrorists have stolen U.S.-supplied weapons from the Free Syrian Army, see my essays for [January 2014](#) and [September 2015](#). In

[September 2014](#), Nusra stole weapons and equipment from United Nations observers.

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.

On 4 March 2016, the Turkish government seized control of *Today's Zaman* newspaper in Turkey. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Anadolu](#) in Turkey. My comment is that there is *no* way that Turkey can join the European Union while Erdogan the dictator is controlling Turkey. But the EU must have the cooperation of Turkey in ending the flow of migrants to Europe, so Europe needs to be delicate in criticizing Erdogan. My essay for [July 2015](#) cited reports by *Zaman* and others that the Turkish government had sent munitions to ISIL in Syria.

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 my essay for [February 2016](#) in the section titled "Summary of Who is Misbehaving in Syria".) 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.

On 22 Feb 2016, the White House press secretary said: "At the request of the United States, the Turkish government has taken important steps to close off large sections of their border. There continue to be some sections where we'd like to see them do more." "... there is more work that they can do along their border." [White House](#). On 14 March 2016, the White House press secretary claimed: "We have seen the Turks take specific steps to more effectively seal off their border between Turkey and Syria. Now, there's more work that we'd like to see them do, but there's no denying that they have made important progress in sealing off the border." [White House](#). On 28 March, the White House press secretary said: "We've also seen Turkey in the last several months make important progress in securing their border with Syria. Now, there's more that we'd like to see them do," [White House](#). On 29 March, the White House press secretary said that Obama would discuss with Erdogan "continuing to intensify our coordination on key aspects of our counter-ISIL strategy, including ramped-up efforts to secure the Turkey-Syria border." [White House](#).

My comment is that, after the U.S. Government waited *10 months* for Turkey to approve flights from the Incirlik air base to bomb ISIL in Syria, the U.S. Government is very careful *not* to antagonize Turkey. Clearly, Turkey has *not yet* sealed its border with Syria, so foreign fighters continue to enter Syria to fight with ISIL and Nusra.

On 28 March, the government of Turkey boasted that it had killed, captured, or wounded 5359 members of the PKK, since Erdogan began slaughtering them at the end of July 2015 to increase his popularity in elections. [Hurriyet](#); [Anadolu](#). My comment is that Erdogan *should* have continued the ceasefire with the Kurdish PKK, and instead attacked ISIL in Syria.

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 was 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.

On 29-30 March, Assad seems confident after his victory in liberating Palmyra from ISIL on 27 March. (See [below](#).) [Associated Press](#).

Peace Negotiations for Syria

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."

Planning for 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.

My essay for [February 2016](#) chronicled the suspension of negotiations in Geneva, and the attempts by de Mistura and ISSG to arrange both a ceasefire in Syria and delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. I also gave my opinion for who was to blame for the collapse of negotiations.

On 1 March 2016, de Mistura again postponed the resumption of negotiations in Geneva. The parties are now scheduled to meet on 9 March. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

The official statement from the U.N. Office in Geneva says:

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, today announced that intra-Syrian peace talks will resume in the afternoon of 9 March 2016.

The 7th of March 2016 was initially set as the target date for the resumption of peace talks. In order to allow adequate time to address logistical and practical matters, the Special Envoy will now resume the talks on 9 March 2016.

Mr. de Mistura looks forward to Syrian participants' engagement in serious discussions with a view to implementing Security Council resolution 2254.

"Resumption of Intra-Syrian talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 1 March 2016.

There is an error in the claim that 7 March "was initially set as the target date". The *initial* target date for the resumption of talks was sometime on or before 25 February, as explained in my essay for [February 2016](#).

On 2 March 2016, Hijab's Supreme Commission was again obstructionist when it said all dates for the resumption of talks in Geneva "remain hypothetical", because the opposition's demands remain unfilled. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

On 4 March, Staffan de Mistura and Jan Egeland spoke to journalists in Geneva:

de Mistura: So let me first of all address the issue about cessation of hostilities which, as you know naturally, has an impact on making as effective as possible the urgent need of humanitarian aid to reach everyone in Syria, but particularly besieged areas. It has been now 6 days of cessation of hostilities. That is quite a period in any type of ceasefire or truce, especially after the conflict of 5 years. Overall, I will repeat what the Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said and I think we can still stand for that. The level of violence in the country has been greatly reduced. Ask the Syrian people, many of our colleagues have done so. In general, the cessation has been holding. This is good news for many Syrian people. Unfortunately, we have to admit, like in every cessation of hostility or ceasefire, and in particular in this one, there are still a number of places where fighting has continued, including parts of Hama, Homs, Latakia and Damascus, but they have been contained and the two co-chairs which, as you know, are the crucial players in order to control the cessation of hostilities, which they, themselves have been facilitating, are paying close attention to the situation in Syria, so is the world. They are, so far, insuring that these incidents are contained, and we need to make sure that it is the case.

.....

Now, the issue of political process, because both humanitarian aid and the cessation of hostilities are extremely important in facilitating the atmosphere and the credibility of them. But they are not preconditions, the precondition for everyone is to see that a political process and a political solution will take care of the tragedy of Syria, and

therefore where are we on that.

Well, I have indicated as a pencilled date, the afternoon of the 9th. I wanted to explain this to you because I owe it to you. I did say the other day that we need to have a pencilled date okay? We need to make sure that everyone knows that this is not open ended, and we need to maintain pressure both on the success of the cessation of hostilities and the delivery of aid in order to make sure that they do give a feeling of credibility to the people in Syria who want to see the political process being connected with facts on the ground for them.

We have now been looking at also the logistics. You know that there is the car show in Geneva. You may say that it's not vital, well it is important because that means hotel availability. We are bringing people by plane from different locations, visa arrangements.

We are having also proximity talks, and the it means that we have a lot of flexibility to make sure that the delegations can come. For instance those who come on the 9th are very welcomed; we will then have prepared meetings. Then, others due to plane [flight] problems will come on the 11th, others perhaps on the 14th. Proximity talks give that flexibility. The important thing is to start the momentum reaching the point when the political aspect will be addressed because that is what will make the endgame a stable one in Syria. We will keep you informed on that. I will take one question.

....

Jan Egeland: The lack of humanitarian access in Syria has been one of the greatest challenges for humanitarian organizations this last generation. More than 4 million people live in so-called "hard-to-reach" areas, which is a euphemism for desperate people only getting sporadic, if any, relief. Nearly half a million people have been living now in besieged areas. It's become a symbol of the impotence of the international community and of the cruelty of the parties on the ground.

In the last three weeks, there has been a separate task force of the International Syria Support Group. Have we made progress? Yes, compared to what was achieved last year, there is progress. In the first three months of last year, zero trucks reached any of the besieged areas in Syria. In the last three weeks, 236 trucks have served 115,000 people, many of these have received several convoys like in the town of Moadamiya, that got four convoys, or three convoys plus another few trucks yesterday [3 Mar]. This was a place that had nothing for one and a half years before that time.

Have we progressed in lifting sieges in general or in closing dramatically the hard-to-reach areas in size and scope? No, not so far. So, there is a tremendous job to do, and a tremendous challenge that is before us now. What we have now is a taskforce that is working, in the sense that in-between meetings we can now get to members of the taskforce that go to the Government of Syria and solve problems for us, other members go to armed opposition groups and solve problems for us. We never had that kind of a mechanism, and that is in part why we failed so dramatically in 2015.

We believe that the cessation of hostilities will lead to a big leap forward — the big leap forward — in reaching many more people, hundreds of thousands or more people in the hard-to-reach areas and the remaining besieged areas. Hopefully, before the end of the weekend, we will be able to serve all of the locations in Kafr-Batna, another three-four besieged areas will then be covered.

Finally, we also have progress on the general procedures for reaching communities both in the so-called hard-to-reach areas and in the besieged areas. Our people on the ground have had to go through multiple steps to be able even to fill one convoy. At times it's taken many months before permits were given, if permits were given at all. Now, we have indications from our humanitarian coordinator on the ground, Yacoub El Hillo, that there will be a much simplified system that will lead within less than two weeks — that the steps will all be covered, and we can fill convoys, and that that is part of monthly plans for access. Again, this together with the cessation of hostilities could be the game-changer that we have hoped for, for a very long time.

QUESTION: What are you going to do about Deir ez-Zor? Are you going to try another airdrop, or is there any talk of trying to break the siege?

Jan Egeland: Well, I don't know of any plans to break the siege as such, that would have to be done on the ground. We cannot fill any convoys to Deir ez-Zor, where there are 200,000 civilians, mostly women and children. But the work to do airdrops is proceeding. It is very difficult, there has never ever, in the history of humanitarian work, been such a high-altitude, big and continuous airdrop operation as the one we still hope to be doing. There is a lot of preparatory work, tests are being performed, we hope to be back with good news to you before long, but I couldn't say how many days or weeks it would take before it could start.

QUESTION: We haven't really seen much progress though to the besieged areas that haven't been reached. As you said, they were getting more convoys to places that have already been served. When is this breakthrough moment going to come that we see convoys hitting the areas that haven't been reached at all? We've got a cessation of hostilities now, it's been there for six days. What is exactly preventing convoys leaving for those places tomorrow? We get a sense that the Government is not greenlighting this.

Jan Egeland: Again, three-four locations in Kafr-Batna should be reached in the next — tomorrow, or before the end of the week, which would bring the number of besieged areas serviced from six to possibly ten. Deir ez-Zor is only the airdrop opportunity. So what remains is Darayya, Douma, Harasta, Arbin, Zamalka, Zabadin, Eastern Ghouta area. Very challenging.

We have requests with the Government now. We're waiting for a green light from there. But it also requires us to get green lights from all of the armed opposition groups to be able to enter. And that can also at times delay convoys. That's why we also have members of the taskforce that help us with armed opposition groups.

QUESTION: Could you tell us if the Syrian Government has agreed to your requests as part of the facilitation letters, as I've understood that you have been seeking? Facilitation letters, as they're called? And also, have you gotten any agreement — you said that progress has been made — but have you gotten any agreement that the Syrian Government forces will not be removing medical equipment from the convoys, as they have in the past?

Jan Egeland: As part of the new procedures, we need to have the green light also for medical supplies. Medical supplies, including surgical equipment, have been taken off convoys even of late. Other places, they've gone through. We need to have the green light for medical supplies as part of this new system of improved procedures. I'm hopeful that we will get that. The facilitation letter is a pretty formal thing, it's even a note verbale that has to be presented to the Government to be able to go to a place. Again, simplification is what is sought, time is of the essence, so if we can get it then within days rather than indefinite time limits, it would be a big step forward.

"Transcript of the Press encounter of Staffan de Mistura and Jan Egeland on progress of Humanitarian Access Task Force," [U.N. Geneva](#), 4 March 2016.

My comment is that I do not understand why de Mistura is scheduling the resumption of Geneva negotiations on 9 March, when there is a shortage of hotel rooms in Geneva, owing to an international automobile exhibition during 3-13 March. De Mistura seems willing to accept that some delegates to the negotiations might arrive on 11 or 14 March. Why not hold the negotiations in some other city (e.g., Vienna, Berlin, Munich, Paris) where there are available hotel rooms?

On 4 March, Hijab said that conditions are "not suitable" for the resumption of peace negotiations in Geneva next week, because the following demands have *not* been satisfied:

1. Assad must end sieges on rebel-controlled towns,
2. Assad must release political prisoners,
3. humanitarian aid must be delivered to all towns in Syria,
4. Assad must end all military operations, and
5. Assad must resign before the transitional government begins.

[Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

My comment is that Hijab's Supreme Commission does *not* recognize that its job is to end the Syrian civil war, something the Syrian people want. Instead, Hijab's Supreme Commission is attempting to obtain through demands what they could not militarily win during five years of civil war. In my essay for [January 2016](#), at 19 Jan, I wrote: "Hijab's Supreme Commission for Negotiations has been spewing demands and preconditions since it was created, conduct that will scuttle the negotiations. In my opinion, Hijab's delegation is defective and unacceptable, because of their demands and preconditions." On 31 Jan, I wrote: "if Hijab's Supreme Commission fails to negotiate a ceasefire, then de Mistura should replace them with a different Syrian opposition delegation." In my essay for [February 2016](#), I wrote: "As a result [of Hijab's demands], 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."

On 5 March, the Syrian National Coalition elected a new president. The [Associated Press](#) remarked: "The coalition was once the main Western-backed opposition group." This remark supports my observation in my essays for [August 2015](#) to [December 2015](#) that the Syrian National Coalition was "fading".

On 7 March, [Reuters](#) reported: "Hijab said the opposition would decide by the end of the week whether to attend the talks, which the United Nations aims to start this week. Another HNC member [Riad Nassan Agha] told Reuters it was leaning towards going." The [Associated Press](#) reported: "Pressed on whether the HNC will participate in the negotiations, Hijab said a decision will be taken 'in the coming days. Before the end of the week.' ". My comment is that this is another example of indecision and delay by the opposition. The negotiations are *scheduled* to resume on 9 March, but the opposition is suggesting that its delegates may *begin* to arrive in Geneva on 11 March.

On 7 March, the deputy spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary General said at the Daily Press Briefing:

... Staffan de Mistura plans on resuming the talks as of the afternoon of 9 March. That's Wednesday. He and his team stand ready to receive all the participants as of 9 March, and they will be conducting preliminary consultations prior to substantive discussions as per the agenda set by Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). It's clear that, due to logistical arrangements, some participants will be arriving on 12 March; some will be arriving on 13 March. We'll accommodate those as they happen. But, the start of the process remains 9 March.

Farhan Haq, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 7 March 2016.

On 8 March, the Associated Press reported a statement by de Mistura's office.

The U.N. envoy for Syria will begin holding "substantive" peace talks with both Syrian government officials and opposition representatives no later than next Monday [14 Mar] even as preparations toward the discussions get underway this week in Geneva, a spokeswoman for the envoy said Tuesday [8 Mar].

....

De Mistura "will start substantive meetings with those who are in Geneva," by March 14 at the latest, [spokeswoman Jessy] Chahine told reporters. She said the peace talks would resume "in a staggered and proximity system," meaning that they are to take place in various phases and not face-to-face, at least initially.

Jamey Keaten, "UN: 'Substantive' Syria peace talks to begin within days," [Associated Press](#) 18:23 GMT, 8 March 2016.

On 9 March 2016 — the day that negotiations in Geneva were *scheduled* to resume — no delegates were present, but de Mistura gave a press conference. Reuters reminds us that neither Assad's government nor Hijab's Supreme Commission has agreed to return to Geneva. De Mistura now expects "substantive, deeper" negotiations to begin on 14 March. On 24 March, a recess lasting approximately 7 to 10 days is scheduled to begin.

[Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

The new date of 14 March needs to be interpreted as another postponement. Previously scheduled dates were 25 Feb, 7 March, and 9 March. Since 3 Feb 2016, there have been four postponements and zero meetings.

My comment is that back in 1970 there was a movie titled "What if they gave a war and nobody came?" By 2016, civilization had declined to the point where "What if they gave a peace conference and nobody came?".

On 10 March, the United Nations office in Geneva posted a transcript of the 9 March press conference by de Mistura and two other U.N. officials:

Now, regarding the actual talks. The talks are, as you know, officially today is the beginning of the arrivals. We are having proximity talks, because we're having a proxy war. And the proximity talks mean we are staggering both meetings, rooms, and dates.

For instance, today we're having the first arrivals of our own people. We're having a whole surge of UN colleagues who are actually helping us to make sure that we are going to be able to handle four things simultaneously. One, the proximity talks. Two: two taskforces, one humanitarian, and one on the cessation of hostilities, cease fire. And three, as you know very well, a very never-seen-before operations centre, where we have Russians, Americans and the UN, monitoring, observing, and trying to check and keep track of the cease-fire. All that requires some arrivals and some movements.

The agenda, the talks are therefore being staggered in terms of arrivals. We have people coming tomorrow [10 Mar], we have people coming on Sunday [13 Mar], there will be anyway on Saturday quite a few too, but then we plan to start having informal talks already in hotels or here, with whoever is arriving.

But the substantive, deeper part of it, after the first preparation, will be on Monday, God willing, the 14th. They will last not beyond the 24th. We believe that having a timetable, and a time limit is healthy for everyone. We don't think that we can go on [with] procedural discussions for two weeks hoping to get into substance. We go seriously into substance as soon as we can. There will be also the fact that there will be then a period of recess a few days, a week perhaps, ten days — in order to give the time for delegations to then return, and for us to recap where we are on it, and then resume them, as we did in the past.

Now, the talks, as you know, were interrupted by myself, because there were various reasons that we felt justified it, and the proof is that Munich was a good response to the need of resuming the talks, by focusing on two important aspects: the humanitarian, and the cease-fire. That is beginning to be addressed. And at the same time, let me be very clear. When we start having the talks on Monday, God willing, the focus will be on substance, on the agendas, in other words on new governance, constitution, and elections, the future elections in 18 months' time, both presidential and parliamentary.

The issue about the cease fire and the humanitarian [issue], in theory and, we hope, in

practice, should not be addressed by the talks, because we do have the two taskforces, who are going to be simultaneously addressing those. And therefore, taking away the alibi, in a way, of those who may want only to talk about the cease fire, and forgetting that at the end of the day, the cease fire and humanitarian aid alone are not a solution. The solution is a political transition in Syria, facilitated, made credible to the Syrian people by incremental humanitarian assistance, and an incremental, more or less sustainable, we hope as much as possible, and quite unbelievable after five years of war, cessation of hostilities or reduction of hostilities. That's basically the plan. So, I will take two questions, but then I will leave the floor to both of you [Jan Egeland & Yacoub El Hillo], because you're the ones who have the opportunity of elaborating on what we did this morning.

....

QUESTION: We are very close to the end of two weeks of the cessation of hostilities. Do you confirm now that there is an extension for the cessation of hostilities for two more weeks?

de Mistura: Well, let me really be very frank on that. I don't know where this two weeks issue came up from an international point of view. I heard that some sides had indicated two weeks. From the UN point of view, and the Geneva meetings we have been having in the taskforce, and certainly the Munich understanding, there was an open-ended concept regarding the cessation of hostilities. Of course, the first days are always the most critical. And we're reaching, God willing, two weeks, with *grosso modo*, by and large, quite a sustained reduction of violence. Incidents are taking place, no question, and there are — I'm expecting even worse incidents to take place, probably caused by spoilers.

The secret will be whether the sides will be in a position — and so far, touching wood, it has been the case — to contain them, make them not becoming an unravelling of what has been, after five years, quite a change. So far, insufficient, but quite a change for the life of every Syrian. And you will be able, Yacoub [El Hillo], coming from Damascus yesterday, to say so.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of press encounter with Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria;" [U.N. Geneva](#), 9 March 2016. [Bracketed dates and names added by Standler, other brackets in original.]

De Mistura was diplomatic about the alleged "two-week limit" on the cessation of hostilities. There is *no* two-week limitation in either the draft agreement issued by Russia and the USA on 22 Feb, or in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2268 on 26 Feb. The "two-week limit" first appeared on 24 Feb in the acceptance of the cessation of hostilities by Hijab's Supreme Commission. Hijab's opposition group could not simply accept the cessation of hostilities — they felt the need to add conditions or limitations, so they accepted what they called "a temporary two-week truce". But there is no expiration date in Resolution 2268. Section 8 of Resolution 2268 does say that "the cessation of hostilities as a step towards a lasting ceasefire", meaning that the parties in Syria will sometime replace the cessation of hostilities agreement with a formal ceasefire agreement.

On 11 March, RIA-Novosti in Russia published an interview with de Mistura, in which de Mistura revealed his agenda for the Geneva negotiations:

1. transitional government
2. new constitution
3. elections in Syria

"The most important point is the three-point agenda, which has been defined by the Security Council and which the Russian Federation adopted, too, which is resolution 2254. The first one is an all-inclusive new government," de Mistura said in an interview.

"The second one is a new constitution and the third one is new elections in 18 months from the beginning of the talks, so from the 14th of this month, to provide both parliamentary and presidential elections and the UN supervision in 18 months. So my hope is that we may progress, on paper or not on paper, but to progress on, at least, on the first item during the first phase of these talks," de Mistura said.

"Any progress that we will make or any difficulty we will face, and we are going to face difficulties because the sides are far away still, will be confronted and brought to the attention of the ISSG and if that is not sufficient, it can be brought to the attention of the [UN] Security Council."

"De Mistura: UN Hopes to Reach Deal on New Syrian Gov't During Geneva Talks," [RIA-Novosti](#), 11 March 2016.

On 11 March, Hijab's Supreme Commission announced it would attend the negotiations in Geneva. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 12 March, the foreign minister of Syria announced that the government would send a delegation to the Geneva negotiations, *but*:

1. "[T]he Syrian Arab Republic delegation will not wait in Geneva forever for other parties to decide to show up." "... [Al-Moallem] said, reiterating that the Republic's delegation will wait only 24 hours for the other parties to show up and if the other parties don't show up by that time, the delegation will leave Geneva and the other party will be held responsible for the failure of the talks."
2. "Regarding the presidential elections, al-Moallem stressed that neither de Mistura nor anyone else whomsoever can discuss this issue as it is 'an exclusive right of the Syrian people,' dismissing what the envoy said as 'a deviation from all the UN documents.'"
" 'We will not have dialogue with any side that discusses the position of the president. This is a red line and it is up to the Syrians alone,' [Al-Moallem] reiterated."
3. Al-Moallem: "If those have illusions of taking over power through Geneva after they failed in the battlefield, they will fail once again."

[SANA](#).

See also [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

My comment is that those of us who want to see an end to the Syrian civil war do *not* want to see Assad's delegation depart and triumphantly blame the opposition "for the failure of the talks." Instead, we want to see the talks succeed.

On 12 March, the Syrian foreign minister, Walid al-Moallem, asserted that presidential elections were "a deviation from all the UN documents." He is wrong. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 specifically says:

Expresses its support, in this regard, for a Syrian-led political process that is facilitated by the United Nations and, within a target of six months, establishes credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance and sets a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution, and further expresses its support for free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution, to be held within 18 months and administered under supervision of the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate, as set forth in the 14 November 2015 ISSG Statement;

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §4 (18 Dec 2015).

Elections are also mentioned in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 at §9(d), which is endorsed in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 and several subsequent Resolutions.

Hijab's Supreme Commission is demanding that Assad resign at the beginning of the transitional government, and that Assad *not* be a candidate in future elections. [Reuters](#). Assad's government, of course, insists that Assad not only continue to rule Syria (in June 2014, Assad was elected president for another 7 year term), but also Assad can be a candidate in future elections. The future role of Assad is an irreconcilable difference that can *not* be settled in Geneva. Attempting to decide the future of Assad in Geneva will cause the negotiations to fail. Moreover, the future role of Assad in Syria should be decided by voters in Syria.

On 13 March at 10:13 GMT, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that the delegation from Assad's government had arrived in Geneva. Later, de Mistura visited both Assad's delegation and Hijab's opposition delegation at their hotels in Geneva. [RIA-Novosti](#).

Geneva Negotiations Resume

14 March 2016 — Day 7

The peace negotiations were finally scheduled to begin on 29 Jan (day 1), although the opposition did not arrive until 30 Jan and then the opposition refused to negotiate because its preconditions (i.e., demands) had not been satisfied. My essay for [February 2016](#) chronicles the suspension of the peace talks in Geneva on 3 February (day 6). Continuing with this numbering, the resumption of negotiations on 14 March is day 7. But de Mistura attempts to

reset the clock — and attempts to rewrite history — by calling 14 March day 1, as if the previous meetings in Geneva never happened.

This resetting the clock was also evident in an interview that de Mistura gave to [RIA-Novosti](#) on 11 March, in which de Mistura said: "... new elections in 18 months from the beginning of the talks, so from the 14th of this month," United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §4 sets a target date for elections in Syria "within 18 months", but fails to specify from when. I noted the ambiguity in my essay for [November 2015](#), when I commented on the ISSG statement of 14 Nov 2015, which is part of the basis for U.N. Resolution 2254. De Mistura's interpretation of 18 months from 14 March 2016 gives him more time than other plausible interpretations of U.N. Resolution 2254.

The ISSG statement of 14 Nov 2015 at ¶9 specifies "a target date of January 1" for the beginning of negotiations in Geneva. De Mistura now claims those negotiations began on 14 March, which is 74 days behind the target date. On the other hand, there is now a well-established cessation of hostilities in Syria that was unimaginable a few months ago, some improvements in delivery of humanitarian aid to besieged towns, and the beginning of a partial withdrawal of Russian airplanes from Syria — all significant improvements for the people in Syria. However, Hijab's opposition delegation continues to make demands and be uncooperative.

On 14 March, de Mistura gave a press conference before his meeting with the delegation from Assad's government.

Let me qualify a little bit now the talks, and then give you some indications about information I can give you at this stage, we are the beginning. So the first one is: this talks are important, they are strongly wanted, and requested by the ISSG, which is the 18 countries who are part of it, plus two international organizations, they are strongly urged by the US and Russian Federation, the P.5s [China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the USA] and the Security Council. So let's be clear, these talks are wanted by the international stakeholders.

And today, this afternoon, in our time, our evening I will be briefing the Security Council. They are urged by the Syrian people, they take place at a time of a fragile, I recognize it, but by and large, holding cessation of hostilities, ask the Syrian people. And while more besieged areas are being reached than ever before, not enough, not enough, but taking place and people see that.

The public statements are going to be showing, and they already done, that there is much distance between the sides, and distance indeed exists. And we are going, therefore, to proceed through the technique of proximity talks, as we did previously and we will this time enhance it.

The agenda is set. It is based on 2254, and within the framework as you know, and the guidance of the Geneva Communiqué no question on that.

Spoilers will try to upset the talks, by incidents, by whatever, you will be seeing and we will be seeing, the secret will be to be cold, determined and have the international community and those I have just mentioned, keeping that type of capacity. Public

rhetoric will try to cast iron preconditions, but this is a moment of truth. And hopefully proactive chance.

The UN let me admitting and accepting what we are, we are going to facilitate, we are facilitating, mediating, pushing, stimulating but the real peace makers here are the peacemaking powers who wanted this talks, the ISSG, and the Security Council members, and hopefully the Syrian sides.

If during these talks and in the next rounds we will see no notice of any willingness to negotiate, which we hope is not going to be the case, obviously we will do what we want to do and we have done, we will bring the issue back to those who have influence, and that is the Russian Federation, the USA, co-chairs of the ISSG and to the Security Council.

The taskforces one on the humanitarian side and one on the cessation of hostilities are going to be meeting in simultaneous during this week, the next week and on. We are counting and using to use these taskforces in order to contribute in order to make sure that the talks are focusing on the real issue, and what is the real issue? The mother of all issues, political transition. Therefore the taskforces can be extremely helpful in actually addressing this issue which in a way are potentially deflecting on the focus on the political process.

The alternative, some people call it plan B as you know. Well as far as I know the only plan B available is the return to war, and to even worse war than we had so far.

Rules of the game, now we get into technical aspects. We will be doing a briefing, we are just doing a pre-briefing today, and we will be having a briefing every Monday, or at the beginning of each week. In other words the next briefing could be next Monday. It is not casted in iron, you will see, we will have to adjust ourselves, but that as a rule so that you know, so that every beginning of the week we will have an opportunity to exchanging, a little more deeply, our own assessment of where we are.

And certainly there will be one briefing or meeting together at the end of the first round which at the time being is expected to be around the 24th of this month.

Stakeouts of course will take place, every time that there is need, I will probably do some of those directly, especially in the beginning, otherwise it will be our two spokespersons Ahmad Fawzi or you know Jessy.

In order to be sure that you are protected from past errors that I made in forgetting that the Geneva team of the press should not be by-passed and I got the message and please forgive me and I move quickly and sometimes based on my own connections and people who call me, there will be no exclusive interviews given during this period of the talks but of course after the talks. And I may decide of course depending on the situation to clarify issues, if there is a need, example if there is an issue which is coming up and there is been stated in one way or the other, my own approach will then is to clarify those and perhaps call for a press conference, in that case.

Meetings will be announced as soon as possible, but normally not before one hour before they take place because there will be a lot changes with scheduling.

The first meeting is today with the government and will be taking place in fact in about 45 minutes, more or less one hour. Yesterday, my first meeting was with whom? Let's see, can we make a little testing? Can I once interview you? Can anyone say with whom I had the first meeting yesterday?

[Journalists suggest: Opposition, Kurds]

No and I am a little bit disappointed, but anyway, the first meeting yesterday, and not by accident, yesterday afternoon, actually took place with Syrian Women. And it is not by accident. I met the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, had a long meeting with them, almost an hour and a half, they are those who I hope will be able to contribute, more than ever before, to at least our understanding, on how to address the Syrian crisis.

Then I met as a courtesy call in a short meeting, because the real meeting starts today, the government. And then later on I met the HNC. Again relatively short meeting in their own hotels as a matter of courtesy. The next meetings are going to be more structured.

The rule of the game will be "inclusiveness" so we will find, thanks to the proximity talks and to the rule that have been given by the Security Council, to include as many as possible, either this round or next round, in fact, the list of those that we are going to consult or meet or will be part of eventually I hope not only proximity negotiations but in fact direct negotiations is going to be constantly updated because the message is to me that should be all-inclusive and all Syrians should be given a chance.

Can I now make one additional point if I may? One is an anecdote which brings me back to what was my first meeting, and the second one is while we are talking I hope that you will bear in mind that somewhere else, I think at the very time we are raising the issue, there is a presentation of the report of UNICEF, on the Situation of Syrian Children. It does have an impact on us, it is a reminder to us that these talks cannot only be about procedural or posturing but it needs to address the issue of Syrian future and that at any cost we have to try to maintain and increase the impact of the cessation of hostilities which is making a difference but not enough, and of the humanitarian access, which is making a difference but not to all areas besieged and beyond. So let me please remind you but you will see it from the report, they had an impact. 3.7 million children under five, what does it mean? Have they seen anything beyond the war? Have they seen anything that looks like a normal life? 3.7 million children had only seen war in Syria. 7 million of them live in families which are on the level of pre-poverty, 900 of them, almost 1000 of them were killed last year, and 150 of them while they were sitting in their own schools. Just to tell you what the message is telling us. When you link it to the 15th which is the Anniversary, and I know that you are aware of it that means five years anniversary. Sad anniversary.

Last point, a little bit of anecdote if you would allow me, which actually was reported to me yesterday by one of the Syrian women, of the Syrian Advisory Board. She had been visiting Syrian women in the Beqaa valley in Lebanon and had seen some other women both in Turkey and in Jordan. And one of them said to her, and I think it was quite an impact, said I am living in a tent here, I am living in a tent with my family, but if the ceasefire holds, if the humanitarian aid continues moving and if we have a feeling that this is going to produce peace in Syria, you know what? I will take this tent and you know I will bring it back to where my house was, which is just ruins and put my tent there, because I want my own dignity and I love my country. I think that message is what, at least to me, I believe with my colleagues pushing, I had not simply because this is a job, like you too, is quite a stimulation for making sure that these talks which start distant should become effective. Thank you very much.

Question: I want to know what your comments would be regarding the Syrian Foreign Minister's comments dismissing Presidential elections (inaudible)

SdeM: It is my habit not to comment on statements made by any foreign minister or any stakeholders and I have practiced that so far. I made a statement and I feel that this statement is consistent with the 2254 but I have no more comments to make.

....

Question: Is there a final date that you have informed all the parties about for reaching an agreement so that these talks don't go out forever?

SdeM: More or less there is a date. We are aiming at three rounds. The first round starting good [sic] willing today the second one I would say a week, ten days after the new recess which is the 24th and then that round should be lasting at least 2 weeks, and then the third round would be after another recess. And by then we believe that we should have at least clear road map, I am not saying an agreement but a clear road map, because that is what Syria is expecting from all of us.

Question: First, a demand can you please make sure that your team will announce the beginning and the end of various sessions in the next few days. Second, you were mentioning spoilers for the talks, who are the spoilers? And what might happen the next couple of days?

SdeM: First of all I cannot tell you what will happen in the next couple of days because we are starting those talks while at the same time cessation of hostilities is still progressing, 17 days, believe it or not, in Lebanon it used to last 20 minutes for a period and at the same time the humanitarian process is still going on, but not enough, so I can't tell you what will happen in the next few days but what I can tell you is what we plan to do. What we plan to do is to move forward, first from what may be at the beginning slightly procedural and then into real discussion about the substance, I mentioned the agenda.

Spoilers, I hope you and I will not see them taking place and having the opportunity

but if that happens you will see yourself who they are.

Thank you very much.

"Transcript of Press Briefing by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura,"
[U.N. Geneva](#), 14 March 2016.

De Mistura promised a briefing every Monday, but what actually occurred was daily briefings by de Mistura.

Then there was a second press briefing by de Mistura on 14 March, after his meeting with the delegation from Assad's government.

During the first meeting, which lasted about more than an hour together with the representation of the delegation of the government of the Syrian Republic, and led by ambassador Jafaari, we, as expected, went through various procedural issues that we wanted to clarify so we are all on the same page.

This is exactly what we will do with everyone else we will be meeting. Then we also came up with the fact that the next meeting, which is expected to take place on Wednesday morning, will be focusing on the agenda, the one set up by Resolution 2254. It was a useful meeting and I think we clarified quite a lot of issues.

On Wednesday [16 March], I want you to know that I will be going to Bern to thank the Swiss parliament and government for the remarkable contribution they have been giving and continue to give. I will do so on behalf of all delegations in order to make sure that these Geneva talks are taking place here, and will be taking place in such effective way in spite of short notice and changes.

Regarding the other points, I informed Ambassador Jafaari, this evening that I will be briefing the Security Council which is very eager. They should be informed and involved because they are the ones who have been insisting for these talks to take place and therefore are also the ones who should be associated with its progresses and possible difficulties.

The main point that has been stressed and that I will be stressing, is the inclusivity that we will be aiming at. In other words, our interlocutors will always be updated in terms. I mentioned that I have met the Syrian Women Advisory Board and that they have a huge influence on what we are doing because we need to have a clear picture of what Syrian people are feeling also from that point of view. That's basically where we are at the moment. There has been some ideas floating but I'm not going to comment on them at the moment. I will take three questions.

Question: How do you see the political process going forward from your perspective, given that you mentioned Resolution 2254 as a starting point?

SDeM: Well, you are asking me to prejudge the actual Intra-Syrian Talks, so I would only say, please read again the Resolution, the Geneva communiqué, and based on that you will see the guidance along which we will be going in order to be able to have the

Intra-Syrian talks. It is exactly about your question: how to actually implement what has been indicated by the international community with the agreement of everybody.

Question: (Inaudible)

SDeM: My clarification is the following: I don't know whether anyone else has a plan B here, I am only aware of a plan A, which is giving a maximum of chances and the maximum of pressure on the international community to ensure that the Intra-Syrian Talks, and the task forces for the cessation of hostilities and the humanitarian access is given the maximum of opportunities.

The alternative to that would be regrettably returning to where we were, which was basically an ongoing conflict, and which is going to be celebrated sadly and tragically in two days' time.

Question: (In French, interpreted in English) Do you focus on the negotiations' agenda or are you going to concentrate more on political issues?

SDeM: The agenda is very serious, it is not a small thing, it is about governance, which is fundamental, and if you look at Resolution 2254, it is about governance, constitution and new elections. So I think we will concentrate on the heart of the question.

Question: The Syrian Government has ruled out discussions on presidential elections, and the Syrian opposition say they will be focusing on the TGB (Transitional Government Body). These positions are drastically opposed. How do you think you will be able to narrow the gap between the two sides?

SDeM: As I said this morning, there is always, in any negotiations, especially as delicate and important and crucial like this one, a lot of strong statements, from rhetoric or preventive types. We should be talking between us about what will be the outcomes of the discussions and the negotiations, that will be the judgement.

"Transcript of Press encounter with Staffan de Mistura after his meeting with the Syrian Arab Republic delegation," [U.N. Geneva](#), 14 March 2016.

15 March 2016 — Day 8

De Mistura met with Hijab's delegation on 15 March. The opposition wants Assad to release political prisoners from prisons. De Mistura added another adviser, Vitaly Naumkin, who had chaired Syrian peace conferences in Moscow during January and April 2015.

[Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

De Mistura held a press conference after his meeting with Hijab's delegation:

SdeM: We had a late afternoon meeting today; it started around 5:00 o'clock and ended a few minutes ago. It was with the HNC, the High Negotiations Committee. The first moment of this meeting was dedicated to commemorating by standing, everyone in silence for a minute; we should have been standing in silence for 300,000 minutes, remembering all those in Syria who have died during the five years of these tragic

events of their own history.

We then went into the discussions about how to proceed on the discussions regarding the political process, and they have been raising particularly some issues, which we will be bringing to the attention of the taskforces. The question that we feel very strongly, and they do too, is of the detainees. There has been so far, as you know, the issue of humanitarian aid and the reduction of violence, but on the detainees' aspect we have been having nothing in terms of outcome. And I think the humanitarian taskforce can be tasked with that, and I think through us the HNC will raise that and I am sure others will do the same.

The issue also about the humanitarian aid to reach other locations, particularly places such as Daraya, which is still pending, has been raised. Again our point and agreement was that we will make sure that the humanitarian taskforce will be able, including the one which is actually addressing the ceasefire, because there is a connection, as you know, between ceasefire and humanitarian aid.

Then we went into some general but quite important overall principals that can and should be actually educating the future of not only the constitution but also the transitional political process. We then exchanged papers but also ideas on how to get deeper into the discussion at the next meeting on the transitional aspect of the political process.

Now let me also address two points: one has been the new major development of the Russian decision announced by president Putin yesterday. We had made a comment, and I will simply at this stage repeat it. We consider this a significant — I repeat a significant — development. We hope, and we shall be expecting and hoping that this will be happening, that we will be seeing this decision bringing some positive influence on the actual progress of the talks. It is not a coincidence, or at least we should not consider it a coincidence, that that decision took place at the very beginning of the Intra-Syrian Talks, and that its political impact that we hope they will be producing.

Let me also address an issue which I have seen coming up in terms of questions. I am supported by a series of very competent and quite unusually professionally competent advisers and consultants; that's how we operate in a mission like this, particularly when we get into the talks. I have two very professionally competent, highly prepared German consultants, we have one British consultant, one Dutch consultant, two Swiss consultants and one Swedish consultant. And yesterday I decided that, in view of the fact that we are getting deeper into some of the discussions regarding the transitional political process, to appoint as my consultant professor Vitaly Naumkin, a Russian expert and academician. He is a consultant, which means he reports to me, not to his own mother country; none of the others do the same and they are actually on call for substantive issues, which I may require to be given good advice. I've actually offered same option for an equivalent option for an equally competent academician from the US. Why these two? Because they are the co-chairs and the more they are able to contribute professionally to my own capacity of better understanding, the better it is for us.

I would simply say that the talks continue. Tomorrow I am staying in the morning with the government delegation, early in the morning about 9:30. Then I will be leaving for Bern, because the Swiss government deserves to be informed and thanked for all what we are seeing and everything that is happening here. It is actually thanks to the help, coordination and funding of the Swiss authorities, and their taxpayers deserve to know why. I think it is time for doing so just while we are doing the talks.

I will take four questions:

Question: I know that the Syrian government presented a paper to you with their ideas. I understand the opposition put some ideas on paper. Can you give us any insight into what is in those documents and are you planning to produce your own paper of ideas of the way forward?

SdeM: I think you are helping me to clarify what is the procedure. You see the advantage of a mediator on top of it, having been given a large mandate from the Security Council in terms of organizing his own work in a conflict like this, is that he or she can do so. The approach I have been using at the moment is proximity talks. I know that some of the participants may want to meet, I will not stop that of course, but I will also feel when is the right time to have actually direct talks. The other way is to actually get all the input from all the sides and then metabolize them, see where there are overlapping, contradictions or even common thinking, and at a certain point when you look at principals we may be surprised how much Syrian, after all these are Intra-Syrian talks, do have some areas, at least some, in common. So I did get a paper from the government side. They may want to share with you or not; my duty is to actually do exactly what I mentioned and I am getting and I will be getting a paper from the opposition. We will analyze them, see whether we can make out of that a UN paper for instance, or whether we can actually add to it. That is the principal of negotiations.

Question: Have you informed the HNC delegation of the proposals or the paper submitted by the Syrian government and what was their reaction?

SdeM: That's not something I should be revealing, because it is part of the discretion of the negotiations, forgive me. But I still have to do my job and not be totally going into details.

Question: Not quite sure how many round of talks, you are the third Special Envoy. Do you sense that the atmosphere is different this time? And if so, to what exactly can you contribute to that?

SdeM: I have to be careful because I have been repeating it so many times: I am affected by this terrible chronic disease of being optimistic, otherwise I would not be able to do this job for so many years — so you may want to filter it to that please. But I do feel there is a difference, and the difference has been caused by three factors. There has been a sense of urgency and those factors have been caused unfortunately by the refugee crisis, has certainly been caused by the new factor we saw yesterday,

starting to change the Russian military intervention, and certainly by the advances or at least non-defeat of Daesh. All this has produced a new momentum. The momentum I would call it the Vienna momentum, which then became the Munich momentum and now is back to the Geneva momentum. At the end of the day, what has changed is that countries are involved and engaged. We have Russia and America talking and being part of a common operations center. They are co-chairing two taskforces and we have 18 countries who are actually meeting; they are meeting in the taskforces so all that leads me to want to believe, even if we are going to have a very rocky time, and we know why, that we have a mechanism that we did not have before and certainly neither of my two predecessors had that type of privilege, neither of them had a unified Security Council. Yesterday I had a long meeting with the Security Council, and I had the impression that there was again some common understanding. It was not polarized; that was certainly helpful.

Question: You have used different terms for transition, transitional government and transitional governing body. These terms have different meanings legally and politically. What is the difference between them?

SdeM: That's exactly why we are having these negotiations. They are not going to be easy, they are going to be very tough, because the distance is still quite very big, but that is why we are having negotiations, otherwise we would have had a treaty and a ceremony here with a signature.

Question: How will you deal with any possible contradictions between the documents submitted by, on the one hand, the regime and, on the other hand, by the HNC, which we understand has 8 points?

SdeM: You seem to be very informed. Well again, I do not want to be appearing to be giving lessons of diplomacy, but that is exactly why we are having this type of negotiations. The secret is to take the points of one side and the other side and a third side, come up with our own common sense and techniques in order to try to merge, and when they can't merge, actually to have a final new touch to it. Bottom line: that is what negotiations and diplomacy is all about.

"Transcript of press encounter by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, following his meeting with the High Negotiations Committee," [U.N. Geneva](#), 15 March 2016.

16 March 2016 — Day 9

In the morning of 16 March, de Mistura met with the delegation from Assad's government. De Mistura then traveled to Bern to thank the Swiss government for its cooperation in the talks in Geneva. De Mistura then returned to Geneva and met with a so-called Moscow-Cairo opposition delegation.

After the meeting with Assad's delegation, de Mistura's deputy, Ramzy Ezzeddine Ramzy (RER), gave a press conference:

Good afternoon. We had a useful meeting today [16 Mar]. We discussed issues of substance as you will recall on Monday [14 Mar]. The government of Syria delegation

provided us with some ideas on the political process. We reacted to them, through seeking further clarifications. I think that the discussion was substantive, and it laid the ground for further important substantive discussion in the future.

We also, just for your information, will be continuing our discussions with other participants this afternoon. Tomorrow [17 Mar] we will be meeting with the High Negotiations Committee to continue on the issues we had raised during the previous meeting. On Friday [18 Mar] we will meet again with the Government of Syria delegation, with the HNC and possibly with other participants. The process as we see it at this stage is progressing. It probably reflects the situation on the ground where there has been, to a large extent, a reduction of violence, and that has also been reflected in the attitude of the various delegations, including yesterday with the High Negotiations Committee and today with the Government.

So by and large, we see that we have achieved important progress in just a few days, and we look forward to continuing our discussions with all participants in the coming days.

Thank you very much I will take some questions.

Question: Who are the participants you will be meeting this afternoon?

RER: Today we will meet, as you know — in the first round of the Geneva talks we had issued invitations to a number of participants that are members of the Moscow-Cairo Group. Part of them will be already in town this afternoon, so we will be meeting with them later on in the afternoon. Mr. de Mistura will be back by then and he will be chairing the meeting.

....

Regarding the meeting tonight [with] those representing the Moscow-Cairo Group, we extended invitations to them for the first round to help us visualize the future of Syria. I know there is a misunderstanding that those we are meeting are our consultants, but no, the invitation was clear and we consult them on the future of Syria. They do not have a “Consultant” status, and as per United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 there is a status for the High Negotiations Committee and we also invite and talk to others. We are very keen on listening to the broadest spectrum of Syrians, whether inside or outside Syria, and our meeting with them today comes within this framework.

....

Question: There were leaks today that the Kurds in Syria are going to establish a “federal” system. What is the UN’s comment on this issue?

RER: The UN stance is clear, the UN Security Council is clear on this issue. All the Syrians I talked to are for a united, sovereign Syria; this is something clear and non-negotiable. The future system in Syria should be decided by the Syrians, we have no

comment on this. This is an announcement by a party, they take responsibility for it. As for us, we work within the framework of the United Nations Charter and UN Resolutions that stipulate the unity and safety of Syrian territories. This stance is clear. "Transcript of the press encounter by Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Ramzy Ezzeddine Ramzy following a meeting with the Syrian Government Delegation," [U.N. Geneva](#), 16 March 2016.

Fateh Jamous and Qadri Jamil, members of the Moscow-Cairo opposition group that is tolerated by Assad, also met with de Mistura on 16 March. Hijab's delegation whined that it was the *only* opposition delegation. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

Federalism for Syria?

Back on 29 February 2016, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov floated an idea of creating a "federal state" in Syria. [Reuters](#). Assad's government and the opposition both immediately rejected the federalism proposal. On 11 March, [Reuters](#) reported: "Any mention of this federalism or something which might present a direction for dividing Syria is not acceptable at all. We have agreed we will expand non-central government in a future Syria, but not any kind of federalism or division,' Syrian opposition coordinator Riad Hijab said." On 13 March, [Reuters](#) reported: "But Moualem ruled out the idea of federalism, one of the ideas backed by the PYD and mentioned by a Russian minister as a possible model for Syria." Perhaps the Syrians did not understand that a federal government (e.g., like Switzerland, USA, or Germany) would still preserve the unity of Syria. On 14 March, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov clarified that Russia was suggesting federalism only if the Syrian people wanted federalism. [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 16 March, the principal Kurdish political party in Syria, PYD, met to decide whether to declare a federal region in northern Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 17 March, the PYD declared a federal region in northern Syria (Rojava). Assad's government and Turkey both condemned the declaration. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

17 March 2016 — Day 10

After meeting on 17 March with the opposition delegation, de Mistura told journalists "the distance between the two sides is large." Yes, that's true. (See press conference quoted below, and also see: [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).)

De Mistura held a press conference on 17 March after the meeting with Hijab's High Negotiations Committee (HNC), also known as the Supreme Commission. Here is part of that press conference.

SdeM: The issue of detainees as I promised was raised by me both with the Government, very firmly and clearly, and with the task force on humanitarian issues and the two co-chairs. We will raise it every time we have a task force; the issue needs to be addressed and it's not only detainees but there's also the abducted people and if

you remember they were and they've been shown in Eastern Ghouta, you remember in those cages. So, we are looking at both cases, but the numbers of the detainees and the abducted are obviously enormously different, but they are reflecting the suffering of Syrian families.

Regarding the Task Force on ceasefire or cessation of hostilities. We have been noticing today that during the last three days have been surprisingly calm according to the reporters and everyone, including those who have access to additional information. There have been a few incidents, and there have at least been three people killed sadly — and one life lost is too many, but when you compare to what it used to be in particular in the last three days, this has been noticeable in the Task Force.

This is not yet a trend, let's be frank. So we remain, and need to remain, vigilant because things can change very quickly. But again, when there are improvements on security we need to capitalize from a humanitarian point of view, so the message is: this is the time to accelerate instead of reducing the acceleration of humanitarian aid. The Russian Federation's representatives after the Task Force on the ceasefire explained the reasons for their own withdrawal and the fact that it took place not by coincidence the very day of the beginning of the Talks. I leave it to the Russian Federation to elaborate on that and not paraphrasing what they said. And you will have the opportunity, I'm sure, since they did so in a public meeting or at least in a large meeting.

The next Task Forces will take place on Wednesday [23 Mar] because we want to dedicate next Thursday [24 Mar] to wrapping up this phase of the Intra-Syrian Talks, and then we get to the Intra-Syrian Talks; today, this evening, we had an intense, in my opinion very productive, meeting with the HNC. They will come and follow me for their own comments. It was very substantive, papers on the political transition were actually distributed and they went very deeply into how they see the political transition being potentially implemented soon. We are going to study them very carefully, and add questions when needed in order to be able to share them with the other side. Certainly we want to better understand how all this can fit in to what could be a negotiating position, but we were impressed about the depth of the preparation they had. Tomorrow we will be meeting both Government and the HNC, and I will tell you more when the day is over. Thank you.

Question: After meeting both sides, did you talk about the common points between both delegations?

SdeM: It is premature for me to tell you the gray zone, in fact we still see that the distance between the two sides is large, but what we are looking for is areas of commonality and... therefore to identify the grey zones. I think we have started seeing clarity on what are their own positions. I hope I will get similar in-depth clarity from the Government. Which has been so far, more on the formal side, time is going by, we want to go deeply.

Question: Regarding political transition, how would you characterize what the

government is doing?

SdeM: I think I will wait until tomorrow to answer, because we have had two meetings and they were rather procedural. There was one paper that you are familiar with eight points of principles but what we need to do is starting looking about political transition and what the government as such sees as a possible political transition. The question is without doubt, that we are not talking about a new agenda, the agenda is clear. So perhaps we will have more clarity tomorrow and I will be able to tell you.

Question: Could you specify about the possible point of agreement? And my second question is regarding the cessation of hostilities. Will there be any international peacekeepers on the ground and if yes how soon will it be?

SdeM: You are really running fast! (laughter) but its your privilege to have a vision... Regarding areas of commonality: on the principles yes, unity of the country, for instance integrity of the country, no discussions about federalism for instance and certainly any type of issue related to the respect of minorities or majorities, many other common principles, and the integrity of the borders. So we can see already on the principles. What we need to see is some beginning of common understanding of political transition, the mother of all issues.

Now the second point was regarding the peacekeeping, we are very premature on that. In a conflict environment, which is still potentially there because it's just been so far more or less well controlled by the cessation of hostilities, the possibility of the Security Council, which is the only one to decide... to send UN military presence as peacekeepers, looks to me premature. But anyway it is up to the partners, the ones negotiating, and it is up to the Security Council.

"Transcript of press encounter with Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, after a meeting with the High Negotiations Committee (HNC)," [U.N. Geneva](#), 17 March 2016. [Ellipses in original. Spelling errors corrected by Standler.]

18 March 2016 — Day 11

On Friday, 18 March, de Mistura gave his fifth press briefing of the week, after meeting with Syrian women, "a group of individuals from Damascus", Assad's delegation, and Hijab's opposition delegation (HNC).

SdeM: Good afternoon, today is the end of the first week. The first week of what we have been waiting for, for a very long time, Intra-Syrian talks. It has coincided to a large degree, today there were some incidents, but to a large degree, to a substantial reduction of violence. I have been checking now with the operations center, as you know, which is working day and night, that the military activities in respect of the cessation of hostilities had been more than by and large, except today, as I said there were some incidents, but not comparable at all to what we used to have.

So if the Syrian talks will produce this type of effect, Alhamdu lellah. Thank God.

The good news is that, I believe and I think we can say, that the proximity system, in

other words, the proximity talks, has clearly contributed to keep the talks going. No walk outs, no excessive rhetoric, some discussions but not excessive rhetoric, no breakdowns, in spite of the fact that I am still obviously detecting large distances, but that is part of why you have talks, or consultations or negotiations, otherwise we would have had one nice signing ceremony, which is not yet the case.

The day was intense, and the first meeting again was with the Syrian women, with my women's advisory board. I met them because they have constantly very good advice, really, genuinely good advice, but not only, they have also been very active in attempting, and to a certain degree succeeding in building a bridge between the various women of the different delegations, informally, and that is one of the functions that I hope the Syrian women to tell us and to teach us could be doing in this process.

And then I had a short acquaintance meeting with a group of individuals from Damascus and inside Syria. As you know the Security Council resolution is very clear in terms of the mandate I am given. I am supposed to consult anyone who has something to say in order to be able to move forward on what has been and should be the Intra-Syrian talks. And eventually serious negotiations.

Then I had a meeting with the government, where the government reiterated its own interest in having a commonly shared list of principles. And I think that would be our focus early next week, to see what are the grey zone of areas of common ground on the principles. Now principles are not just principles, they are the basis for then getting deeply into what we consider a common ground for what is the mother of all issues, which is the mandate for the political transition, no question on that.

And then I had a meeting with HNC, which I think you have just met them if I am not wrong, who have already produced substantive papers, they had gone deeper and I must say I am quite impressed by the level of depth in which they have been ready and ready, to engage the facilitator, the mediator, my team with substantial points regarding already their own vision of governance, hence political transition.

The issue of detainees was raised by me, by them and I raised it again with the government. The issue of detainees is unquestionably a crucial one and in fact at the very time with the reduction of violence taking place, substantially, thanks to the cessation of hostilities, bringing food is important, but bring people back to their own families, from both sides by the way, but no doubt, as I said, huge numbers according to any report, in the prisons of the government, should be given an opportunity to return home. That includes also those who have been abducted on the side of the opposition.

Next week will be the last week of the second round. The first one was a mini-round as you know but the mini-round was very productive.

It produced Munich, and Munich produced the two taskforces: one on humanitarian and one on ceasefire, not a small thing after five years. But this time next week will be important because we will be aiming at building a minimum common platform of not

only principles but points that could lead to a better understanding in what direction we will be going for the political transition, which in my opinion will be the main focus of the next meeting, which will be in April, and we are already aiming very clearly for that. Remember there will be three additional ones, after which we need to see concrete results. When you compare it to five years of horrible war I think it is quite a short term ambition, but doable at this stage and certainly where we intend to get.

Question: (Original in French) Next week there will be a meeting between Lavrov and Kerry in Moscow. What do you expect from this meeting and what do you ask to the two co-chairs for the negotiations?

SdeM: (Original in French) It is a very good question, you have noticed that there are different means to make peace. One is discussions inside the Palais des Nations, the other is discussions outside. Proof is, Vienna and Munich have helped a lot for what we do today. I think the meetings between Mr. Lavrov and Mr. Kerry are crucial, because it could help a lot for the phase three, which will be in April. It doesn't happen by accident, and fortunately it is not.

Question: What I understand till now is that you didn't receive the paper from the delegation of the government about the political transition. Does it mean that you will start the coming round with receiving this paper or will you have it, for example, in the period between the two rounds?

SdeM: Well, I leave it to them to actually decide when. I can tell you I am urging them for having a paper on the transition and the political transition, and I have already received a pretty good deep paper on the vision from HNC on transition. The government is currently focusing so much on principles, which are necessary in any type of common ground on transition, but I hope next week, and I have been saying so to them, that we will get their opinion, their details on how they see the political transition taking place. But that will not be conclusive. I am looking for the much deeper approach on it in the next round, and that is normal, because both sides need to metabolize it, go back to their own capitals, in the case of Damascus, in the case of the others to consult with their own friends in order to be able to go deeper on that. It is totally expected and I am not disappointed I am just pushing, that's my job and we are in hurry, let me tell you that, we are in hurry.

Question: (Original in French) Mr de Mistura, for the first time today the head of the Syrian Government delegation has abstained from raising the issue of questions of procedures. Can we understand now that procedural issues are behind us and that the substantive talks have started.

SdeM: (Original in French) It is always important to not ignore procedures, and to not forget that it is important to resolve them. But I have clearly said to the Syrian Government delegation that there are procedures and we can talk about them, but we should not avoid talking substance. Peace and people in Syria don't need procedures, they need reality, and they are waiting for that.

"Transcript of press encounter by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de

Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 18 March 2016.

De Mistura mentions there will be "three additional" rounds and then there will be "concrete results". If there are two rounds of negotiations in April, then he expects concrete results by the end of May 2016.

The [Associated Press](#) reported the press conference held by the HNC opposition. The HNC spokesman "accused the Damascus government of 'procrastinating' and not engaging fully in the negotiations."

21 March 2016 — Day 12

On Monday, 21 March, de Mistura met with Assad's delegation and then met with 25 representatives of Syrian "civil society". Afterwards, de Mistura gave a press conference:

SdeM: Good evening. First of all some logistics. Today the meetings took place both with the government, and I think you had the opportunity of listening to Ambassador Jaafari about his own take on the meeting with us, and then with civil society. Tomorrow will be the HNC in particular and others, but in particular the HNC.

Of course I intend to meet again the government and the HNC, in particular both Wednesday and Thursday morning, before we conclude this first phase of our Intra-Syrian Talks.

There are moments frankly when I am not going to go too much into details about what we have been really discussing because otherwise we will have a sort of constant debriefing about the issues that need to be going into — what could be a possible common understanding before the end of the week.

We went anyway through a long discussion related to the government paper. I know that the government is constantly saying that they did not get any reply to it; they are right, they didn't. Because that paper has been shared with the opposition, but at the end of the day if we start having an exchange of papers we will just have a public exchange of papers. What we need here is a common understanding.

That's exactly what negotiations are all about, talks are all about, and what a mediator is supposed to do. That's why I have been informing the other side, the opposition; they will be providing us with some ideas, we will use those in order to contribute to the mediator, with his own guiding ideas in order to find whether there is or not — but I hope yes — some common ground for the guiding principles for negotiations. You may be thinking that this is just procedural. No, it is important because those are also the framework for what Syria could be looking like, so we go far beyond just procedures.

We then interacted together on the concept of terrorism, because the issue of terrorism is definitely a matter which is coming up in any of the guiding principles. The government has its own very elaborate analysis, its own concept of terrorism. We have a very simple one. As far as the UN is concerned, it is what has been applicable and

applied so far into the cessation of hostilities agreement. Those organizations which are listed by the Security Council as terrorists are terrorists. The rest is a personal opinion, or a government opinion, but not the UN opinion. We are certainly also working on all the aspects for the preparation for Thursday, but I am not going to go into those details.

I have been reminding everyone that there is no plan “B”, so the plan “B” is basically getting through this.

The next point is — some are, and we all are obviously looking with great interest, and it was not accidental that they are taking place in coincidence with the ending of this session of the Geneva Intra-Syrian Talks — the visit to Moscow by Secretary of State John Kerry and meeting with Sergey Lavrov. Nothing in this situation is purely coincidental, everything is interconnected. And therefore we will have to look at the whole picture in connection with what we are doing here and what, I hope and certainly believe, can be done in Moscow and beyond.

We met civil society today. I know you may be less interested in civil society because they are less politicized, and they are probably less vocal from the political point of view, but we find them essential. They give us the voice of the Syrian people; we don't hear it, I don't hear the voice of the Syrian people. I hear only political positioning, or strengthening, or winning or losing. What we need to hear is the voice of the Syrian people, and 25 of them were with me today. We listened to them, they gave us quite a strong message, we hope that it can be conveying that too, about detainees, about how to reach the besieged areas, how to reach also the less easy-to-reach areas and so on.

That's basically where we are today, and I am ready for three questions.

Question: Do you have any sense of what Ambassador Jaafari understands by the phrase “political transition”?

SdeM: That's a very good question that I raised to him today, believe it or not, I did actually. And he said it was, I am not revealing a secret, “premature” at the moment to talk about it. My message was “premature” means “imminent” as far as we are concerned. It is important to start addressing their own understanding. It is clear that the political transition is the “mother of all issues”; no one has questioned that, neither in the Security Council, nor in Vienna, nor in Munich, nor in the ISSG. So we will have to be realistic on that.

Question: The developments have been accelerating on all fronts, in Syria, in Turkey, in the neighboring countries, on the military front in Syria. Are you not concerned that things are not moving quickly enough in this process compared to the developments outside?

SdeM: I am. That's why we are in a hurry, and I know very well, and it is not a secret, and I think I said it and I think everyone more or less agrees, the cessation of hostilities is still holding, and frankly — by and large — holding. The same is more or less with the movement on humanitarian aid, but neither of these two can be sustained if we

don't get progress on the political transition, so you are quite right.

Question: Russia today warned the United States today that it will start responding unilaterally to the ceasefire violations in Syria if the US does not coordinate the rules of engagement against violators. How concerned are you about whether or not the United States and Russia together can manage that process?

SdeM: Let's put it like this: I am more than concerned. I have been extremely supportive of the fact that both the Russian Federation and the US are talking, have been talking and continue talking, I know it, in a substantive way about how to get the political process moving. The proof is that we have been doing this "innovative" I would say — never did the UN do it before — operations centre, in order to allow Russian military and civilians and Americans to be able to cooperate in containing the crisis. So I am confident that we will overcome that, there is no alternative. The moment they don't talk substantively, we go back to the past and we cannot afford it, and they know it too.

"Transcript of press encounter by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura,"
[U.N. Geneva](#), 21 Mar 2016.

The last question refers to punishment for violation of the cessation of hostilities, a topic mentioned [below](#).

[Reuters](#) reports that Assad's government wants to discuss "counter-terrorism efforts", but *not* discuss "the fate of President Bashar al-Assad". [Reuters](#) reports a spokesman for the HNC "accused the government delegation at peace talks in Geneva on Monday [21 Mar] of wasting time by refusing to discuss the future of President Bashar al-Assad."

In my opinion, [Assad's future](#) should be a matter for voters in Syria to resolve, *not* an issue for a few people in Geneva to decide. Aside from a belief in democracy, the two delegations in Geneva have a rigid, irreconcilable difference of opinion on this issue, making it impossible for them to compromise on this issue. So, Assad, the leader of Syria, should be part of a transitional government and — if Assad wishes — then he should be a candidate in the next presidential election. Assad being a candidate is *necessary* before the voters can decide Assad's future role in Syria.

22 March 2016 — Day 13

On Tuesday, 22 March, de Mistura gave another press briefing:

[In response to a question about the composition of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board delegation, the Special Envoy said the following before delivering his own statement at the stakeout.]

SdeM: I can tell you that they really represent various realities of the Syrian situation. One of them is a mother and wife of a person who has disappeared, the other one is certainly wearing traditional clothes, in other words you haven't seen them all. And trust me they are quite impressive in the way also they represent, in my opinion, every component of Syria. Some of them are pro-government, some of them are also

opposition. Some of them are purely intellectually independent, but they have been able to talk and actually come with common points, which I hope the men will also be able to do.

So let me now address instead the rest of the day. The rest of the day was the focus on some homework. We are working hard, the whole team of advisers and colleagues who are working on preparing; after all we still have two days, no more than two days, before Wednesday and part of Thursday [24 Mar], when we will be closing this session.

And that's why we are all working hard in getting a common understanding of what has been — as you know, some papers have been produced by the government, others have been produced and given to us today by the opposition in addition to others. Our job is to see where are the points in common and where are the points of difference, and do what the mediator normally does: see where there can be common areas. If that is the case, we will let you know by Thursday [24 Mar].

The next step is what we will talk about on Thursday, when we meet again. The opposition, HNC, has been presenting some additional documents. I presume they referred to them, and we have been sharing with the opposition the basic principles' paper by the government, and they themselves had their own reaction to that.

We will elaborate, and tomorrow will be an interesting day because we will be meeting both of them. Plus, of course as usual, we will be consulting other stakeholders and what we call the different platforms that are available. As I did today consult our own Women's Advisory Board.

That's basically where we are at the moment. I am ready for questions.

Question: Regarding the Riyadh delegation [HNC], you remember their proposals during the last round of talks. What has changed in their narrative since then?

SdeM: I am not going to tell you what are the different positions, otherwise my role as a mediator would be [inaudible], and then we will have basically each of the regular brainstorming together between the press, which I respect, and I already have enough interlocutors and with you it will be quite a number. No, what I can tell you is the atmosphere, the atmosphere has changed. And I think it has changed even from the government point of view. We have not had a walk out, or slamming the doors. We have not had the refusal of acknowledging the existence of others as interlocutors. We have not had joint meetings, but the proximity talks have continued, with some level of mutual respect towards the fact that the mediator is allowed, and should be, in listening and hearing the positions of others. In fact, sometimes eagerly hearing the position of others: where is the paper of the government? Where is the paper of the HNC?

So from that point of view there is a change, and the answer is why? Because I think, or I want to believe, that everyone has an interest in maintaining this cessation of hostilities, because that is benefiting every Syrian. And those who will be breaking it or

spoiling it will have to respond not only to history, but to the Syrian people, who are already sometimes demonstrating, saying: “leave us like this, we like [the cessation of hostilities]”.

Second I think there is a feeling that this is a different page, in which you have to at least try or show that you are serious about wanting to find a political process and a political transition. We are not yet there, but that’s the atmospherics.

....

Question: The statements made by both the opposition and the Government delegations to the press are very principled and sound very intransigent. Is it that they say something different to you when they meet with you? And what about the “grey” area which you promised us?

SdeM: Thank you for reminding me about the “grey” area, because this is my main focus. You have to know, and I know you do because many of you have been long enough in this political analysis, you have public statements, you have rhetoric positions, you have pre-positions and you have discussions and negotiations. All that is part of what we are doing. And therefore not surprising but not at the same time overstating what you are hearing. There are points that are discussed privately that may help in producing the grey zone. All that is true but is part of it. So I am sure you are not surprised. Thank you very much. See you for the grey moment.

"Transcript of press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura,"
U.N. Geneva, 22 Mar 2016.

23 March 2016 — Day 14

The remarks below about Brussels refer to Islamic terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March that is chronicled [below](#).

On Wednesday, 23 March, de Mistura held another press conference, joined by Federica Mogherini, the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

SdeM: I am delighted to be able to be together with the EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, who has been asked by me, and I am very grateful to you, for being here on a special day. Not only because it is an occasion for all of us at the UN to, through you, express our strong solidarity to the city where you are, to the country where you are, and to Europe that you represent so well, because what happened yesterday in Brussels. You came as soon as I asked you to come, and I am grateful.

Second, it is not a coincidence that today is the evening before the closing of this Intra-Syrian Talks, and I did ask Federica Mogherini to come and sound, on my behalf too, some of the interlocutors, because they need to feel how much Europe is committed in expecting them to be committed. So I am double grateful, thank you. The floor is yours.

FM: Thank you very much Staffan. It is a pleasure for me to be here in the UN, with

you, on a day that is clearly special for Europe. I was this morning in Brussels meeting with the Prime Minister of Belgium, the Prime Minister of France, with all my colleagues in the European Commission, not only to commemorate and honor the victims who died yesterday, but also to look at our response.

And part of our response, the external part of our response, is for sure the work that you are doing together with the rest of the international community with the support of the UN Security Council and with the full support of Europe. So I was particularly honored and grateful for the call that you gave me in working more and more together to try and consolidate and accelerate the process for bringing peace in Syria.

I immediately thought this was an excellent idea because I was yesterday in Amman, the day before in Jordan, including Al Beqaa valley meeting so many Syrians, children, grand parents, women and men. And all of them were telling me the same thing: “We want to go back home. When are we going to be able to go back home?” Even the small children at school asked me: “How are talks going in Geneva?” And I said they are in good hands, proceeding, but still the way is long.

When the news of the attacks in Brussels came, my first thoughts were that the responsibility we are all having, and Staffan on behalf of all of us is having, for bringing peace to Syria, is first and foremost for the Syrian people, it is for the region, but it is also for the European region, as you said, **because the threat coming to Europe and elsewhere in the region and elsewhere in the world has a clear connection also with the spread of Daesh in Syria.** And if we want to tackle this threat, this existential threat, in an effective way, we have to do something internally in the European Union — this is not the place, and I am not the person to address this — but also to accelerate and consolidate our common work, in terms of our common work of the international community, **to put an end to the war in Syria and to concentrate and join forces against Daesh in an effective way.**

That is why I discussed this with John Kerry yesterday evening, on the eve of his trip to Moscow today. And I met today first of all with Staffan to understand in which ways the European Union can fully support and, in an effective way, support his efforts and passed messages that we all share to the delegations present — that we expect them to engage in the process on three key elements that were agreed by all of us, in the International Support Group, and that are the backbone of our common position, endorsed by the UN Security Council resolution.

1. First, the consolidation and expansion of the cessation of hostilities.
2. Second, the consolidation and expansion of the humanitarian access to the areas that are still to be reached.
3. And third, and I would say extremely important, to enter into the political process, without delays, without games, with the spirit of reaching a solution.

Negotiations are in the hands of Staffan, but I felt that I had to respond to his call and pass the message that it is important, not only for the Syrians but for the Europeans that this process starts, works and delivers. For the sake of the Syrians, for the sake of the region, for the sake of Europeans, for the sake of international community.

I would like to thank very much Staffan for his work, for the excellent cooperation we have and for all that we will be able to do during the coming weeks. I say weeks hopefully, Inshallah, not months or years, to address this issue that, as we said and as we know, is one of the most crucial issues of our times.

SdeM: I just wanted to qualify one point. Tomorrow you will have the opportunity to ask questions about where we are on the negotiations. I am not saying, so that we can concentrate on the opportunity of having with us the EU representative.

Secondly, the message I heard today from the delegations I met, the HNC and the Government, were both focusing on what happened yesterday, and you must have heard it from Ambassador Jaafari, the focus on terrorism. Well, the message that Federica and I are giving, and certainly you had a lot in giving it today, is true the terrorism is, and what we mean by terrorism is Daesh and Al-Nusra, a priority. But the priority of the priorities is **to win the terrorism you have to find a political solution in Syria**. So, it all goes back to those who have been complaining about terrorism, saying: what about all of you helping us to solve politically the crisis in Syria? And you will see suddenly that we will all be able to focus on Daesh, and by doing so, helping both Syria and Europe. Therefore, your message today was very helpful, to bring it back to the mother of all issues, which is trying to find a political transition in Syria, and urgently because yesterday we were reminded that it was urgent.

So I thank you, and questions are open, but only on Syria and only on this occasion and not on negotiations, because we will be talking about it tomorrow.

Question: Ms. Mogherini, as you met the delegations, what were the main messages that the delegations gave to you? What can you tell us? Apparently one of the main issues that the Government delegation talked to you about was the European sanctions. Could you confirm this? Or say what do you think are the possibilities to lift the sanctions on Syria?

FM: No, not at all, this issue was not discussed. Our talks were only focused on the support to the UN-led process, so on the negotiations. And then Staffan underlined, rightly so, my main message, especially in meeting with that delegation, is **the need to start a political transition in Damascus**, because this is in our opinion, the only way to effectively create the conditions in the country, first of all to find peace and security for all Syrian with an inclusive approach, and second **to defeat Daesh**. So the de-link between the fight against terrorism on one side and the political process on the other, in our view has no ground. We have to do the two things and one thing reinforces the other. This was my main message. Obviously not all exchanges were consensual — we didn't expect that to be the case at all — but I thought it was important to bring the message, especially the European Union consolidated position, that we expect, as I said, the political process and the transition to start. There is the unique opportunity of the international community uniting on this for the first time. There is no excuse.

....

Question: I have a question for Mr. de Mistura about the consolidated effort against terrorism. What military consolidation do you see, especially we've got Mr. Kerry and Mr. Lavrov meeting tomorrow. Do you expect them to bring some joint forces and have a wider coalition? Are we talking specifically about something like that? **And Ms. Mogherini, I haven't heard you say the word al-Assad must go.** Could you just say that if this is still your policy?

SdeM: Let me address the first one. We are all very interested, and in fact we have been in touch with John Kerry and Sergy Lavrov about the high level of expectations that we all have about this important, timely and not coincidental meeting in Moscow. And I am sure that what happened in Brussels and what happened in Istanbul, which can happen anywhere else, is going to be a clear reminder about the urgency of finding a solution in Syria. Because I think the two countries are very clearly identifying a common interest in trying to address the issue of terrorism by finding a solution in Syria. From that point of view I am convinced that they will be addressing that aspect. Now the details of whether and what, we will see later.

FM: When I say that the European Union sticks to the common position it has and it shares with the rest of the international community, of the need to have a political transition in Damascus, I think I am clear enough.

"Transcript of joint stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini," [U.N. Geneva](#), 23 Mar 2016. [Boldface added by Standler to emphasize dogma.]

Should fighting terrorism in Syria wait for Assad to leave?

[Reuters](#) summarized the above-quoted 23 March press briefing in a two-sentence news article titled: "EU, U.N. say only way to fight terrorism is via Syria transition".

My comment is that there is a *belief* that if Assad is removed from Syria, then Islamic terrorism will magically end. This belief originated in propaganda from the U.S. Government that asserted Assad is a "magnet" for terrorists. (See, e.g., [State Dept](#) 11 Sep 2014 ("Assad has been the magnet that has attracted foreign fighters."); [State Dept](#) 20 July 2015 ("It's very hard to see how the war stops as long as President Assad remains the magnet who is attracting all of these foreign fighters."); [White House](#) 11 Sep 2015 ("... magnet for jihadists throughout the region."); [State Dept](#) 17 Nov 2015 ("... Assad is the magnet attracting these jihadis who come from all over the world").) This belief is *totally false*.

The clearly stated goal of ISIL is to establish a caliphate in Iraq and Syria, which will spread to other nations. ISIL will fight *any* government who opposes the goals of ISIL. So removing Assad will do nothing to stop ISIL. Further, it is easy to predict that the anarchy that will occur after Assad is removed from Syria will actually help ISIL.

It is the same with Nusra Front, which is Al-Qaeda in Syria. Their goal is to establish an emirate in Syria. Nusra will fight *any* government who opposes the goals of Nusra. So

removing Assad will do nothing to stop Nusra.

Obviously, the presence or absence of Assad in Syria will have no effect on the Taliban in Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan, and no effect on other Islamic terror groups scattered throughout the world.

The foreign meddlers in Syria (with the exception of Russia and Iran) have decreed that Assad must go. According to these foreign meddlers, only after Assad leaves, can we work together on defeating ISIL and Nusra. That means the fight against ISIL and Nusra is postponed until *after* Assad leaves, something that did *not* occur in 2013, 2014, 2015, In my opinion, a better plan would have been for foreign nations to cooperate with Assad in the fight against ISIL and Nusra, beginning in 2013.

I admit there is one possible way that the dogma of 'remove Assad first, then fight terrorism' *could* be correct. After Assad is removed, there will presumably no longer be fighting between rebels and the Syrian government. That would allow the Syrian army to concentrate more on fighting terrorist groups. *But* after Assad is removed, the new Syrian government will surely reconstitute the Syrian army — punishing some former army officers for war crimes, and integrating rebels into the Syrian army. That reconstitution of the Syrian army could easily make the army *ineffective* for months, or even permanently damage the effectiveness of the army. Why wait for Assad to be removed, and the ensuing uncertainties of the reconstitution of the Syrian army? We could have been fighting against terrorist groups since 2013, simply by cooperating with Assad.

On 25 March 2016, the U.S. Government continued to cling to its dogma that "Assad has lost his legitimacy to govern." At the U.S. State Department, spokesperson John Kirby said:

The Obama administration maintained Friday [25 Mar] that President Bashar Assad shouldn't lead Syria any longer, rejecting a Russian claim that the U.S. has changed its position.

....

State Department spokesman John Kirby said: "Any suggestion that we have changed in any way our view of Assad's future is false. Assad has lost his legitimacy to govern. We haven't changed our view on that."

"US says it hasn't changed position on Syria's Assad," [Associated Press](#), 18:17 EDT, 25 Mar 2016.

There are at least three things wrong with the U.S. dogma that Assad must be replaced as leader of Syria:

1. It is undemocratic for a foreign nation to tell Syria that its leader must go. Who is president of Syria is solely for the Syrian people to decide in an election.
2. It smacks of colonial imperialism when the USA and Western Europe tell a third-world nation that their leader must resign. Again, who is president of Syria is solely for the Syrian people to decide in an election.

3. Foreign meddlers who attempt to determine who should rule Syria are interfering with delicate peace negotiations in Geneva. The support of the USA and Western Europe for the rebels in Syria encourages and enables those rebels to demand that Assad resign, something that is unacceptable to Assad's government, and something that could cause the negotiations to fail. (See pleas by the United Nations Secretary General, [above](#).)

24 March 2016 — Day 15

The second round of negotiations ended on 24 March 2016. De Mistura held a press conference. To shorten this long transcript — I do *not* enjoy formatting *long* quotations — I have omitted most of the questions and answers.

SdeM: Good afternoon. I have been thinking — and you have to forgive me if I tell you things that look more like background before I give you the punch line — but I have been thinking that it would be fair to share with you also a little bit of what is the strategy about the talks, so that you can put it into context when you make your comments, or at least in your analysis.

The first point that I think has been leading our strategy on the Intra-Syrian Talks is: what are the Syrians asking us? Not only what is useful or not useful, but what are the Syrian asking us? They have been asking us for a reduction of violence, you remember, so therefore the priority in mind to protect is the cessation of hostilities. And the second priority to protect — because they have been asking us and continue to ask us, they have even been demonstrating in favor of that — is humanitarian access: not enough, but that is what they have been asking for. Cessation of hostilities: not perfect, but that's what they have been asking for. So that is what we need to protect.

But now comes the next concept in our own strategic approach. You can't sustain a cessation of hostilities in a conflict like the Syrian one, five years of horror — and you can't therefore sustain the humanitarian aid, which is linked to access thanks to the reduction of violence, unless there is a political process. And you can't have a political process that is credible unless there is a vision, a horizon of a political transition, as per 2254.

That is the context in which we are working, and when you look at the Intra-Syrian talks — phase one, phase two, phase three — please, at least understand what is the roadmap that we have in mind in order to make it happen.

At this stage the discussions are and were meant to actually keep the momentum, and at the same time prepare for the real talks about transition, political transition, political process.

Diplomacy is done both in this building and outside, and that's also how the cessation of hostilities took place. You remember — most of you were with me in the evening in the middle of the rain, and I still apologize for that — I felt so embarrassed actually when I came out of the hotel and saw you in the rain — but if you think about it, the suspension of the talks on that occasion, which appeared to be quite dramatic, because normally the UN never suspends talks, you know, we are in favor of continuing talks,

did produce a wakeup call, which was the Munich meeting. And the Munich meeting produced two elements: the cessation of hostilities and the humanitarian aspect.

There is diplomacy here, and diplomacy outside the two coincide. The two are supposed to support each other, and in theory they are supposed to produce also further improvement.

And perhaps not by coincidence, that the day when we started this round of talks the Russian Federation announced the reduction or the withdrawal of its own presence. And perhaps it is not by coincidence that while we are closing this round of talks today, there are expectations of important discussions in Moscow between John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov, which we hope and want believe are going to be helpful to the next phase.

Meanwhile, and now we get into the actual analysis of these talks, I must say, and I don't know whether you felt the same, but I was quite impressed by the fact that both sides behaved very seriously. You must have seen them when they came to be interviewed — very professionally, even I must say, those who we could have expected to be not well prepared because they are a new entity, like the HNC. Particularly I must say, one or two of them when they spoke; today you saw Madam Basma with what focus and professional outlook, everyone too, but she in particular, responding in English, calmly, professionally, statesmanship. So we kept the momentum, waiting for the combination of the two political movements to coincide. The support of this cessation of hostilities kept. I want to remind you that Sunday would be one month — my friends, one month (in Lebanon we had a ceasefire for 25 minutes), so there is something which has been moving. And no breakdowns, no walkouts and no de-legitimization or personal de-legitimization.

True, the government delegation was extremely focused on the issue about principles in order to be able then to talk about everything else. And on the side of the opposition a very serious list of papers as well, but much deeper already on the political process. So the conclusion was we better take this issue about the principles, which are important — we can't avoid them because they are part of the future constitution, even part of the future discussions about political process — take them and put them quite aside. If we keep them there all the time, the next round of talks will not be about political transition or political process.

Hence my decision to produce a paper myself: that's a standard negotiating, facilitator, mediator technique. And the paper which will be shared with you digitally, both in English and Arabic, while we are talking, or which is already available to you by courtesy of Al-Jazeera, I understand, miraculously, but I am not against it, the UN is very transparent, as long as it is not too early because it's stops us having buy-in by the various components, which did take place between yesterday and today.

I think by looking at those twelve points you can see that there is a lot of common ground, which can be, according to my interpretation and my colleagues, a listing to both sides, and even to all the stakeholders we have been inviting to be consulted — as

you know civil society, various platforms, even those who came from far away and women's associations — that those points are, for me, to look for a common ground. I prefaced it with a paragraph to make sure that no one should be feeling that this is a trick or any type of form in trying to push through a new Security Council resolution or any new Security Council discussion related to this. It is what they are; they are an understanding by the facilitator of what could be, and we believe are likely to be, a common ground.

So what are the next steps? Well, first of all, a feeling that we have been able to overcome these two weeks without any walkouts, any drama, any de-legitimization, and potentially a paper that has not been refused by either side on what could be an understanding of principles, which means next time we take the principles aside and we look now on political process. Hopefully, building on what we hope, between now and then, could be the other political and diplomatic discussions, which are mutually supportive.

So the next time, well we have been planning to have obviously sooner or later again an ISSG and a Security Council meeting, the better if itself can build on what has been achieved in both diplomatic arenas and to reconvene, I know that it has become an issue, we will not fall into that. As you know, one of the great things about proximity talks is that they are dramatically flexible. And therefore they have also a so-called a target date.

So the target date starts on the 9th [of April], on the 10th — can become the 11th depending on the arrivals. If people want to come on the 14th or the 13th they are warmly welcomed but we will start talking and meeting at the date that we will be indicating ourselves, which cannot be much later than 9th or 10th in my opinion, but could be perhaps the 11th of April because we do not want too much of a gap. If circumstances will induce us to accelerate or delay it will be basically on objective criteria and not simply because we had fixed a date. We will keep you informed of course so that you can be here.

That's basically where we are. Do I have to add a few more points? Well, let me see. The issue of detainees has become for me a priority, even more than before, obviously maintaining the pressure on the sieges lifting or improvement, and obviously the maintaining of the issue of supporting the cessation of hostilities and expanding it and controlling it, as has been done in the control room or the operation centers remains. We cannot take anything for granted in this conflict, but I think the operation centers has been doing quite a good work in being able to contain — you don't see what has been avoided as often as you see what has been happening, but you don't see how many cases have been contained before they became something much worse. And that has been thanks to the cooperation of the operation centers mainly now in Geneva, but also in Amman, in Moscow and in Washington.

I will stop there and that would be my concluding points.

....

Question: Syria next month will have parliamentary elections. What are your views, especially that these elections will be part of the political solution at a later stage?

SdeM: The only elections I feel authorized to comment on are the elections that the Security Council resolution 2254 has indicated as the ones that we are waiting for 18 months from the Intra-Syrian political process. And those are the ones that will be, according to the resolution, supervised by the UN according to international standards and including also the diaspora. Any other elections I am not commenting about and I am simply aware of.

....

Question: Correct me if I am wrong but it seems to me that the cessation of hostilities has really underpinned these talks and, as you had mentioned, it has been said by Syrians suffering from this war: what is the challenge that you give or the insistence that you make both on the two Syrian sides and world powers congregated around it, in this interim period before the next talks so that this critical element will hold up amid concerns about violations expressed by both sides?

SdeM: The challenge is that we have been able, altogether, to maintain these three elements together, through the help of the international community, and through the help of the Syrian components. Without them we would not have been able to do it, these three components; look at it, one is the cessation of hostilities that has been holding. **We are calculating perhaps 3,000 people are alive today since the beginning of the cessation of hostilities they would not be, based on the statistics that we sadly have been facing every day.** Secondly it is true that there have been quite a lot of incidents, but not an epidemic of incidents, which are what break normally a ceasefire or a cessation of hostilities, because the mechanism we have in Geneva in this Palais and in the other capitals, has been able to succeed in keeping the fire in not becoming a “bush” fire, but remaining incidents of a fire, regrettably as it may be.

Now the second element has been the humanitarian access. It used to be zero last year; we are close to reaching 384,000 people. Not enough, but moving — Darayya, for instance, Douma, but moving.

The third element, which is the fuel helping these two to keep going and actually being also fueled by them, is the political dialogue. I won't call it yet a political transition but a political dialogue definitely. It has taken place and I would say, rather in a civilized way. So the three are mutually supportive and mutually reinforcing. The secret during this period is that when one is suspended, for obvious reasons, the other two should be continuing, putting hope, energy, positive credibility, so that when the third one is renewed he would be in a position doing the same with the other two. They are interconnected, and I think I had explained it from the beginning.

"Near verbatim transcript of press conference by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 24 Mar 2016. [Boldface added by Standler.]

24 March 2016 — de Mistura's Paper

During 14-23 March, both the opposition and Assad's delegations presented papers to de Mistura, but those papers were *not* published. Here is de Mistura's paper on what he finds in common between the positions of the two delegations:

Explanatory Note

This is an Explanatory Note to the Special Envoy's Paper on Points of Commonalities. It sets out what the official purpose is of the paper. During the course of talks the Special Envoy noted that certain commonalities existed between the two sides in relation to their respective visions of what a future of Syrian state might look like. He instructed his staff to try to capture points of convergence in order to help him structure the next round of talks which shall also focus on political transition. The paper is a useful guide as to the commonalties that exists between the two negotiating parties. It is not an agreed paper of the two negotiating parties. It does not constitute in any way a framework document or a negotiating text and shall not be put before the UN Security Council or the ISSG unless specifically authorised by both sides. Instead, the Special Envoy has invited each of the two negotiating parties to take away the paper to examine whether it accurately captures points of convergence if not consensus. He has also invited each of the two negotiating parties to identify important points of divergence on essential principles. For the avoidance of doubt the two negotiating parties continue to maintain their respective negotiating positions as regards any political transitional process and what a future Syrian state might look like.

Essential Principles of a Political Solution in Syria

The participants in the intra-Syrian talks agree with the Special Envoy that the full implementation of UNSC Resolution 2254, the ISSG statements and the Geneva Communique in its entirety are the basis for a political transition process and beyond that will end the crisis in Syria—a crisis that has cost countless lives and imposed endless suffering on the people of Syria. The sides confirm that a political settlement is the only way to peace. Towards this end the parties recognize the following essential principles as the foundation for a future Syrian state that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people:

1. Respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. No part of the national territory shall be ceded. As an integral part of the Arab nation, Syria is committed to a peaceful and active role in the international community. As a founding member, Syria is dedicated to the UN Charter and its purposes and principles. The people of Syria remain committed to the restoration of the occupied Golan Heights by peaceful means.
2. The principles of sovereign equality and non-intervention shall apply, in conformity with the UN Charter. The Syrian people alone shall determine the future of their country by democratic means, through the ballot box, and have the exclusive right to choose their own political, economic and social system without external pressure or interference.
3. Syria shall be a democratic, non-sectarian state based on citizenship and political

pluralism, the representation of all components of Syrian society, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, equal rights, non-discrimination, human rights and fundamental freedoms, transparency, accountability and the principles of national reconciliation and social peace.

4. Syria cherishes its history of diversity and the contributions and values of all religions, traditions and national identities to Syrian society. Acts of revenge against individuals or groups shall not be tolerated. There shall be no discrimination against, and full protection of, all national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural identities. Members of all communities, men and women, shall enjoy equal opportunities in social, economic, cultural and public life.
5. Women shall enjoy equality of rights and representation in all institutions and decision-making structures at a level of at least 30 per cent during the transition and thereafter.
6. As per Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), the political transition in Syria shall include mechanisms for credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution and free and fair elections pursuant to the new constitution, administered under supervision by the United Nations, to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate.
7. Such governance shall ensure an environment of stability and calm during the transition, offering safety and equal chances to political actors to establish themselves and campaign in the forthcoming elections and participate in public life.
8. Continuity and reform of state institutions and public services, along with measures to protect the public infrastructure and private property, shall ensure stability in accordance with international standards, principles of good governance and human rights. The governance will take effective measures to combat corruption. Citizens will benefit from effective mechanisms of protection in the relations with all public authorities, ensuring full compliance with human rights.
9. Syria categorically rejects terrorism and strongly opposes terrorist organizations and individuals identified by the UN Security Council and will engage in a national endeavour, in international partnership, to defeat terrorism and to address the causes of terrorism. Syria calls on all states in accordance with the relevant UNSC resolutions, to prevent terrorist groups from being supplied with weapons, money, training, shelter, intelligence or safe havens and to refrain from inciting acts of terrorism.
10. Syrians are committed to rebuilding a strong and unified national army, also through the disarmament and integration of members of armed groups supporting

the transition and the new constitution. That professional army shall protect the borders and population of the State from external threats in accordance with the principle of the rule of law. The state and its reformed institutions will exercise the exclusive right of controlling weapons of war. There shall be no intervention by foreign fighters on Syrian soil.

11. All refugees and internally displaced people wishing it shall be enabled to return safely to their homes with national and international support and in line with international protection standards. Those arbitrarily detained shall be released and the fate of the disappeared, kidnapped or missing shall be resolved.
12. There shall be reparations, redress, care, and restitution of rights and property lost for those who have suffered loss or injury in consequence of the conflict. As peace and stability are being restored, Syria shall call for the holding of a major donor conference to gain funds for compensation, reconstruction and development of the country, and the lifting of all coercive economic measures and other unilateral actions affecting the people of Syria. Syria looks forward to international guarantees and support for the implementation of the political process in a way that does not infringe upon the sovereignty of Syria.

"UN Special Envoy's Paper on Points of Commonalities," [U.N. Geneva](#), 24 Mar 2016.

30 March 2016
Assad rejects Transitional Governing Body
in Geneva Communiqué of June 2012

After the Geneva talks adjourned on 24 March, there was silence about the peace talks. Then on 30 March, Assad made the startling announcement that he rejected the transitional governing body that is mentioned in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. This is a significant setback for the Geneva negotiations, because *everyone* involved in the Syrian problem — even Russia — publicly supports the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012.

I have been critical of the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 for reasons given in my [review](#). This Communiqué was written at a time when the conventional wisdom expected Assad's government to soon collapse under assault by rebels, so Syria would *need* a new government. This Communiqué was written at a time before Islamic terrorists (e.g., Nusra Front and ISIL) appeared. In my opinion, this Communiqué was obsolete in 2014, and is now thoroughly obsolete. But diplomats worldwide continue to cling to the dogma in this Communiqué.

Assad seems confident after his victory in liberating Palmyra from ISIL on 27 March. (See [below](#).) Assad now plans to liberate Raqqa and Deir Ezzor from ISIL. After liberating those three cities, Assad will have defeated ISIL in all of the major cities now held by ISIL. After those future victories, Assad will be much more in control of Syria, while the rebels/jihadists will have accomplished nothing, because of the cessation of hostilities that binds them.

In an interview with RIA-Novosti on 30 March 2016, Assad asserted that rebels should be integrated into the current Syrian government (what Assad calls a "national unity government"), instead of forming a transitional governing body. Then the Syrian constitution can be changed, and submitted to the people of Syria for approval or rejection in an election. [RIA-Novosti](#)(14:15 Moscow); [RIA-Novosti](#)(13:15 Moscow) ; [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [FirstPost](#)(AFP).

Assad's government's proposal for a "national unity government" appears in a [Reuters](#) news article on 13 March 2016: "[Syrian Foreign Minister] Moualeem indicated that a 'national unity government' with opposition participation was the most on offer, an idea ruled out by the HNC." However, previously there were few public details about this proposal.

Personally, I like Assad's proposal, because it is logical, simple, and avoids foreign meddlers. But the rebels, Obama, and other foreign meddlers — whose policy in Syria can be summarized in the slogan "Assad must leave" — will surely object to Assad's plan. Note that both (1) the "transitional governing body" in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 and (2) Assad's proposal for a "national unity government" are different paths to the same goal.

The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) published the first half of the interview of Assad by RIA-Novosti. The relevant part is:

Question 5: I wanted to ask you about that. What are the positions from which Syria will start the next round of negotiations when what is called the political transition will be discussed? And then the issue of a transitional governing body will be raised. What is your take on the mechanism of forming such a body?

President Assad: First, concerning the definition of the transitional period, there's no definition. We in Syria believe that the concept of political transition means moving from one constitution to another, and the constitution expresses the form of the required political system in the transitional period, so the transitional period should continue under the present constitution, and then move to the next constitution after it is voted on by the Syrian people. Until that time, what we can do, from our perspective in Syria, is that there will be a government. This transitional structure, or transitional form, is a government consisting of the whole spectrum of the Syrian political forces: opposition, independents, the present government, and others. The main objective of this government will be drafting the constitution, putting it to the vote of the Syrians, and then moving to the next constitution. There is nothing, neither in the Syrian constitution nor in any other constitution in the world, called a transitional body. This is illogical and unconstitutional. What are the authorities of this body? How shall it run the daily affairs of the population? Who oversees its performance? Now there is the People's Assembly (Parliament) and a constitution which rules over the government and the state. That's why the solution is forming a national unity government which prepares for a new constitution.

"President al-Assad to RIA Novosti and Sputnik: Syria is not prepared for federalism," [SANA](#), 30 March 2016.

In my opinion, Assad also *should* have explained some of the history of the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. *No* one from Syria attended that one-day meeting in Geneva, so

the Communiqué was imposed on Syria by foreign meddlers, in violation of the sovereignty of Syria.

The spokesman for Obama was quick to reject Assad's proposed "national unity government", without reading the Assad interview transcript.

QUESTION: I wanted to also ask about Syria. There's an interview that President Assad gave to some Russian media that he's proposing a national unity government and is rejecting calls for a transitional ruling body. Is there any reaction to that from the White House?

MR. EARNEST: I didn't see the interview, and I don't know whether he envisioned himself being a part of that national unity government. Obviously, that would be a nonstarter for us. And again, we have raised the significant concerns we have with President Assad's leadership. The manner in which he has used that nation's military to attack innocent civilians isn't just completely immoral, it has also turned a large majority of the country against him. So it is impossible to imagine a scenario where the political turmoil and violence inside of Syria comes to an end while President Assad is still there. And by "there," I mean in the President's office in Syria.

So that's why we have been clear for years that the successful resolution of the political chaos inside of Syria isn't just critical to solving the many problems plaguing that nation and the broader region, it also will require President Assad stepping aside.

QUESTION: Syrian forces recently retook the town of Palmyra from ISIL. I know that the U.S. is for Assad to go, but how does the White House feel about Syrian forces retaking that town? And he's also said they're going to push on to Raqqa, which is the ISIL de-facto capital.

MR. EARNEST: Well, a couple things about that. The first is obviously that ISIL — the actions that ISIL undertook while Palmyra was under their control were terrible. They plundered precious historical artifacts that actually illustrate the common heritage that we all have. They also carried out terrible acts of violence against the individuals who are responsible for protecting that heritage.

So seeing them driven out of that location, seeing ISIL driven out of that location is obviously a welcome development. But that doesn't change the basic calculus that I just described, which is that the political turmoil inside of Syria will not recede as long as President Assad is in office. And that's why we continue to believe that he must go.

....

QUESTION: I just wanted to get back to clarify something you said at the beginning. Is the administration's position that Assad should step aside before a transitional government, not at the end of a transition?

MR. EARNEST: What we have said, Andrew, is that President Assad must step aside because until he does, we will not see an end to the political turmoil and chaos that's been plaguing that country for far too long. It is because of President Assad's failed

leadership that we have reached this point. That is the root cause of the violence and mass migration that we've seen there. It's also the root cause of the terrible atrocities that have been committed in Syria, and the hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their lives as a result of President Assad's failed leadership. And that's why we continue to believe that we're not going to resolve this situation until President Assad makes a clear commitment to leave.

QUESTION: You seem to be more specific on the timing. You said that it would be a non-starte[r] for Assad to be involved in the transitional national unity government.

MR. EARNEST: I think what I said is that it will not — the chaos and violence and turmoil inside of Syria will not come to an end until President Assad has left office. And that has long been our position, and it continues to be.

"Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 3/30/2016," [White House](#), 30 March 2016.

Over at the U.S. State Department, spokesperson John Kirby was more diplomatic than Mr. Earnest at the White House:

QUESTION: John, on Syria, in an interview with the Russian media, President Assad has said today or talked about the transition in Syria. He said regarding the definition of the transitional period, "Such a definition does not exist." He added the term "political transition" means the transition from one constitution to another. About the unity government or the government, he said a national unity government would be formed by various Syrian political forces — "opposition, independent, the current government, and others." Any reaction to this statement?

MR KIRBY: We continue to support the process that is in place right now for deciding what the transition inside Syria should look like, and that is administered and led by the UN, by Mr. de Mistura specifically, and enabled through a UN Security Council resolution which codifies the process, which will, we hope, keep the opposition and the regime in discussions going forward. There is another round of talks that are supposed to happen in April. We look forward to those talks and to what we hope will be continued momentum and real progress going forward. That's what we're focused on. That's what the international community is focused on. That is the framework and the architecture that has been decided in terms of going forward.

QUESTION: But do you agree with President Assad when he said that the transition would be from one constitution to another and there would be a unity government that includes the current government, independent, and opposition?

MR KIRBY: We support — again, we support the process that is in place now and codified in three communiques and a UN Security Council resolution. That is the process the international community has signed up to through the UN and the International Syria Support Group, and I would note, factually speaking, the regime was present at the first full set of talks that just occurred in Geneva, and it's our expectation that they will attend the next set.

QUESTION: But these communiques and the resolution, the UN resolution didn't talk

about the future and the role that President Assad will play.

MR KIRBY: It's not supposed to. The process — it lays out the process and it is through that process that those kinds of questions will get answered and will get addressed — through that process, through the UN process. And that's the process that we support in making these determinations.

....

MR KIRBY: Well, Assad has lost legitimacy to govern. Nothing's changed our view on that.

"Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept](#), 30 March 2016.

Of course, the reason that the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (and other Resolutions), and statements of the ISSG all fail to mention the future of Assad is that there was *no* consensus at those meetings about the future of Assad. In particular, Russia continues to support Assad.

March 2016 Cessation of Hostilities

Full-text of agreements on a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria is posted at [rbs0.com](#)

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.

My essay for [February 2016](#) chronicled the cessation of hostilities on 27-29 February.

1 March 2016: fourth day

Here is a bibliography that I prepared after 03:45 GMT on 2 March, about the fourth day of the cessation of hostilities. (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:

- "Suspended Syrian peace talks to resume in Geneva next week," [The Guardian](#), 18:35 GMT, 1 March 2016. ("The opposition High Negotiations Committee alleged at least three violations by regime forces on Tuesday [1 Mar] and 17 violations the previous day. Russia said it had recorded 15 violations over 24 hours, mostly in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Latakia.")
- "Shelling near reporters in Syria shows limits of truce," [Associated Press](#), 19:20 GMT, 1 March 2016. (Nusra allegedly fired artillery shells at a Syrian village near the Turkish border. "The cease-fire has remained fragile, however, with violations reported in

many areas and the government and opposition trading blame.")

- "U.S. says no reports of significant Syria truce breaches in past 24 hours," [Reuters](#), 19:49 GMT, 1 March 2016. (Reports daily press [briefing](#) at U.S. State Department, where the spokesman said: "Over the last 24 hours we've not been apprised of any claims of any additional violations of any significance. we have seen a notable reduction in violence in Syria.")
- "The Latest: UN chief urges Syria parties to keep promises," [Associated Press](#), 20:46 GMT, 1 March 2016. (chronicles violations. At 14:30 Damascus time: "Russia's Defense Ministry says the ongoing cease-fire in Syria has been violated 15 times in the past 24 hours. ... most of the violations were recorded around Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Latakia.")

2 March 2016: fifth day

- "Russia says Syria ceasefire violated 31 times in past 3 days," [Reuters](#), 12:40 GMT, 2 March 2016.
- "The Latest: 18 US-backed rebels killed in Syria car bomb," [Associated Press](#), 14:33 GMT, 2 March 2016. (At 16:15 Damascus time: "A Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman says that the cease-fire in Syria has been violated 31 times since it came into effect midnight Friday [26 Feb].")
- A hotline established by the U.S. State Department to receive complaints about alleged violations of the cessation of hostilities has problems because of the lack of hotline operators who are fluent in the Arabic language. [U.S. State Dept](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

3 March 2016: sixth day

- "'Huge drop' in civilian deaths after Syria truce," [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP), 12:49 GMT, 3 March 2016. ("The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told AFP that [24 civilians have been killed in the first five days of a landmark truce in parts of Syria], gathered from areas where the ceasefire had come into effect, included five women and six children. [Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman] called it a 'huge drop', adding that the daily average during the month of February was 38 civilians killed.")
- "Russia says registered 14 Syria ceasefire violations in last 24 hours," [Reuters](#), 15:43 GMT, 3 March 2016. ("The violations concerned the shelling of residential areas and Syrian government forces in the provinces of Damascus, Latakia, Hama and Deraa".)
- "The Latest: Damascus official warns Turkey, Saudi Arabia," [Associated Press](#), 17:24 GMT, 3 March 2016. ("[Ahmad Mounir, Syria's deputy minister of national reconciliation,] says the cease-fire in Syria can succeed if Turkey and Saudi Arabia cease interfering and halt their support for militants.")

- "UN envoy: Syria cease-fire is holding despite some fighting," [Associated Press](#), 17:52 GMT, 3 March 2016. ("A U.S.-Russia-brokered cease-fire in Syria, now in its sixth day, is largely holding despite sporadic clashes in some areas, a U.N. envoy [Staffan de Mistura] said Thursday [3 Mar] , raising expectations ahead of next week's planned resumption of Geneva peace talks.")
- "U.S. says no significant new violations of Syria truce in last 24 hours," [Reuters](#), 19:58 GMT, 3 March 2016. (Quotes U.S. State Department spokesperson, John Kirby, at the Daily Press [Briefing](#): "[o]ver the last 24 hours, there hasn't been ... any significant new numbers of alleged violations.")
- "118, including 24 civilians, were killed in five days of military operations in the truce areas," [SOHR](#), 3 March 2016. ("The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was able to document the death of 118 people during the first five days of the ceasefire in Syria, in the places which is considered as truce areas, since the 27th of February 2016 and until the 2nd of March 2016,")

4 March 2016: seventh day

- "Al Qaeda in Syria respects truce despite rejecting it," [Reuters](#), 11:54 GMT, 4 March 2016. ("Although al-Qaeda's wing in Syria [Nusra] has rejected an international effort to halt nearly five years of conflict, its fighters have laid low, careful not to jeopardise the fragile agreement that has slowed if not entirely stopped the war.")
- "In its first week, Syria truce brings sharp drop in violence," [Associated Press](#), 16:55 GMT, 4 March 2016. ("A shaky cease-fire in Syria brokered by Moscow and Washington has survived its first week, outlasting skeptics' expectations and providing some hope that a diplomatic solution to the five-year-old war might be possible." "The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition group that closely monitors the conflict using activists on the ground, says the overall violence has decreased by 90 percent.")
- "Syria truce wobbles amid claims of government attacks, aid-delivery snags," [Washington Post](#), 17:38 GMT, 4 March 2016. (Pessimistic assessment, owing to inflammatory statements by both Riyadh Hijab and the jihadist group, Jaish al-Islam.)
- "The Latest: Kerry and Lavrov discuss Syria cease-fire, talks," [Associated Press](#), 19:34 GMT, 4 March 2016.

5 March 2016: eighth day

- "135, including 32 civilians, were killed in 7 days of military operations in the truce areas," [SOHR](#), 5 March 2016. ("The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was able to document the death of 135 people during the first five days of the ceasefire in Syria, in the places which is considered as truce areas," 135/7 days is only 19/day. SOHR counted 41 dead during 27-29 Feb, so a total of 4761 people (i.e., 4802 minus 41) died

during the first 26 days of Feb 2016, giving a pre-ceasefire death rate of 183/day. The cessation of hostilities caused a 90% reduction in deaths in the truce areas of Syria.)

- "Russia says registered nine Syria ceasefire violations in last 24 hours," [Reuters](#), 15:25 GMT, 5 March 2016. ("... six violations in Aleppo province, one in Damascus, one in Latakia and one in Daraa [over the past 24 hours].")
- "Syrian Reconciliation Center Records Nine Ceasefire Violations," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:33 GMT, 5 March 2016. ("Over the past 24 hours nine violations of the cessation of hostilities have been recorded, including six in the province of Aleppo and one each in Latakia and Daraa.")
- "Killings, violations as Syria fragile truce continues," [Al-Arabiya](#), 16:42 GMT, 5 March 2016.
- I looked at the Associated Press website at 01:00 and 07:10 GMT on 6 March 2016, but the AP posted *no* news about the cessation of hostilities in Syria on 5 March.

6 March 2016: ninth day

- "Russian Reconciliation Center Records 15 Ceasefire Violations in 24 Hours," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:57 GMT, 6 March 2016. ("Over the past 24 hours the cessation of hostilities was violated 15 times (11 in Damascus, one each in Hama, Daraa, Idlib).")
- "Russian defence ministry says Syria ceasefire violated 15 times in past 24 hours," [Reuters](#), 16:07 GMT, 6 March 2016.
- "Syria: Insurgent shelling of Aleppo kills 13 civilians," [Associated Press](#), 18:20 GMT, 6 March 2016. ("A rocket and mortar barrage struck a government-controlled neighborhood in Syria's northern city of Aleppo on Sunday [6 Mar], killing 13 civilians and wounding 40, the government and an opposition group said." "The [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights] said the shells were fired by insurgents, including the al-Qaida branch in Syria known as the Nusra Front.")

7 March 2016: tenth day

- "Syria Ceasefire Regime Violated Eight Times in Past 24 Hours," [RIA-Novosti](#), 16:01 GMT, 7 March 2016. ("During the past 24 hours, the cessation of hostilities in Syria was violated eight times (two times in Hama province, three times in Aleppo, three times in Idlib), according to the Russian Defense Ministry.")
- "Russia says registered eight Syria ceasefire violations in last 24 hours," [Reuters](#), 16:20 GMT, 7 March 2016. ("two violations in Hama province, three in Aleppo, and three in Idlib.")
- "Syrian opposition says truce breaches may preclude peace talks," [Reuters](#), 17:10 GMT, 7 March 2016. (Hijab alleges airstrike in Abu Dhuhour in Idlib province,

killing "tens" of people.)

- "Syrian opposition undecided over peace talks," [Associated Press](#), 23:11 GMT, 7 March 2016. ("An opposition-held town in northern Syria was bombed by planes earlier Monday [7 Mar], killing at least 12 people, monitoring groups said. The bombs struck a fuel depot in Abu Adh-Dhohour, in Idlib Province.")
- "Air strike hits Syrian market, opposition says truce must be respected," [Reuters](#), 01:14 GMT, 8 March 2016. ("A Syrian or Russian air strike was reported to have killed at least 19 people and possibly many more at a market in northwestern Syria on Monday, straining a cessation of hostilities agreement meant to pave the way for peace talks.")

8 March 2016: eleventh day

- "Russian Reconciliation Center Records 7 Ceasefire Violations in Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:38 GMT, 8 March 2016. ("Over 24 hours the cessation of hostilities was violated seven times — four in Aleppo, two in Idlib, one in Latakia.")
- "The Latest: Monitors say deaths up in Syria cease-fire zone," [Associated Press](#), 16:21 GMT, 8 March 2016. ("A British-based monitoring group says fighting in Syria has killed more civilians in the past two days than in the previous eight days combined, marking a deterioration of the conflict's partial cease-fire. Eighty civilians have died in fighting in the cease-fire areas since it took effect 10 days ago, more than half of them in the past two days, says the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.")

9 March 2016: twelfth day

- "Russian Reconciliation Center Records 7 Ceasefire Violations in Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:56 GMT, 9 March 2016. ("Over 24 hours, the cessation of hostilities was violated seven times — three in Aleppo, one each in Latakia, Homs, Idlib, Hama.")
- "Syria opposition sees fewer truce breaches, U.N. prepares talks," [Reuters](#), 18:14 GMT, 9 March 2016. ("The Syrian opposition said on Wednesday [9 Mar] there had been fewer breaches of a truce agreement by the government and its allies in the past day....")

10 March 2016: 13th day

- "Insurgents in Syria attack government positions," [Reuters](#), 10:01 GMT, 10 March 2016. (Nusra Front or "Islamists" attack Assad's army in Hama province.)
- "Russia registers eight ceasefire violations in Syria in 24 hours - RIA," [Reuters](#), 15:54 GMT, 10 March 2016. ("... five were in the province of Aleppo and one each in Idlib, Damascus and Daraa.")

11 March 2016: 14th day

The English-language RIA-Novosti website did not post any news article on 10-11 March about violations of the cessation of hostilities in Syria. Also the Associated Press did not post any news article on 10-11 March with a title about violations of the cessation of hostilities in Syria. It is the same at Reuters and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Journalists do not like to report more of the same, which is probably why the topic of ceasefire violations has disappeared from the news.

At the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department on 11 March, spokesman John Kirby accused Assad's government of violating the cessation of hostilities agreement when Assad's military bombed a peaceful demonstration in the city of Aleppo.

However, we note — while we note these steps forward, we remain deeply concerned by chronic and recurring actions to undermine some of these efforts and to inflict more suffering upon the Syrian people. And we strongly condemn the Assad regime's ongoing practice of removing badly needed medical supplies from the emergency humanitarian aid deliveries that are actually made.

We also strongly condemn reports today [11 Mar] that the regime has conducted airstrikes which struck civilian protesters in Aleppo and Daraa, including the Arbayen mosque as the congregation was leaving. Now, these are clear violations of the cessation of hostilities and of the express commitment by the Assad regime to the United States and Russia as ceasefire taskforce co-chairs to provide full humanitarian access and to abide by the cessation of hostilities. Attacks against civilians and the denial of humanitarian aid needs to stop immediately, and we urge all parties — particularly Russia — to use its influence with the Assad regime to make this happen.

....

QUESTION: Very quickly on the issue of the airstrikes, you said that there were airstrikes near Aleppo and so on. Were these, like, camps by at least what the Syrians claim to be ISIS supporters or ISIS camps and so on, or were they civilian areas?

MR KIRBY: Well, as I said in my opening statement, our indications are that they were against civilian targets, or at least civilian targets were hit. What else was targeted, I wouldn't know. But we have enough information at this point — and you know I've been very careful and cautious about getting into specific comments on this or that airstrike, but again, it shouldn't be lost on you that we felt comfortable enough with the information that we have at hand to know that civilians were targeted in this regard, not just hit but targeted.

....

MR KIRBY: But we know there have been some violations and we want those to stop, and so we understand the fragility of it. So that's why it's important that the right conversations are happening so that it doesn't — so that these things don't happen again. Because we don't want to see violations of a cessation tear asunder these talks

that are just about ready to start.

John Kirby, "Daily Press Briefing," [State Dept.](#), 11 March 2016.

See also [Reuters](#).

12 March 2016: 15th day

- "Russian Defense Ministry Says 42 Armed Groups Join Syrian Ceasefire," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:48 GMT, 12 March 2016. ("The ceasefire is generally holding. At the same time, 10 violations of the ceasefire were recorded within 24 hours (Damascus — 6, Aleppo — 3, Hama — 1)." "The positions of government troops in Damascus have been shelled five times from areas under control of the Free Syrian Army....")

13 March 2016: 16th day

Sunday, 13 March, is the day before the negotiations resume in Geneva.

- "Ceasefire in Syria Violated 29 Times Over 24 Hours - Reconciliation Center," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:18 GMT, 13 March 2016. ("18 violations have been registered in Latakia, five in Damascus, three in Aleppo, two in Idlib and one in Hama regions.")

14 March 2016: 17th day

Reuters, the Associated Press, and RIA-Novosti all failed to report on violations of the cessation of hostilities on 14 March 2016. Journalists were busy with the resumption of negotiations in Geneva, and with the surprise announcement of the withdrawal of most of Russia's airplanes from Syria.

15 March 2016: 18th day

- "Russia says records 15 violations of Syria truce in last 24 hours: RIA," [Reuters](#), 15:08 GMT, 15 Mar 2016. ("Russia's defense ministry said on Monday [14 Mar] it had recorded 15 violations of an agreed cessation of hostilities in Syria in the last 24 hours, RIA news agency reported." *Not* reported at English-language RIA-Novosti website.)
- "15 breaches of 'cessation of hostilities' by terrorist organizations observed during the past 24 hours," [SANA](#), 15 Mar 2016. ("The Russian Coordination Center in Hmeimem said on Tuesday [15 Mar] that 15 breaches of cessation of hostilities by terrorist organizations were observed during the past 24 hours. '6 breaches were monitored in Damascus Countryside, two in each of Aleppo, Idleb, Hama and Homs countryside and one breach in Lattakia countryside'.")

16 March 2016: 19th day

- "Russia Registers Ten Ceasefire Violations in Syria in Past 24 Hours," [RIA-Novosti](#), 17:20 GMT, 16 Mar 2016. ("Ten violations have been registered in the past 24 hours,

including four in Aleppo, three in Latakia, one each in Idlib, Homs and Hama".)

17 March 2016: 20th day

- "Over 40 Syrian Armed Groups Intent on Joining Truce - Reconciliation Center," [RIA-Novosti](#), 16:44 GMT, 17 Mar 2016. ("Nine violations have been registered in the past 24 hours, including three each in Aleppo, Damascus and Idlib".)

18 March 2016: 21th day

- "Russian Military Registers 5 Ceasefire Violations in Syria in Past 24 Hours," [RIA-Novosti](#), 16:48 GMT, 18 Mar 2016. ("three in the Damascus province, and one each in the Aleppo and Latakia provinces")

Beginning 12 March, RIA-Novosti is the only news source that is publishing information on violations of the cessation of hostilities. And that information — a simple count of the number of alleged violations — is of little significance. One violation might be a single mortar shell that lands harmlessly in a field. Or one violation might be bombings or artillery shelling of a town, killing more than a dozen innocent civilians. By mixing de minimis violations with serious violations, a meaningless statistic is created. Also, note that there is no public disclosure of *who* is the alleged perpetrator of each violation. Public shaming of violators might discourage violations.

19 March 2016: 22th day

On Saturday, 19 March 2016, [Reuters](#) reported that Russia registered *zero* violations of the ceasefire in Syria in the past 24 hours. [RIA-Novosti](#) reports "there have been no ceasefire violations involving heavy weapons in Syria in the past 24 hours."

On Saturday, 19 March 2016, the Associated Press reported:

The Russian Defense Ministry says the U.S. has dragged its feet on responding to Moscow's proposals on joint monitoring of a Syria cease-fire. Lt. Gen. Sergei Kuralenko said Saturday [19 Mar] that Russia proposed measures on controlling the truce on Feb. 25, but the U.S. hasn't answered yet, adding that further delays led to civilian casualties and were "inadmissible." Kuralenko said 67 civilians have been killed by militant fire in Aleppo alone since the truce started.

"The Latest: Russia says US slow to agree on Syria monitoring," [Associated Press](#), 16:35 GMT, 19 Mar 2016.

Reuters reports the Russian Defense Ministry wants the U.S. Government to do more to support the cessation of hostilities.

The ceasefire in Syria is broadly holding but the United States should be doing more to support it, Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement on Saturday [19 Mar].

....

The Russian statement criticised the United States for what is said was Washington's failure to restrain rebel fighters.

"In contrast to the American side, officers of the Russian (monitoring) Centre are in the provinces and on the ground to restrain potential violations of the ceasefire," it said.

Russia had yet to receive a reply from Washington to its proposals for organising monitoring of the ceasefire, it added.

"We consider that this delay in accepting the document in question is unacceptable, because it leads to new civilian casualties," the statement said.

"Russia says Syria ceasefire mostly holding, U.S. should do more," [Reuters](#), 17:07 GMT, 19 Mar 2016.

It is difficult to know what is happening between the Russian and U.S. governments, since neither of them enjoy cooperating with other, and both spew propaganda that obscures the Truth. It does seem strange that, after accumulating more than 175 alleged violations of the cessation of hostilities during three weeks, there is still *no* investigation of each alleged violation. Consequently, there is still *no* punishment for violators.

21 March 2016: cessation of hostilities

On Monday, 21 March 2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported the Russian Defense and Foreign Ministries declared that Russia "will start responding unilaterally to cease-fire violations in Syria if the U.S. refuses to coordinate rules of engagement against violators." [Reuters](#) reported "The United States on Monday [21 Mar] rejected Russia's call for an urgent meeting over violations of Syria's three-week cessation of hostilities".

RIA-Novosti reported the Russian Defense Ministry's statement on 21 March:

"In case of the absence of a US response to these proposals, the Russian Federation will begin unilaterally applying the rules stipulated in the agreement starting March 22," Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi, head of the General Staff's Main Operational Directorate, said.

He underlined that military force would only be used in case reliable evidence proved systematic violations of the Syria ceasefire deal by armed groups.

"Russia Says to Control Syria Ceasefire Unilaterally From March 22," [RIA-Novosti](#), 11:03 GMT, 21 Mar 2016.

RIA-Novosti tersely reported the Russian Foreign Ministry's statement on 21 March:

According to the [Foreign] ministry's statement, although Moscow is satisfied with the level of Russia-US cooperation on Syrian ceasefire, "it is dangerous and counterproductive" to endlessly drag on the creation of a mechanism on coordinated reaction from the members of the International Syria Support Group to ceasefire violations in Syria.

"We do not rule out the possibility that we could be forced to take unilateral actions against the militants who do not respect the ceasefire regime," the statement said. "Russia Says Ready to Prevent Syria Ceasefire Violations Unilaterally," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:03 GMT, 21 Mar 2016.

My comment is that Russia is probably unwilling to criticize Assad's airplanes for bombing rebels, jihadists, and/or civilians. And the USA probably has *no* influence over rogue rebel commanders who violate the cessation of hostilities. So it is quite remarkable that there are so few violations of the cessation of hostilities.

But if Russia resumes bombing rebels and jihadists, the cessation of hostilities could quickly unravel, and Syria would return to the previous civil war.

22 March 2016: cessation of hostilities

Although Russia yesterday threatened to unilaterally punish ceasefire violators, there was *no* punishment today.

Reuters reported an Arabic-language press release by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights:

A total of 530 people were killed in the first 23 days of a truce in Syria in areas covered by the cessation of hostilities agreement, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Tuesday [22 Mar].

In areas not covered by the ceasefire, which came into force on Feb. 27, 1,279 people were killed, the British-based Observatory said.

"530 killed in areas covered by Syria truce in first 23 days," [Reuters](#), 10:17 GMT, 22 Mar 2016.

23-24 March 2016: cessation of hostilities

Although on 21 March, Russia threatened to unilaterally punish ceasefire violators, there was *no* punishment on 22-24 March.

On 23 March, [RIA-Novosti](#) reports the commander of Russian forces in Syria said: "Despite recorded violations, the cessation of hostilities in Syria has been generally observed." This is a retreat from the alarming Russian threats of 21 March.

On 24 March, John Kerry met with Putin in Moscow, to discuss the Russian withdrawal from Syria, reinforce the cessation of hostilities in Syria, expand deliveries of humanitarian aid to besieged cities in Syria, and discuss the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. [RIA-Novosti](#)(meeting); [RIA-Novosti](#)(aid); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

31 March 2016: 34th day

On 31 March, "the Russian center for Syrian reconciliation at the Hmeymim airbase" reported 10 violations of the cessation of hostilities in the past 24 hours.

The cessation of hostilities in Syria has been respected in general. However, a total of 10 violations of the ceasefire regime have been registered, including three each in the Aleppo, Latakia and Damascus provinces, and one — in the Idlib province. "Russian Registers 10 Ceasefire Violations in Syria in Past 24 Hours," [RIA-Novosti](#), 15:16 GMT, 31 March 2016.

The bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense on 31 March says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces. Within last 24 hours, 10 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo, Latakia, Damascus — 3 for each, Idlib — 1).

....

Jaysh al-Islam militants opened fire against living houses in suburbs of Damascus for three times: two times from Zibdin against al-Maliha and al-Sahiyah, and once from al-Rishan against Haush al-Fara village.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (March 31, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 31 March 2016.

The Associated Press reported on 31 March:

Airstrikes hit near a school and a hospital east of the Syrian capital of Damascus on Wednesday [30 Mar], killing at least 23 people in one of the deadliest incidents involving civilians since a partial cease-fire came into effect in the war-torn country more than a month ago, pro-opposition activists said Thursday [31 Mar].

....

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Thursday's casualties near the capital were caused by a series of airstrikes that struck the rebel-held town of Deir al-Asafir, which lies east of Damascus in an area known as Eastern Ghouta. Four children and a civil defense worker were among the victims, the Observatory said. The Local Coordination Committees, another opposition activist group, put the death toll from the airstrikes at 17.

Zeina Karam, "Syrian activists: Airstrikes hit east of Damascus, kill 23," [Associated Press](#), 18:39 GMT, 31 Mar 2016.

The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) hinted why Deir al-Asafir "in Damascus suburbs" was targeted by Syrian airstrikes, possibly in retaliation for mortar shells fired by jihadists of the Jaish al-Islam group:

In a new breach of the cessation of hostilities agreement, terrorists fired a mortar shell on Masaken Barzeh neighborhood in Damascus city on Thursday.

The shell was fired by terrorists positioned in Eastern Ghouta, a source at Damascus Police Command told SANA.

"New terrorist shelling attacks hit Damascus and Dier Ezzor," [SANA](#), 31 March 2016.

A later news article on 31 March at SANA said:

Russian coordination Center said on Thursday that 10 breaches of the cessation of hostilities agreement by terrorist organizations were observed during the past 24 hours in Syria.

“Jaish al-Islam terrorists targeted residential buildings in Damascus suburbs with mortars three times and Ahrar al-Cham terrorists shelled 3 positions for the Syrian army in Lattakia countryside,” the Center said in a statement published on the Russian Defense Ministry’s website page.

....

The number of breaches by the terrorist organizations reached at 340 since February 27th.

"Russian coordination Center: 10 breaches of cessation of hostilities by terrorists observed during last 24 hours," [SANA](#), 31 March 2016.

Reuters reported on 1 April:

The death toll from air strikes in the Deir al-Asafir district southeast of Damascus has risen to more than 30, mostly women and children, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the White Helmet civil defence group.

The strikes on Thursday [31 Mar], which the Observatory monitoring group said were carried out by Syrian aircraft, came despite a month-long "cessation of hostilities" in Syria between government forces and their opponents, excluding Islamic State and al Qaeda's Nusra Front.

....

Parts of the Eastern Ghouta region east of Damascus, where Deir al-Asafir is situated, have been outside President Bashar al-Assad's control almost since the start of the uprising which erupted five years ago and descended into civil war.

The area is controlled by different factions, including rebel forces covered by the truce, such as Jaish al-Islam, as well as Nusra Front [which is *not* covered by the truce].

The Observatory said 12 children, nine women, a teacher and an emergency response worker were among the 33 dead in Deir al-Asafir.

"Death toll from east Damascus air strikes rises to more than 30," [Reuters](#), 12:25 GMT, 1 April 2016.

U.N. Reports

On 22 Feb 2014, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139, which required parties in Syria to allow humanitarian aid and to stop targeting civilians. Although this Resolution was effective immediately, *all* of the parties in Syria ignored it. The U.N.

Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, issued monthly Reports on the situation in Syria, beginning March 2014.

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.

war crimes prosecution?

The Secretary General's recent monthly reports on Syria (required by Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191) called for criminal prosecution of people in Syria who had allegedly committed war crimes. For example:

In my statement to the General Assembly in New York on 28 September [2015], I called for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

Those who carry out such serious violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law must be held to account. I repeat my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

S/2015/813 (22 Oct 2015) at ¶29 and ¶63.

Throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, the fundamental rules of international humanitarian and human rights law are being violated with little or no accountability. I repeat my call that the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic be referred to the International Criminal Court.

S/2015/862 (11 Nov 2015) at ¶58.

The deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime and those responsible must be held accountable. I repeat my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

S/2015/962 (11 Dec 2015) at ¶54.

The deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of starvation as a weapon of war are war crimes, and those responsible must be held accountable. I repeat my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

S/2016/60 (21 Jan 2016) at ¶61.

But the Secretary General's report for February 2016 does *not* mention referral to the International Criminal Court, perhaps to avoid interfering with the negotiations in Geneva. Instead, the February report says:

Such actions are reprehensible and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. There must be accountability for these and other crimes.

S/2016/156 (18 Feb 2016) at ¶57.

The Secretary General's report for March 2016 mentions *neither* war crimes, referral to the International Criminal Court, *nor* accountability.

All parties who are imposing the siege and attacking medical facilities, as well as committing unlawful detention, must be reminded that these acts constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

S/2016/272 (23 Mar 2016) at ¶55.

Because Syria is *not* a party to the international treaty that established the International Criminal Court (ICC), jurisdiction of the ICC over crimes in Syria can only be established by a vote of the United Nations Security Council. In May 2014, France attempted to have the Council refer the Syrian matter to the ICC, but the referral was vetoed by both Russia and China. (See my essay for [May 2014](#).)

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has a Commission of Inquiry on human rights violations in Syria, beginning in the year 2011. On 15 March 2016, the chairman of that Commission of Inquiry, Paulo Pinheiro, said: "The adoption of measures that lay the ground for accountability need not and should not wait for a final peace agreement to be reached." [Reuters](#).

I am concerned about two things. First, prosecuting members of Assad's government for war crimes prosecution could derail peace negotiations in Geneva. Second, there is currently no way to arrest the alleged perpetrators of war crimes in Assad's government. For a fair trial, the defendant needs to be in the courtroom and participating in his/her defense. On the other hand, *after* the Security Council grants jurisdiction to the ICC over war crimes in Iraq and Syria, then the [U.S. Special Forces](#) could arrest leaders of ISIL and turn them over to the ICC.

I predict that sometime either Russia or Iran will offer Assad asylum and protection from prosecution for war crimes, perhaps in exchange for an early dismantling of Assad's government in Syria. (See my essay for [March 2015](#), search for "asylum" or "immunity"; also see my essay for [June 2015](#), search for "immunity".)

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. My essay for [February 2016](#) cites Russian claims of the number of airstrikes and provinces hit.

On 27 February 2016, Russia grounded its airplanes in Syria, in observance of the cessation of hostilities. [RIA-Novosti](#). On 29 Feb, Russian airplanes bombed Nusra north of the city of Aleppo, but most of the Russian airplanes remain grounded. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 15 March 2016, I searched the English-language RIA-Novosti website for "Syria airstrikes". The most recent report of Russian airstrikes in Syria was on 29 Feb, when

Russia bombed Nusra north of Aleppo. Although Russia bombed ISIL and Nusra — and possibly other targets — since the cessation of hostilities began on 27 Feb, Russia has *not* publicized either the number of sorties flown or the number of targets hit. This is in marked contrast to Russian reports during October, November, and December 2015. Even in January and early February 2016, there were weekly reports of the number of sorties and number of targets hit by Russian airplanes in Syria. The last weekly report was on 16 Feb. [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 14 March, Russian President Putin unexpectedly announced the Russian military will begin on 15 March "withdrawing the main part of our military factions from the Syrian Arab Republic". [RIA-Novosti](#) also says: "Putin also indicated that Russian forces will remain at the port of Tartus and Hmeymim airbase in Latakia." Apparently, there will be only a partial withdrawal of Russian military from the Hmeymim airbase. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).

Commentators suggested that the partial withdrawal of Russian aircraft from Syria — ending five months of bombing in Syria — will put pressure on Assad to make some concessions at the peace negotiations in Geneva. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 18 March, CENTCOM said that Russia had removed the majority of their fighter and bomber aircraft from Syria. [Reuters](#).

During 20-23 March, Russia did something useful with their aircraft and bombs — they attacked ISIL near Palmyra. The Russians claim they conducted 41 sorties, and hit 146 terrorist targets. The Russians claim to have destroyed "six command centers, 320 terrorists, five tanks, six artillery systems, two ammunition depots, and 15 vehicles". [RIA-Novosti](#)(24 Mar); [RIA-Novosti](#)(25 Mar). On 23 March, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's army was 0.85 km from Palmyra and expected to capture the town "in a few hours".

On 26 March, Russia claimed they conducted 40 sorties and attacked 158 targets in Palmyra in the past 24 hours. The Russians claim: "killing more than 100 militants and destroying four tanks, three artillery systems, four ammunition depots, and five units of motor vehicles [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 27 March, Assad's army liberated Palmyra from ISIL. Russia will assist in the removal of ISIL land mines and bombs from Palmyra. ISIL has controlled Palmyra since May 2015. The liberation of Palmyra is a significant victory for Assad, and a major defeat for ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 31 March, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported: "From March 7-27, Russian Aerospace Forces conducted some 500 sorties around Palmyra, hitting over 2,000 terrorist targets."

On 30 March, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported continuing airstrikes in Syria, after the liberation of Palmyra: "The Russian aircraft have delivered 23 night-time airstrikes against 54 terrorist targets, killing over 60 militants and destroying four command posts, six artillery pieces, three ammo depots, two fuel depots, 18 all-terrain vehicles, and an anti-aircraft gun." The Russians did not say *where* the airstrikes were located.

Russia/Assad airstrikes on hospitals

My essay for [October 2015](#) tersely mentioned "Médecins Sans Frontières complained that airstrikes in Syria during October had hit at least 12 hospitals, killing at least 35 people, including hospital staff" and cited two sources. My essay for [February 2016](#) has details on Russian airstrikes on hospitals in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, and cites more than ten sources.

On 16 Feb 2016, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a press release:

At least four hospitals and a school were hit in airstrikes yesterday [15 Feb 2016] in Syria.

....

While it is not yet clear whether these facilities were intentionally targeted, the sheer number of incidents raises huge question marks about the failure of the parties to the conflict to respect the special protections afforded to medical facilities and personnel under international humanitarian law.

Customary international humanitarian law affords special protection to hospitals, medical units and healthcare personnel, and Article 3, common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 — which is binding on all parties to the conflict in Syria — requires the wounded and sick be collected and cared for.

Depending on the circumstances, an airstrike on a hospital may constitute a war crime. Intentionally directing attacks against hospitals and places containing the sick and the wounded and against medical units using the Red Cross or Red Crescent emblem is a war crime, in a non-international armed conflict.

Attacks on hospitals and other medical facilities in Syria began as far back as the beginning of 2012. A 13 September 2015 report by the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, entitled "Assault on medical care in Syria" listed an appalling litany of attacks on hospitals and medical units over the past four years as well as numerous examples of the sick and wounded being deliberately denied medical assistance, primarily by Government forces and pro-Government militias.

Rupert Colville, "Press briefing notes on Syria and Iraq," [OHCHR](#), 16 Feb 2016.

On 18 Feb 2016, the president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) said in Geneva: Deliberate attacks against civilian infrastructure, including hospitals struggling to provide lifesaving assistance, are routine [in Syria].

....

The latest attack came just three days ago, on February 15th, in Ma'arat al-Numan, Idlib Province. At 9:00am, airstrikes destroyed a hospital supported by MSF. At least twenty-five people were killed, among them 9 medical personnel and 16 patients. Ten

others were wounded.

According to accounts from medical staff onsite, four missiles struck the hospital in an attack lasting about two minutes. Forty minutes later, after rescuers arrived, the site was bombed again.

These secondary strikes- in military jargon — known as “double taps” — that target rescue and medical personnel trying to save the injured are outrageous.

But it didn't stop there. A nearby hospital that received many of the wounded from the first strike was itself hit an hour later.

....

Equally shocking are the 101 aerial or shelling attacks that struck MSF-supported facilities over the last 13 months. Several were struck twice after the arrival of medical and rescue personnel. Patients have told us they're now too afraid to go to hospitals. Dr Joanne Liu, "Syria: Statement by Dr Joanne Liu," [MSF](#), 18 Feb 2016.

As a result of deliberate targeting of hospitals, MSF stopped providing GPS coordinates of its facilities to Assad's government and Russia. [The Guardian](#). This backfired, as Russia could then claim that it did *not* know the location of the MSF facilities. [Russia Today](#).

On 3 March 2016, Amnesty International accused Assad and Russia of deliberately targeting hospitals as part of their military strategy.

[Amnesty International] has gathered compelling evidence of at least six deliberate attacks on hospitals, medical centres and clinics in the northern part of the Aleppo Countryside governorate in the past 12 weeks. The attacks, which killed at least three civilians including a medical worker, and injured 44 more, continue a pattern of targeting health facilities in various parts of Syria which amounts to war crimes.

....

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, a local monitoring group, at least 27 hospitals, including eight in Aleppo governorate, have been targeted by Russian and Syrian government forces since September 2015. The Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) told Amnesty International that since December 2015 at least 13 hospitals had been targeted in Aleppo by airstrikes and one by a surface-to-surface missile on 15 February. A total of four medical staff workers and 45 civilians were killed in these 14 attacks.

Physicians for Human Rights has reported that, since the conflict began, at least 346 attacks on medical facilities have been carried out by parties to the conflict, with 705 health workers killed. Syrian government forces and their allies have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of these.

"Syrian and Russian forces targeting hospitals as a strategy of war," [Amnesty International](#), 3 Mar 2016.

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 1119 Iraqis killed in violence during March 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.

March 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 6 March at 21:23 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) reported that at least 47 people had been killed when an ISIL suicide bomber drove his fuel truck into a checkpoint at Hillah, about 95 km south of Baghdad. The following morning, [Reuters](#) reported at least 60 dead at 117 km south of Baghdad. The [Associated Press](#) reported 61 dead.

On 14 March 2016, the U.S. House of Representatives passed House Concurrent Resolution 75, which declares: "Expressing the sense of Congress that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria include war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide." The minorities specifically include Christians, Yezidis, and Turkmen. [House](#). The vote was 393 for the resolution, zero against the resolution, and 40 members not voting. [House](#).

On 17 March 2016, John Kerry made a formal declaration that ISIL had committed genocide in Syria and Iraq. [State](#). The [Associated Press](#) remarked that Kerry's declaration was "likely to change little in the conflict against the extremists." [Reuters](#) reports that Kerry's declaration "does not change U.S. military strategy or legal obligations."

On 25 March 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber exploded at a soccer stadium in Iskanderiyah, a town 45 km south of Baghdad. At least 29 people were killed. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The [NY Times](#) says the mayor was among the 31 dead. The [Washington Post](#) reports at least 41 dead on the morning of 26 March.

On 29 March, an ISIL suicide bomb in Baghdad killed 3 people. [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). [Al-Jazeera](#) says 7 people were killed.

Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

My comments: Such attacks have become an almost routine part of life in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. Not only are there attacks, but also there seems to be no effort by the Iraqi government to find and punish the attackers — an indication that civilization has collapsed in Iraq.

No Criminal Prosecution of Iraqi Army Officers

Back on 10 June 2014, ISIL quickly seized Mosul. Although the Iraqi army significantly outnumbered the ISIL terrorists, the Iraqi army simply fled instead of fighting against ISIL. (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria.) About a week later, there were news reports that Maliki had ordered the arrest of Iraqi army officers who deserted, instead of fighting ISIL. At that time, I was overwhelmed with reading and digesting the news from Iraq, so I ignored the criminal prosecution of these army officers.

On 17 June 2014, [Reuters](#) reports that Maliki sacked four top army officers in Mosul, because they "failed to fulfill their professional and military duties".

On 18 June 2014, [Reuters](#) reported that 59 officers will be tried in military court for fleeing from their posts. The same story also says on 17 June "Maliki dismissed four top generals and said they were being charged in military court for abandoning Mosul". Copy at [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon.

On 18 June 2014, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan reports that the four dismissed officers are "Lt. Gen.

Mahdi al-Gharawi, his deputy Maj. Gen. Abdul Rahman al-Handal Mahdi, and chief of staff Brigadier General Hassan Abdul Razzaq Ghazi", along with one Kurdish officer, Brigadier General Hidayat Abdul Karim. Rudaw reports that only the Kurd will be charged in military court, the other three were dismissed but not criminally charged.

On 19 June 2014, [The Daily Beast](#) reports that Lt. Gen. Mahdi Al Gharawi, who commanded the Iraqi army in Mosul, was accused of torture when he commanded a police unit in Baghdad during 2005-2008. Maliki not only granted Gharawi immunity from prosecution, but also promoted him to head the Iraqi army in Mosul. Gharawi is a Shiite, Mosul is predominantly Sunni — this is one of the sectarian abuses perpetrated by Maliki. On 17 June 2014, as mentioned above, Maliki finally sacked Gharawi.

On 15 July 2014, about a month after the order for a court martial of Gen. Karim, [Rudaw](#) published an interview with Karim. He is living in Erbil, avoiding prosecution. He claims his troops had no ammunition, and he did not learn about the fall of Mosul until a day after it occurred. "Karim said that 85 percent of the Iraqi army is dominated by Shiites, with Kurds and Sunnis treated with suspicion and as outcasts."

On 21 Oct 2014, the Iraqi defense minister promised to investigate the failing of the Iraqi army and hold them accountable. [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

On 12 Nov 2014, Iraqi prime minister sacked 36 Iraqi army officers. Note there was *no* attempt to punish these corrupt officers. (See my essay for [Nov 2014](#).)

On 23 Nov 2014, the [New York Times](#) reported on corruption in the Iraqi army, including army officers who sell weapons and ammunition and pocket the extra income. There is no mention of criminal prosecution for corrupt officers.

The conventional wisdom from journalists is that former prime minister Maliki wrecked the Iraqi army by replacing competent top officers with incompetent officers who were personally loyal to Maliki. See, e.g.,

- [Washington Post](#) ("... Maliki, who has been widely accused of promoting officers based on loyalty rather than merit.");
- [Washington Post](#) ("[U.S. officials] say [Maliki] assigned commanders on the basis of sectarian loyalty, diminishing military capabilities and undermining morale.");
- [Associated Press](#) ("Many have blamed the army's poor performance on al-Maliki, saying he replaced top officers with inexperienced or incompetent political allies in order to monopolize power.");
- [Christian Science Monitor](#) ("These [sectarian policies] fostered the promotion of incompetent Shiite officers on the basis of loyalty to Maliki, and a military culture filled with greed and corruption.");
- [Politico](#) ("... [Maliki] systematically purged the most capable senior officers from the Iraqi Army and replaced them with Shiite cronies who were personally loyal to him, but were incompetent — and, under fire, proved to be cowards.");
- [CNN](#), ("As then Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki tightened his grip on power between 2006 and 2013, the high command of the Iraqi military became a political football — with loyalty to al-Maliki prized above competence.");

- [Washington Post](#) (General Petraeus: "The proximate cause of Iraq's unraveling was the increasing authoritarian, sectarian and corrupt conduct of the Iraqi government and its leader [Maliki] after the departure of the last U.S. combat forces in 2011.").

While Maliki appears to be responsible for part of the blame for the incompetent Iraqi army in June 2014, Maliki was appointed one of three Vice-Presidents of Iraq on 8 Sep 2014. It seems strange that the person who wrecked the Iraqi army is not only avoiding criminal prosecution, but continues to be a leader in the Iraqi government.

On 13 April 2015, Abadi involuntarily retired more than 300 Iraqi army officers. Abadi gave no public explanation for the retirements. [Rudaw](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

On 17 May 2015, prime minister Abadi announced the dismissal of legal action against deserters from the Iraqi military, "as well as crimes against the military regime and the affairs of the service". [Iraqi News](#). No reasons were given for this end to legal prosecution. Perhaps there were too many defendants for a small number of prosecutors and judges. Perhaps Abadi wants to increase morale in the military by stopping prosecution of military personnel.

The failure to prosecute corrupt army officers may be more evidence that Iraq is a failed nation, which no longer enforces its laws. Karim *may* be a victim of ethnic discrimination and now a scapegoat.

On 29 June 2015, Abadi retired the chief of staff of the Iraqi army, General Zebari. The reason for the retirement was *not* publicly disclosed. Because there was no praise for Zebari's service, I assume that Abadi was dissatisfied with Zebari. [Daily Star](#)(AFP); [All Iraq News](#); [BAS News](#); [Iraqi News](#).

There is another problem that is *not* mentioned by journalists. Abadi may be short on well-trained, experienced officers to lead the Iraqi army. When the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, *all* of the Sunni military officers in Saddam Hussein's army became unemployable by the new Iraqi government, under the U.S. "de-Baathification" policy. This ban led to those experienced army officers joining Sunni insurgent groups, and later joining Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which became ISIL. As a result, ISIL now appears to have better military leadership than the Iraqi army. See e.g., [Washington Post](#), 4 April 2015; [Reuters](#), 18 June 2015; [Associated Press](#), 8 Aug 2015; [Daily Star](#), 10 Aug 2015. Further, in Abadi's first year in office, as mentioned above, Abadi forced more than 336 Iraqi army officers into retirement. This may have removed some incompetent and/or corrupt officers appointed by Maliki, but it also depleted the army of experienced officers. So, after the U.S. purge in 2003 and after Abadi's purge, the Iraqi army may now have a shortage of well-trained, experienced officers.

No Prosecution for Fall of Mosul

My essay for [August 2015](#) explained that on 17 Aug 2015, the Iraqi parliament quickly approved the Mosul Report, then referred the Report to the Judiciary, for investigation and criminal trial of 36 people. The Report recommends criminal prosecution of:

1. the former Iraqi prime minister (Nouri al-Maliki),
2. the former defense minister (Sadoun al-Dulaimi),
3. the former governor of Nineveh province (Atheel al-Nujaifi),
4. four top Iraqi army officers
 - A. chief of staff: Babakir Zebari,
 - B. assistant chief of staff: Obud Qanber,
 - C. ground forces commander: Ali Ghidan,
 - D. commander of Nineveh: Mahdi al-Gharrawi,
5. and 29 other people.

On 2 April 2016, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Mosul" after 21 August 2015, but I found no news about the investigation and prosecution of these suspects. I am concerned that the Iraqi Judiciary will "forget" to investigate and prosecute those who ordered the Iraqi army to flee from Mosul in June 2014.

No Prosecution for Rout at Ramadi

On 19 May 2015, a press release posted at Abadi's website says the Iraqi Council of Ministers have agreed to "directing harsh penalties to the indolent who led to negative impacts in Ramadi." [Abadi](#). Astoundingly, this comes just two days after Abadi dismissed prosecution for similar offenses in Mosul in June 2014.

On 21 May 2015, Abadi "open[ed] an investigation into the causes of the fall of the city of Ramadi" with the intention "to bring the guilty security leaders to the military courts". [Iraqi News](#); [Rudaw](#).

On 30 May 2015, Abadi reiterated his intent to investigate the rout at Ramadi and punish those leaders who gave orders to flee.

The prime minister also promised to take "legal action" against commanders who "left Ramadi without approval" and said the Iraqi government has created a committee to investigate the fall of the city.

"The Iraqi forces pulled out, not because they couldn't fight, but they have been given orders to withdraw," said Abadi.

"We will take those commanders to court who have destroyed the reputation of brave Iraqi commanders. We will remove them from security agencies," Abadi added. "PM Abadi says Ramadi codename is 'Labaik Ya Iraq'," [Rudaw](#), 30 May 2015.

On 16 August 2015, Abadi ordered the Iraqi army commanders in Ramadi on 17 May to face court martial for abandoning their positions. [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). Also on 16 August, [All Iraq News](#) reports that Abadi approved an investigative report on the rout at Ramadi.

On 2 April 2016, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Ramadi" after 21 August 2015, but I found no news about the prosecution of the Iraqi army commanders who ordered the army to flee from Ramadi.

No Criminal Prosecution for Employing "Ghost Soldiers"

My essays for [Nov 2014](#) and [Dec 2014](#) mention that corrupt Iraqi army officers maintained *at least* 50,000 fictitious "ghost soldiers" on the payroll, then pocketed the salaries of these fictitious soldiers.

On 19 May 2015, *The Washington Post* reported:

Ahmed al-Sharifi, an Iraqi political analyst, cited corruption as a major reason why the Iraqi army performed poorly in Ramadi. He estimated that there were as many as 23,000 "ghost soldiers" on the government payroll in the province — people listed as drawing salaries but who were not actually performing military service. The actual number of soldiers who fought to defend Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, was closer to 2,000, he said.

In November, Abadi [announced](#) as part of a preliminary investigation that at least 50,000 such "ghost soldiers" across Iraq had been receiving salaries, highlighting the level of corruption in a force that Washington spent billions of dollars to train and equip.

"When you have corruption at this scale, then fighting the Islamic State is going to be even more of a challenge," Sharifi said. "This is a major reason for the security and military collapse in Anbar."

Hugh Naylor, "Fall of Ramadi reflects failure of Iraq's strategy against ISIS, analysts say," [Washington Post](#), 19:04 EDT, 19 May 2015.

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

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

Iraq is a Failed Nation

Introduction

During an existential crisis — the invasion of Iraq by ISIL — the Iraqi parliament held infrequent meetings, had small attendance when they met, and made glacially slow progress on solving Iraq's problems. This abysmal performance of parliament was chronicled in my essays for [July 2014](#) through [February 2015](#). The data for July through October 2014 are summarized in my [table](#).

My essay for [June 2015](#) mentions corruption in Iraq, and criticism of the Iraqi government by journalists. The Iraqi parliament — which has failed to end corruption in the Iraqi army, and

failed to create a nonsectarian National Guard that integrates Sunni tribesmen and Shiite militias under the firm control of the federal government in Baghdad — was on vacation beginning 31 May until 1 July 2015. My essay for [July 2015](#) mentions that the Iraqi parliament was on vacation again from 6 July to 25 July 2015.

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

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

March 2016

Back on 18 Feb 2016, the Iraqi government announced it would reduce financial support of Shiite militias by 30%, because low oil prices had caused a financial crisis in the Iraqi government. [Associated Press](#).

On 3 March, Fitch, a credit rating agency, downgraded Iraq's outlook from stable to negative. Iraq now has a B- rating from Fitch. [Reuters](#).

On 5 March, the [Washington Post](#) published a news article with the title: "Iraq is broke. Add that to its list of worries." Part of the problem is that the Iraqi economy is heavily dependent on export of oil, and oil prices have fallen from \$110/barrel to \$30/barrel. Another problem is the widespread corruption in the Iraqi government that wastes money.

U.S. combat 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.

Sometime between 10 and 17 February 2016, the U.S. Special Forces in Iraq conducted a raid

and captured a senior ISIL leader. The operation was disclosed by anonymous U.S. officials on 1 March, but details are few. The captured leader has been interrogated by U.S. agents, and he will soon be handed over to Iraqi government. [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 9 March, anonymous Iraqi government officials said the senior ISIL leader captured by the U.S. Special Forces in February was Sleiman Daoud al-Afari, who formerly worked in Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons program, and who was — until captured — director of ISIL's chemical weapons program. [Associated Press](#). See the daily report of airstrikes for [9 March](#), below, for more on this topic.

The Pentagon does *not* want publicity for the U.S. Special Forces in Iraq, partly because the Iraqi government is very sensitive about foreign combat troops in Iraq, and partly to keep secret operational details to deprive ISIL of information.

On 21 March, the U.S. military revealed that it had created Fire Base Bell sometime around 7 March, to protect U.S. troops at an Iraqi military base near Makhmour. Fire Base Bell has approximately 150 Marines and four 155mm howitzers. Although Obama has limited the number of U.S. troops in Iraq to 3870, the Marines at Fire Base Bell are *not* included in this limit. [Pentagon](#) press briefing; [Associated Press](#); [Associated Press](#)(24 Aug). ISIL learned of Fire Base Bell before the U.S. taxpayers learned of this combat mission. On Saturday, 19 March, ISIL fired two rockets into the outpost, killing one U.S. Marine. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#). On the morning of 21 March, ISIL again attacked Fire Base Bell, this time with rifle fire.

In my opinion, the failure to include the Marines at Fire Base Bell in the limited number of U.S. troops in Iraq is a deliberate evasion of Obama's limit. Further, Fire Base Bell is *not* considered a combat mission, because it is behind the front lines, despite the fact that ISIL has attacked Fire Base Bell twice in three days.

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](#), [January 2016](#), and [February 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. After these

cities are liberated, then ISIL will simply counter-attack from the surrounding countryside.

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.

March 2016: Ramadi

On 4 March, a United Nations inspection team visited Ramadi and concluded that the destruction in Ramadi was worse than anywhere else in Iraq. [Reuters](#) says: "the main hospital and train station had both been destroyed, along with thousands of other buildings. Local officials told the UN team 64 bridges and much of the electricity grid had been ruined." The Iraqi government can afford *neither* to remove ISIL bombs from Ramadi *nor* rebuild Ramadi.

During 1-12 March 2016, there was a total of 32 airstrikes near Ramadi to attack ISIL.

(See [below](#).) This shows that the liberation of Ramadi was continuing in early March.

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".

Beginning in July 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.

March 2016: Mosul

On 6 March 2016, the Associated Press reported:

It will take many more months to prepare Iraq's still struggling military for a long-anticipated assault on the Islamic State group's biggest stronghold in the country, the city of Mosul, U.S. and Iraqi officials say — and it may not even be possible to retake it this year, despite repeated vows by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

As the U.S. and its allies furiously work to train thousands more troops for the daunting task of retaking Iraq's second largest city, Islamic State fighters are waging a diversion campaign of bloody suicide attacks in Baghdad and elsewhere. Their aim is to force Iraq's already overburdened security forces to spread even thinner to protect the capital and other cities rather than prepare the Mosul operation.

....

.... Estimates of the number of IS fighters in Mosul vary from a few thousand to "not more than 10,000," according to the coalition.

The Iraqi military is still struggling to regroup. When Mosul fell to IS, more than a third of the military disintegrated as thousands of soldiers shed their uniforms and dropped their weapons to flee. In the following months, tens of thousands more Iraqi troops were identified as "ghost soldiers" — nonexistent troops whose pay was pocketed by commanders.

The U.S.-led coalition began a training program months later in December 2014, but so far only 18,500 soldiers and security forces have been trained in courses which last around seven weeks. Experts question whether such a crash course is adequate preparation. Coalition and Iraqi officials estimate eight to 12 brigades, or an estimated 24,000 to 36,000 troops, will be needed for the operation to capture Mosul.

Susannah George & Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "As army rebuilds, Iraqi assault to retake Mosul months away," [Associated Press](#), 13:32 GMT, 6 March 2016.

On 24 March, the Iraqi military announced the operation to liberate Mosul had officially begun. The Associated Press reported:

The Iraqi military backed by U.S.-led coalition aircraft on Thursday [24 Mar] launched a long-awaited operation to recapture the northern city of Mosul from Islamic State militants, a military spokesman said.

In the push, Iraqi forces retook several villages on the outskirts of the town of Makhmour, east of Mosul, early in the morning on Thursday and hoisted the Iraqi flag there, according to the spokesman for the Joint Military Command, Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool.

....

Some U.S. and Iraqi officials have said it may not even be possible to retake it this year, despite repeated vows by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

....

Despite Thursday's announcement, the number of Iraqi troops needed to carry out the operation to retake Mosul, nearly two years after it fell to IS, is not yet in place and training efforts by the U.S.-led coalition are still ongoing.

....

Coalition and Iraqi officials estimate that an eight to 12 brigades, or an estimated 24,000 to 36,000 troops, will be needed for the Mosul operation. So far, only 2,000 to 3,000 Iraqi troops have been deployed at Makhmour base.

"Iraq says it's launched offensive to recapture IS-held Mosul," [Associated Press](#), 10:38 GMT, 24 Mar 2016.

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

Beginning in August 2014, I have included this section in my essays. In the USA and Western Europe, many Christians do *not* personally know any Muslim person, so the only time these Christians encounter Muslims is in reading about atrocities of Islamic terrorists. That is a public relations problem for mainstream Muslims, as the reputation of the Islamic religion is besmirched by Islamic terrorists, who act in the name of their interpretation of Islamic theology.

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.

The same broad public relations campaign could satisfy the three goals of (1) protecting the reputation of mainstream Islam, (2) stopping the flow of foreign fighters into Syria, *and* (3) reducing financial support of Islamic terrorism.

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.
- On 25 March 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military had killed Haji Imam, "who was an ISIL senior leader, serving as a finance minister and who is also responsible for some external affairs and plots." Imam is also known as Abdul-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) spells the dead man's name as "Haji Iman — an alias for Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli".

However the deaths of bin Laden and al-Awlaki had little effect on Al-Qaeda, and it is expected that the deaths of the leaders in June 2015 will also have little effect on Islamic terrorism. [Washington Post](#); [Haaretz](#); [BBC](#); [Associated Press](#), 16 June 2015; [Associated Press](#), 2 July 2015.

Al-Qaeda continued after these deaths because Al-Qaeda is driven by an *idea* of Islamic extremism. If we want to stop Islamic terrorism, we need to kill its ideology, something that requires persuasion and propaganda, *neither* bombs *nor* bullets.

This lesson is not difficult to understand. The U.S. Government continued after the deaths of President Roosevelt in 1945 and President Kennedy in 1963. Successful organizations are capable of continuing under new leadership. Indeed, the U.S. Constitution, 22nd Amendment, limits a president to a maximum of two terms (8 years).

Mullah Omar was the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 1996. Omar was reclusive and not seen in public since 2001. On 29 July 2015, there were unconfirmed reports that Omar had died in a hospital in Karachi, Pakistan in April 2013. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 30 July 2015, the reports were confirmed and the Taliban appointed a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Express Tribune](#) in Pakistan; [Associated Press](#). This example shows us how unimportant a leader is to a terrorist organization. The Taliban functioned successfully with a

dead leader for more than two years! Journalists report that Omar's death may make peace negotiations more difficult, because some Taliban want to continue fighting. But — regardless of who leads the Taliban — there will be some Taliban who want to continue fighting, in the hope for a total victory.

Admittedly, the world is a better place with ISIL terrorists — of any rank — dead. However, killing a few leaders of ISIL will *not* cause ISIL to collapse. Killing leaders of ISIL is a temporary inconvenience to ISIL, *not* a death knell. It is also possible that a new ISIL leader may be more competent or more vicious than the previous leader. Continually attacking the ideology of Islamic terrorism is more detrimental to a terrorist organization than the brief inconvenience of killing a terrorist leader.

Despite the essential importance of countering the ideology of Islamic terrorism, during the first year of the U.S. war against ISIL, the Sawab Center in the UAE was the only organization created and dedicated to countering ideology. (See my essay for [July 2015](#).)

ISIL is *not* defeated

Politicians love to give speeches claiming that the enemy is being defeated. In response to Obama's speech on 6 July 2015, I wrote a rebuttal that documents that ISIL is not only functional, but also ISIL has spread to other nations where it engages in terrorism. For example:

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but the Iraqis have been unable to begin the liberation of Mosul.
2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.
5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at at Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).

9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."

21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
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.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels.

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

As of February 29, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$6.5 billion and the average daily cost is \$11.4 million for 571 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 15 Mar 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 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On Feb. 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL buildings.
- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles and two ISIL buildings.
- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes destroyed an ISIL building, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL building, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL staging area, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, and damaged a separate ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, two ISIL tunnel systems, and two ISIL VBIEDs.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tikrit, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL mortar positions.

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

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

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

2 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On Mar. 1, 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 14 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, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL security headquarters.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL buildings and two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike suppressed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Near Fallujah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

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

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

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

3 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 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 Al Hasakah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, three ISIL buildings, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL vehicles and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Abyad, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed ISIL communication equipment.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 27 ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck four ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, 12 ISIL assembly areas, and 25 ISIL bed-down locations, and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL front-end loader,

- an ISIL bed down location, and an ISIL petroleum, oil and lubricant truck.
- Near Samarra, two strikes struck two separate large ISIL tactical units and destroyed 9 ISIL vehicles, three ISIL VBIEDs, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL supply cache, and three ISIL fuel trucks.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL mortar position, and suppressed an ISIL mortar fire position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

4 March 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL vehicle, and damaged an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck two ISIL petroleum pipelines.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 16 ISIL vehicles.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL fighting positions, and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL bed down location, and three ISIL fighting positions.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 4 Mar 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 4 Mar 2016.

5 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 4, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using rocket artillery and attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 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 Al Hawl, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL buildings and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and damaged an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bed down location.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL mortar positions, four ISIL VBIEDs, and seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL staging area, an ISIL tunnel, and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes 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](#), 5 Mar 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 5 Mar 2016.

6 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using fighter, attack, 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 attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device, and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL building, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL improvised weapons factory and an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed three ISIL bulldozers.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL weapons production facility and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL front end-loader.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL assembly area.

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

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

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

7 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 6, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 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, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL building, four ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL front-end loader.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL used bridge.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position, and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tikrit, two strikes struck an ISIL improvised weapons factory and an ISIL headquarters.

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

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

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

8 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 7, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter 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 rocket artillery, attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL house borne improvised explosive device (HBIED).

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL gas and oil separation plant modular refinery, and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck three ISIL tactical units and an ISIL facility, and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL heavy machine gun position, and an ISIL building.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL staging area, and an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Habbaniya, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL used bridge.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position, and two ISIL supply caches.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Waleed, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL supply cache.

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

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

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

9 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 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, two strikes destroyed two ISIL cranes.

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck an ISIL modular refinery and an ISIL natural gas processing plant.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL mortar fire positions.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar fire position and an ISIL assembly area and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

In February 2016, U.S. Special Forces captured the head of ISIL's chemical weapons program in Iraq. (see [above](#)) Information from his interrogation was recently used to target two airstrikes on ISIL's chemical weapons facilities near Mosul. [NY Times](#); [CNN](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 10 March, the Pentagon emphasized that the ISIL chemical weapons program had been "disrupted and degraded", but *not* destroyed, by the airstrikes. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

10 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 9, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and ground-attack, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and an ISIL logistics facility.

Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL supply caches, 11 ISIL improvised explosive devices (IED), three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL VBIED, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL tactical vehicle, 12 ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL supply cache, and six ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

11 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

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

Iraq

- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and six ISIL staging areas.

- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, two ISIL supply caches, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, two ISIL staging areas, and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes destroyed an ISIL supply cache and two ISIL mortar firing positions and damaged four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket system.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL facility and an ISIL bed down location.

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

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

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

12 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 11, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally 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 Hawl, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL mortar systems.
- Near Dayr Ar Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL gas and oil separation plant well head.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL artillery piece, two ISIL weapons caches, 10 ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL rocket position, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position and three ISIL tunnel systems and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL weapons cache.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 12 Mar 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 12 Mar 2016.

13 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 12, 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 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar position, and an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL financial storage center.
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), three ISIL fighting positions, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL used bridge.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL assembly area, and an ISIL rocket position.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 13 Mar 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 13 Mar 2016.

14 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 13, 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 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

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

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL tunnel entrance and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed five ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

15 March 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near AL Hawl, three strikes destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near AL Huwayjah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Hit, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL improvised weapons factory and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL training camp and two ISIL improvised explosive device factories and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two large ISIL tactical units.

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

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

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

16 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally 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 Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL assembly area, six ISIL rocket rails, two ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece and an ISIL mortar position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed four ISIL assembly areas and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, three strikes destroyed three ISIL heavy machine guns and four ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

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

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

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

17 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally 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 Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL staging area and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Hit, four strikes struck two ISIL improvised weapons factories and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED), and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed an ISIL machine gun position.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed three ISIL bed down locations and four ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Mosul, nine strikes struck seven ISIL propaganda sites and two ISIL manufacturing factories.

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

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

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

18 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, damaged an ISIL fighting position and suppressed a second fighting position.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Mar'a, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions and damaged an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel and an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Kisik, three strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL rocket rail, an ISIL used bridge section, and three ISIL vehicles.
- Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine gun positions.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

The number and location of airstrikes in Syria was corrected in the 19 March press release.

19 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike 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 rocket artillery and ground-attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket position and an ISIL mortar position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, four strikes struck two ISIL bed down locations and two ISIL staging areas.
- Near Al Huwayja, one strike destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Hit, seven strikes struck an ISIL training camp, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factories, an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) factory and two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tunnel, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL supply cache, and three ISIL vehicles and damaged an ISIL-used bridge section and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL fighting position.

Additionally, on the March 18 release, two strikes were duplicated in AL Hawl and Mar'a, Syria due to administrative error. The following is a summary of the correct strikes in both Al Hawl and Mar'a from the March 18 release:

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, and damaged an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, and damaged an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

20 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 19, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria [sic] and Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and suppressed two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL bunker.

- Near Hit, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), two ISIL rocket rails, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL supply cache, and three ISIL rocket rails and suppressed an ISIL sniper position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL supply caches and an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL supply cache and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

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

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

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

21 March 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Kobani, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Hit, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed three ISIL supply caches.

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

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

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

22 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 21, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack and fighter 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 and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck two ISIL staging facilities.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed ISIL engineering equipment and damaged an ISIL used bridge section.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

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

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

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

23 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 22, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight 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 rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted

aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mar'a, six strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) cache, an ISIL tunnel, and four ISIL vehicles.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL weapons storage facility.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL front end loader, an ISIL machine gun position, and an ISIL bed down location.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL staging areas.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed two ISIL staging areas and two ISIL supply caches.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and three ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL headquarters, an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL used bridge section.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position and an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

The 23 March press release erroneously reported two airstrikes near Hit in Iraq, and an erroneous total of 17 airstrikes, as corrected in 24 March press release. Also the entry for Hit appears at the bottom of the Iraq list, instead of in its proper alphabetical position. I have inserted the corrections above, so that no one sees erroneous information and no one needs to look at two press releases.

24 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 23, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 26 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Hit, three strikes struck an ISIL weapons storage facility and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail and five ISIL bunkers.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL command and control node, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and six ISIL assembly areas and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck an ISIL communication facility and destroyed an ISIL used bridge section and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, five strikes struck five ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and four ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL assembly area and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

25 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack aircraft

against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL tunnel entrances.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL staging areas.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Mosul, one strike destroyed two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and two ISIL assembly areas and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Waleed, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

26 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 25, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive

device (VBIED) and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL artillery piece and three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Hit, five strikes struck an ISIL improvised weapons factory, an ISIL communications facility, an ISIL weapons storage facility and two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed an ISIL artillery piece and suppressed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL supply caches and three ISIL assembly areas and suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Qayyarah, six strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL vehicle, and five ISIL assembly areas and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

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

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

27 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 26, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack and ground-attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes struck an ISIL staging facility.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece and two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL security headquarters and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes suppressed an ISIL rocket firing position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL assembly areas and suppressed two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL surface to air firing position, and an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

28 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed two ISIL bed down locations and two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL security headquarters and an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL machine gun, and an ISIL supply cache and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL assembly area.

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

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

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

29 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 28, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria [sic] and Iraq. In Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted four strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL bed down location and an ISIL safe house.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed two ISIL assembly areas and suppressed an ISIL machine gun position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed three ISIL assembly areas.

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

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

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

30 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using ground-attack, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL bunkers.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL boat.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL safe house

and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

- Near Mosul, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL tunnels and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Makhmur, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL assembly area and an ISIL fighting position.

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

[Central Command](#), 30 Mar 2016.

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

31 March 2016: airstrikes

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

On March 30, 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 against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 25 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL defensive fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike damaged an ISIL defensive fighting position.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL safe house and destroyed two ISIL supply caches, 15 ISIL rockets, three ISIL bunkers, and an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Kirkuk, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL assembly areas and an ISIL bed down location.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL bed down location, two ISIL safe houses, an ISIL fighting position, and suppressed two ISIL mortar firing

positions.

- Near Qayyarah, four strikes struck an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) factory and an ISIL communications facility and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, four strikes destroyed four ISIL assembly areas, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL tunnel system, and an ISIL improvised ferry system.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL communications facility.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 31 Mar 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 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 disenchanted with their new home, and some will become radicalized. The radicalization will most likely occur via the Internet, but could also occur from personal contact with Islamic radicals in Europe.
2. It is possible that some Islamic terrorists will enter Europe along with migrants. These could be terrorists sent to recruit more fighters for ISIL or Al-Qaeda. Or they could be Europeans returning from battle in Syria, but using a new name to avoid criminal prosecution for fighting in Syria.

This is a subject that humanitarians avoid considering, as the humanitarians welcome migrants to Europe.

In mid-September 2015, I wrote that some "migrants will become disenchanted with their new home". This has already happened. On 19 October 2015, 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 2015, [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 2016, [Reuters](#) reports the Iraqi embassy in Berlin issued 1400 passports for migrants to return to Iraq since the end of October 2015. On 7 March 2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iraqis were "disappointed" in Europe and were returning to Iraq.

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.

Three German states (Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony-Anhalt) held elections for their state legislatures on 13 March 2016. The anti-immigrant party, Alternative für Deutschland, came in second place in Saxony-Anhalt, and made a strong showing in the other two states. These results indicate widespread dissatisfaction with Merkel's policy of

welcoming Muslim immigrants. [Reuters](#); [tagesschau](#) at ARD; [Der Spiegel](#).

On 18 March 2016, the European Union and Turkey reached a new agreement about Muslim migrants to Europe. The EU will pay Turkey US\$ 6.6 billion for housing of refugees in Turkey during 2016-2018. Turkey promises to end the flow of boat people across the Aegean Sea to Greece. Those boat people who do reach Greece will be returned to Turkey. Europe will accept some refugees from Syria, but *not* from other nations. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); Text of agreement at [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 24 March 2016, Poland refused to accept more Islamic migrants, because of the Islamic terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March. [Associated Press](#).

Immediately after the Islamic attacks on the office of the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical newspaper in Paris in Jan 2015, there was a slogan "Je Suis Charlie". And immediately after the Islamic attacks in Brussels on 22 March, there was a slogan "Je Suis Bruxelles". Now there is a new slogan: "Je suis sick of this shit". [France24](#); [NY Times](#). But one needs to be extremely careful. Instead of "sick of this shit", if one were to say "sick of Muslims", one might be arrested for having an unapproved thought. Indeed, a man in England was arrested on 23 Mar 2016 for inciting racial hatred. [BBC](#); [Evening Standard](#); [Associated Press](#). (On 25 March, charges were dismissed, although it is possible he will be charged later. [Associated Press](#).) And Dutch anti-immigrant politician Geert Wilders is facing criminal trial on hate speech charges. [BBC](#). Personally, I am an absolutist in matters of freedom of speech: freedom of speech includes the freedom to be offended. Hate speech statutes are an attempt by the majority to force everyone to conform their speech to what pleases the majority, which is a blatant attempt by governments to impose orthodoxy on its citizens.

Calais, France

Since April 2015, thousands of migrants have lived in a shantytown in Calais, waiting to illegally enter the United Kingdom via the tunnel under the English Channel. In February 2016, there were approximately 4000 migrants — the exact number is unknown — living in the camp in Calais. On 12 Feb 2016, France decided to expel approximately 1000 migrants who are living in the southern part of the camp at Calais. [Associated Press](#) (12Feb); [Associated Press](#) (19Feb); [Reuters](#)(12Feb). On 25 Feb 2016, a French court in Lille approved the closing of the southern part of the migrant camp at Calais. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 29 Feb 2016, the French government began dismantling huts in the southern part of the migrant camp. Apparently, the migrants set fires in the camp, which destroyed more huts. Most of the huts had been abandoned and were now filled with garbage. Reuters reports: "about 150-200 migrants and activists threw stones [at police]". French police fired tear gas in an attempt to evict the migrants and control the ensuing riot. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#).

On 16 March 2016, French authorities announced the southern portion of the migrant camp at Calais was "fully dismantled." [Associated Press](#).

capture of Abdeslam

On 13 November 2015, a group of Muslim terrorists killed 130 people in Paris, France. Since then, police in Europe have been seeking to arrest Salah Abdeslam, who was apparently the only surviving attacker. See my essay for [November 2015](#).

On 18 March 2016, police arrested Abdeslam in the Molenbeek district of Brussels. Abdeslam was shot in the leg and briefly in a hospital, before being moved to jail on 19 March. [Associated Press](#)(18 Mar); [Associated Press](#)(19 Mar); [Reuters](#)(19 Mar). The [Associated Press](#) reports that false Syrian passports and fake Belgian identity cards were found by police on 15 March in an apartment where Abdeslam's fingerprints were found.

The [Associated Press](#) reports that Abdeslam intended to be a suicide bomber at the stadium in Paris, but he decided *not* to detonate, for undisclosed reasons. The AP says the man arrested with Abdeslam "used fake Syrian and Belgian documents in two different names." See also [Reuters](#), which reports: "it seems [Abdeslam] was in Brussels all or most of the time" since the 13 Nov attacks.

22 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

On Tuesday, 22 March 2016, there were a series of attacks in Brussels:

1. At 07:58 Brussels time, two bombs exploded at the Brussels airport, first at the American Airlines baggage check-in and then near a Starbucks cafe.
2. At 09:10 Brussels time, a bomb exploded in a train at the Maelbeek metro [subway] station, near the European Union headquarters.

At 14:47 GMT on 22 March, [Reuters](#) said the public television in Belgium reported 14 dead at the airport and 20 dead in the subway. "Many of the dead and wounded at the airport were badly injured in the legs, one airport worker told Reuters, suggesting at least one bomb in a bag on the floor." A 16:05 GMT version of the same Reuters news article added: "Belgian media published a security camera picture of three young men pushing laden luggage trolleys through the airport and reported that police suspected them of being the attackers. They said two were suspected of having blown themselves up while police were hunting the third."

Police found an unexploded suicide bomb belt at the Brussels airport, suggesting that one attacker decided not to detonate. Nails were packed around the explosives in the airport, in the traditional Islamic way, to increase maiming. Amaq news agency in Syria reported that ISIL claimed responsibility for the bombings in Brussels.

There was speculation that the bombings in Brussels were conducted by remaining members of Abdeslam's group of terrorists, who might fear that Abdeslam would tell police the identities of members. According to this speculation, the members detonated their bombs before they could be arrested by police. However, terrorism experts said that the planning for the Brussels attacks certainly began *before* Abdeslam's arrest on 18 March.

Islamic scholars at Al-Azhar University in Egypt declared that the Brussels attacks "violate the tolerant teachings of Islam". [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Al-Manar TV](#) in Lebanon. News media in Europe and the USA ignored this news from Al-Azhar. And there seems to be little other condemnation of the Brussels attacks by Muslim opinion leaders. As I mention [above](#), these continuing Islamic terror attacks will lead many non-Muslims to associate terrorism with the Muslim religion.

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 22 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "Brussels attacks: 34 killed and hundreds wounded as Islamic State claims responsibility for airport and Metro bombings — live," [The Telegraph](#), live blog on 22 March 2016.
- "The Latest: Peruvian woman killed in Brussels airport attack," [Associated Press](#), blog ends 03:02 GMT on 23 Mar 2016.
- "Brussels: Islamic State launches attacks on airport and station — as it happened," [The Guardian](#), live blog ends at 04:53 GMT on 23 Mar 2016.
- "Police hunt suspect after Islamic State kills 30 in Brussels suicide attacks," [Reuters](#), 24:32 GMT on 22 March.
- "Islamic State claims deadly bombings in Brussels," [Associated Press](#), 23:46 GMT on 22 March. (An earlier title was "At least 31 dead in bombings of Brussels airport, subway".)
- "Brussels explosions: What we know about airport and metro attacks," [BBC](#) on 22 March.
- "Islamic State claims Brussels blasts: Amaq agency," [Reuters](#), 15:48 GMT on 22 March.
- "Brussels attacks 'were accelerated after Abdeslam's arrest'," [France24](#) on 22 March.

23 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

On the morning of 23 March, the day after the attacks, the toll in Brussels was 31 dead and more than 270 wounded. The 31 dead does *not* include the 3 Islamic suicide bombers. Some people included the 3 dead terrorists in the toll, giving 34 dead, but I consider it immoral to include criminals with victims.

At 19:00 GMT, the Belgian Health Minister told journalists there were "more than 300 wounded" and "61 patients are in intensive care".

The taxi driver who took the three terrorists to the airport gave police the address of the house from which the terrorists departed. In a search of that house, police found 15 kg of

triacetone triperoxide (TATP), a highly unstable explosive. Terrorists like TATP because it does not contain nitrogen, and therefore TATP evades chemical instrumentation that detects nitrogen in vapor from explosives. Terrorists also like TATP because it can be manufactured from easy-to-obtain ingredients, e.g., acetone and hydrogen peroxide. But preliminary tests in the airport show those bombs were ammonium nitrate. [Washington Post](#), 14:10 GMT; [NBC News](#), 14:30 GMT; [The Guardian](#), 16:36 GMT.

Ironically, a note on a discarded computer at the house mentioned in the previous paragraph shows the terrorists at the airport feared that police would soon arrest them. The Islamic terrorists preferred to die as suicide bombers than to spend life in prison. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#).

The government of Turkey arrested Ibrahim El-Bakraoui in June 2015, because he was a "militant". [Anadolu](#); [Reuters](#). The government of Belgium was unable to link Ibrahim to terrorism. Ibrahim was deported from Turkey to The Netherlands in July 2015. Eight months later, Ibrahim was a suicide bomber at the Brussels airport.

Najim Laachraoui was the other suicide bomber at the Brussels airport. Authorities believe Najim made the bombs that were used in the Paris attacks on 13 Nov 2015. This links the Paris and Brussels attacks.

The Brussels airport was closed after the attack on 22 March and remained closed for an additional three days, 23-25 March. The Brussels airport has about 600 flights/day, so being closed for four days means that 2400 flights were cancelled or diverted to other airports. If there are 100 people per flight, that would inconvenience approximately a quarter-million passengers.

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 23 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "Brussels attacks: suicide bomber was known militant deported from Turkey to Europe, president says — live," [The Telegraph](#), live blog on 23 March 2016.
- "The Latest: Officials: Paris bombmaker among Brussels dead," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 20:07 GMT on 23 March.
- "Brussels suicide bomber el-Bakraoui 'caught in Turkey last June' — as it happened," [The Guardian](#) live blog ends at 06:05 GMT on 24 March.
- "Bomb attacks show how Belgium became an incubator of terror," [Washington Post](#), 23 Mar 2016.

On 23 March, Yisrael Katz — Israel's Minister of of transport, intelligence and atomic energy — made an undiplomatic remark about the Brussels attacks:

If in Belgium they continue to eat chocolate and continue to enjoy life and to appear to be big liberals and democrats and they don't define that some of the Muslims who are sitting there are from terror groups, they won't be able to fight them.

Europe and the US aren't prepared to define that the war is on Islamic terror. When

your definition isn't right and doesn't exist, you can't lead a global war. "Israeli minister pans Belgians for eating chocolate instead of fighting terror," [Times of Israel](#), 23 March 2016. Also see [Jerusalem Post](#) for a different translation.

My comment is that it was *unnecessary* to: (1) make the remark about "eat chocolate", and (2) make the remark about "enjoy life" instead of fighting terrorism. Further, the timing of the remarks a day after the terrorist attacks was cruel. But I agree with the substance of Katz's remarks that is necessary to call *Islamic terrorism* by its name. And I agree that political correctness (i.e., "big liberals") gets in the way of fighting Islamic terrorism in Europe and the USA.

24 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

On 24 March, the Brussels airport cancelled all flights on 24-27 March, making six consecutive days that the airport is closed.

As police in Brussels worked frantically to prevent more Islamic terrorist attacks, six people were arrested in Brussels on 24 March.

On the morning of 24 March, police in Paris arrested a suspected terrorist that prevented "a planned bombing in France that was at an advanced stage." [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 24 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "Brussels attacks: Six arrested by Belgian police while Paris raid foils attack in 'advanced stages' — live," [The Telegraph](#), live blog on 24 March 2016.
- "Belgian ministers 'offered to resign' over Brussels attacks — as it happened," [The Guardian](#), live blog on 24 March 2016.
- "The Latest: Prosecutors say 6 arrested in Brussels attacks," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 23:05 GMT on 24 March 2016.
- "Brussels attacks: arrests made in Paris and Belgium police raids — as it happened," [The Guardian](#), live blog ends at 01:20 GMT on 25 March.
- "Six arrests in Brussels police operation after bombings," [Reuters](#), on 24 March 2016.

I make a comment about the revolting Islamic terrorist attacks in Brussels. The laws of war are clear that it is forbidden to deliberately attack civilians (i.e., noncombatants) the way Islamic terrorists target people in airports, subways, markets, and other public places. But the Islamic terrorists violate another international law, by packing nails around their bombs to increase maiming and suffering, in a way analogous to the use of prohibited hollow-point bullets in warfare. An official at a Belgian military hospital grimly commented "These bastards sure know what they're doing." See, e.g., [CBS News](#); [NY Daily News](#). Then there

is the gruesome X-ray image of a steel bolt with a length of 7.5 cm in a victim's thorax, near their heart. A bolt does *not* belong there. It was put there by an Islamic terrorist. Look at the published X-ray image: [Express](#); [Daily Mail](#); [The Independent](#); [news.com.au](#); [stuff.co.nz](#). Regardless of one's religion, it *should* be immoral to use human creativity to deliberately increase suffering of innocent people. The emotional impact of seeing the murder and maiming of innocent people by Islamic terrorists could easily produce calls for the complete and total extermination of *all* ISIL and Al-Qaeda, to prevent more innocent people from being attacked.

25 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

On 25 March, Belgian prosecutors admitted that, after Abdeslam was arrested on 18 March, they failed to ask Abdeslam about future attack(s) in Belgium. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#). This added to the failure of Belgian authorities to ask Turkey about Ibrahim El-Bakraoui's crimes in June 2015. However, the two Bakraoui brothers who exploded in Brussels on 22 March were both on the U.S. terror watch list, showing that it was possible to identify them as potential terrorists. [Reuters](#).

On 25 March, police in Brussels arrested another three Muslim terrorists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 25 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "The Latest: Brussels victim was heading to NY honeymoon," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 20:02 GMT on 25 March.
- "Sources say Ibrahim El Bakraoui was on US counterterrorism watch list before Paris attacks — live," [The Telegraph](#), live blog ends at 06:16 GMT on 26 March.

26 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

Security cameras recorded three terrorists pushing luggage trollies in the Brussels airport before the explosions on the morning of 22 March. Two of those terrorists were killed in the airport when their luggage detonated. The third terrorist fled from the airport after his luggage failed to detonate. (The third terrorist's luggage later spontaneously detonated in the airport.) Police have been seeking the third terrorist.

On 26 March, it was announced that police now believe the third terrorist at the airport is Fay al Cheffou, a supporter of Islamic terrorism who was previously known to police in Brussels. He is a Brussels resident of Moroccan origin. He was arrested on 24 March.

A public "March against Fear" was planned for 27 March in Brussels, but the mayor and interior minister both asked the organizers to cancel the march because police are already overworked with the investigation of the previous bombings, so police are not available to provide security for the march.

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 26 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "The Latest: Italian police arrest Algerian wanted by Belgium," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 03:22 GMT on 27 March.
- "Brussels attacks: 'Man in the hat' charged with terrorism and murder as nuclear security guard killed — latest," [The Telegraph](#), live blog ends at 02:49 GMT on 27 March.

27 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

On 27 March, it was announced that police in Italy had yesterday arrested Djamel Eddine Ouali, an Algerian man who was wanted in Belgium on an arrest warrant issued in January 2016. He allegedly produced fraudulent identification documents, including documents used by the Islamic terrorists who attacked Paris and Brussels. [Washington Post](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [Reuters](#).

On 27 March, police in Europe are searching for at least eight suspects who were involved in either the Paris or Brussels bombings. [Reuters](#).

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 27 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "The Latest: 2 more Americans identified as Brussels victims," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 23:46 GMT on 27 March.
- "Brussels attacks: US says two more Americans dead as police arrest suspect fixer who allegedly 'supplied bomber's fake ID' — latest," [The Telegraph](#), live blog ends at 01:24 GMT on 28 March.

28 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

Four victims died on the night of Easter Sunday, 27 March, bringing the death toll to 35 (not counting the three Islamic terrorists). During the weekend, 26-27 March, 101 victims remained in hospitals. [Reuters](#). Later on 28 March, [Reuters](#) reported: "Around 340 people were wounded and 96 were still being treated in hospital, of whom 55 were in intensive care, a health ministry statement said."

Fay al Cheffou was arrested on 24 March (see report for 26 March, above). On 28 March, a judge in Belgium ruled there was *not* enough evidence to justify holding Cheffou in custody, so the judge ordered police to release Cheffou. Meanwhile, police are continuing to seek the identity of the third Islamic terrorist in the surveillance photographs at the airport on 22 March. Six days after the Islamic terrorist attacks, police in Brussels still do *not* know the identity of the third terrorist at the airport.

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 28 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "The Latest: Obama meets anti-terror, homeland security team," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 00:11 GMT on 29 March.

- "Brussels attacks: Belgium releases sole suspect after suspicions not substantiated," [The Telegraph](#), 14:36 GMT, 28 March.
- "Belgian police hunt airport suspect; victim toll rises to 35," [Associated Press](#), 20:27 GMT, 28 March 2016.
- "Belgium frees charged suspect in blow to bombing investigation," [Reuters](#), 21:35 GMT, 28 Mar 2016.
- Marc A. Thiessen, "Brussels attacks were a terrorist interrogation failure," [Washington Post](#), 15:19 GMT, 28 March 2016. ("It is simply unconscionable that Abdeslam was allowed to protect the identities of cell members and their plans for the Brussels attacks. But that is only the beginning of the shameful incompetence on display here." "If we keep treating terrorists like common criminals, that nightmare will soon become reality.")

29 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

At 19:00 in Brussels on 29 March, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "Belgian authorities say 90 people remain in hospital, 49 of them in intensive care, one week after suicide bombers killed 32 people at Brussels' airport and a subway station." Yesterday's report of a total of 35 dead was wrong, "due to the double counting of three people with dual nationality". [Reuters](#). The uncertainty in the death toll seems to be part of Belgian incompetence.

The Brussels airport remains closed on 29 March. The Brussels subway is mostly running, but the Maelbeek station remains closed, after that station was struck by an Islamic suicide bomber.

On 16 March, the FBI warned the Netherlands about the Bakraoui brothers, who exploded in Brussels on 22 March 2016. Ibrahim Bakraoui had been on a U.S. surveillance list since 25 Sep 2015. [France24](#); [Reuters](#).

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 29 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "The Latest: 90 remain hospitalized week after Brussels bombs," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 18:29 GMT on 29 March.
- "Belgian police 'believe they have found bombers' missing gloves'," [The Telegraph](#), 02:49 GMT, 29 March.
- "Tense commuters, politicians: No more 'normal' in Brussels," [Associated Press](#), 19:29 GMT, 29 March 2016. ("Belgium's justice minister pleaded Tuesday [29 Mar] for critics of Belgium's intelligence failures to focus on the hunt for those behind last week's Brussels attacks and November's massacre in Paris." "‘There's no such thing as "normal" anymore,’ [the mayor of Brussels] said during a visit to Paris.")

30 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

There was very little new information on 30 March about the Islamic terror attacks in Brussels on 22 March.

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 30 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "The Latest: Paris suspect charged with terrorism offenses," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 17:52 GMT on 30 March.

31 March 2016: attacks in Brussels

The airport in Brussels remained closed on 31 March and 1 April. [Associated Press](#).

The Brussels airport was closed after the attack on 22 March and remained closed for an additional 10 days, through 1 April. The Brussels airport has about 600 flights/day, so being closed for 11 days means that 6600 flights were cancelled or diverted to other airports. If there are 100 people per flight, that would inconvenience approximately 660,000 passengers.

[Reuters](#) says the Brussels airport has 23.5 million passengers/year. I calculate that being closed for 11 days would inconvenience 700,000 passengers, in good agreement with my estimate in the previous paragraph.

Here is a short bibliography of news articles on 31 March about the Brussels attacks:

- "The Latest: Extradition approved for Paris suspect Abdeslam," [Associated Press](#), blog ends at 16:19 GMT on 31 March.
- "Belgium to extradite Paris suspect Abdeslam to France," [Reuters](#), 20:33 GMT, 31 March 2016.

Conclusions

During September 2013, I began chronicling the history of chemical weapons in Syria and the futile peace negotiations. I now see three distinct intervals:

1. Before 10 June 2014, when removal of Assad was the simplistic solution to the Syrian civil war.
2. 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. Suddenly, the USA and Western Europe focused on defeating ISIL.
3. In March 2016 a "cessation of hostilities" had greatly reduced deaths in Syria, but the opposition delegation to peace negotiations in Geneva was making numerous demands that scuttled the negotiations. Nonetheless, there was finally a glimmer of hope for an end to the Syrian civil war.

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

In February 2012, Hillary Clinton created the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations to attend meetings and denounce Assad. This group disappeared after November 2014, having accomplished nothing except wasting travel expense money.

Before 10 June 2014, the conventional wisdom in the "Friends of the Syrian People" 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 Hillary Clinton, 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.

The following series of events exposed the futility of the plans of the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations and the Syrian National Coalition at the negotiations in Geneva during Jan/Feb 2014:

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 during Jan/Feb 2014 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.

A more detailed analysis of the failure of the Geneva negotiations is found in my separate [review](#). I suggest that the "Friends of the Syrian People" 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 Geneva negotiations to fail. Not only was much diplomatic effort and expense wasted on Geneva, but also the frustration caused the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resign on 13 May 2014.

In January 2014, ISIL invaded Iraq. The Iraqi government begged for help from Obama, but Obama ignored the Iraqi requests, as ISIL quickly captured about 1/3 of Iraq. During an interview published on 27 Jan 2014, Obama made a now famous remark about ISIL being "junior varsity" terrorists. See my essays for [July 2014](#) and [August 2015](#). Clearly, Obama seriously underestimated ISIL in early 2014.

2. 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. However, the USA, Europe, and Arab nations were unable to cooperate with Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorism.

ISIL has had effective fighters in Syria since mid-2013. The Syrian Kurds are the only ground forces in Syria who have defeated 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. Obama's train-and-equip program was an ignominious failure. This lack of competent ground forces

in Syria is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

In my essays for [August 2015](#) to [December 2015](#), I observed that the Syrian National Coalition was "fading".

3. Glimmer of Hope for End to Syrian Civil War

On 29 January 2016, peace negotiations began in Geneva.

However, peace negotiations in Geneva were scuttled by an obstructionist opposition delegation. From their creation on 11 December 2015, the opposition delegation had insisted on pre-conditions (i.e., demands) *before* the opposition would begin negotiations:

1. end to the airstrikes by Assad and Russia,
2. end sieges by Assad's army,
3. delivery of humanitarian aid to rebel-controlled towns,
4. Assad releases all political prisoners, and
5. Assad resign.

At different times, the opposition made slightly different demands, but the above-mentioned five demands were commonly made. Hijab's Supreme Commission is attempting to obtain through demands what they could not militarily win during five years of civil war. Obviously, one should *not* go into negotiations with Assad with a demand that Assad resign — the role of Assad in the future of Syria is for *all* the people of Syria to decide in an election.

Because the opposition arrived late, de Mistura first met with the opposition delegation on 31 Jan 2016, three days after the negotiations formally began. The opposition refused to negotiate with the delegation from Assad's government, because none of the opposition's demands had been satisfied. De Mistura suspended the negotiations on 3 Feb 2016. The negotiations were supposed to resume no later than 25 Feb 2016. The negotiations actually resumed on 14 March 2016.

After a heroic effort by diplomats from Russia and the USA, and by de Mistura, on 27 February 2016, a "cessation of hostilities" began in Syria. This diplomatic effort quickly reduced the death rate by about 90%, a remarkable accomplishment. But the opposition was ungrateful for this accomplishment, and instead whined about minor violations of the ceasefire — some of which were caused by insurgents who continued fighting. The opposition also shifted emphasis to their other demands, such as humanitarian aid and release of prisoners.

Note that the [statements](#) by the ISSG and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2249, 2254, and 2268 continue to insist on implementing the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. The [review](#) that I wrote in June 2014 explains why the Geneva Communiqué is flawed. 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. That makes the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 an obsolete and wrong plan.

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.

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.

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 270,000 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,

- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than four million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

The Syrian government — regardless of who leads it — does *not* have the resources to repair buildings, electricity supply, and other infrastructure that was destroyed during the five years of civil war in Syria.

Conclusion for Iraq

The Syrians have an effective government and an effective military. In contrast, 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.

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

1. The Iraqi government is corrupt. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [January 2016](#))
2. The Iraqi government is dysfunctional. During July-October 2014, the Iraqi Parliament *slowly* formed a new government — during an existential crisis. 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](#).)
3. The Iraqi army was unable to stop the ISIL invasion during the first six months of 2014. 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.
4. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable or unwilling to prosecute:
 - A. corrupt politicians or corrupt government officials,
 - B. army officers who hired ghost soldiers (see [above](#)),
 - C. desertion at Mosul on 10 June 2014 (see [above](#)),
 - D. fleeing from Ramadi on 17 May 2015 (see [above](#)), and
 - E. terrorists who kill innocent civilians in frequent bombings in or near Baghdad.
5. Beginning in August 2014, my essays each month have chronicled suicide bombings, car bombs, kidnappings, and other horrible crimes in Iraq. Such attacks have become an almost routine part of life in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. These continuing attacks are an indication that civilization has collapsed in Iraq.

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.

It will take years to fix the 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.

Violations of Cessation of Hostilities during March 2016

During March 2016, I was not aware of daily reports of violations of the Cessation of Hostilities agreement at the Russian Ministry of Defense website, instead I relied on news articles by RIA-Novosti, Reuters, and other news sources. On 27 May 2016, I added the following section at the end of my essay for March, so as not to disturb the pagination of the version that I posted on 6 April 2016.

The following table summarizes violations of the Cessation of Hostilities agreement, as reported by Russia — the only publicly available data on violations. I cite the daily reports by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

Date	total violations/day	citation
28 Feb	9	MoD
29 Feb	7	MoD
1 Mar	15	MoD
2 Mar	21	MoD
3 Mar	14	MoD
4 Mar	27	MoD
5 Mar	9	MoD
6 Mar	15	MoD
7 Mar	8	MoD
8 Mar	7	MoD
9 Mar	7	MoD
10 Mar	8	MoD
11 Mar	8	MoD
12 Mar	10	MoD
13 Mar	29	MoD
14 Mar	14	MoD
15 Mar	15	MoD

16 Mar	10	MoD
17 Mar	9	MoD
18 Mar	5	MoD
19 Mar	2	MoD
20 Mar	5	MoD
21 Mar	6	MoD
22 Mar	6	MoD
23 Mar	5	MoD
24 Mar	7	MoD
25 Mar	7	MoD
26 Mar	9	MoD
27 Mar	10	MoD
28 Mar	9	MoD
29 Mar	11	MoD
30 Mar	6	MoD
31 Mar	10	MoD

This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria31.pdf>
begun 1 March 2016, revised 2 April 2016, table added 27 May 2016.

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

[my homepage](#)