

# Syria & Iraq: April 2016

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## Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 29 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper.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),
- (only during 11-29 April) the Daily Press Briefings of the U.S. State Department,
- 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.

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### **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](#).

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## Chemical Weapons

Beginning in October 2013, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued monthly reports on chemical weapons on Syria. My [webpage](#) has links to each of these reports at the United Nations Security Council.

### Chemical Weapons in Syria History

As chronicled in my previous essays, someone used canisters of chlorine gas on civilian towns in Syria beginning on 11 April 2014. Politicians and diplomats were hysterical about "war crimes", but OPCW was slow to investigate and returned empty-handed from its first fact-finding mission in May 2014.

In my essay for [April 2015](#), I cited three separate chlorine attacks in Syria from 16 March to 29 April 2015. In my essay for [May 2015](#), I cited two chlorine attacks in Syria on 2 and 7 May.

On 21 August 2015, ISIL apparently used mortar shells to deliver a chemical weapon (mustard gas?) to civilians in the village of Marea, north of Aleppo in Syria. My essay for [August 2015](#) cited 6 news articles about this use of chemical weapons by ISIL.

My essays for [November 2015](#) and [December 2015](#) mention three new reports from the OPCW fact-finding mission in Syria. These three reports were attached to the OPCW monthly report for November.

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### **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.

On 4 April, Assad's government alleged that ISIL had used mustard gas in an attack on a military airport near Deir Ezzor city. [Reuters](#).

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### **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.

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**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 2015, 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.

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## **Syria**

### **Futile 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.

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### **Diversions**

Various major problems in the world diverted attention of politicians and diplomats away from Syria, and also diverted resources that might have helped the crisis in Syria. There are *at least nine* of these major problems in the world:

1. Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the **Ukraine**, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. The threats during the Ukraine crisis mean that further cooperation between Russia and the USA on the civil war in Syria is temporarily *unlikely*. By 30 May 2014, the crisis in the Ukraine appeared to be winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border. But on 28 June 2014, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil war. On 17 July 2014, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug 2014, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels. On 5 Sep 2014, another ceasefire began. On 24 Jan 2015, Russian rebels violated agreements and began an offensive against Mariupol. From the end of April 2014 to 2 Feb 2015, the United Nations says 5358 people died in the war in the Ukraine. During the first two weeks of Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was negotiated.
2. a continuing civil war in the **Central African Republic**



3. more violence in **South Sudan**, as ceasefires are violated
4. On 14 April 2014, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists in **Nigeria**, kidnapped more than 230 girls from a boarding school. On 20 May 2014, an Islamic bomb in Jos, Nigeria killed at least 130 people. Approximately ninety people were kidnapped by Islamic terrorists on 21 June in Nigeria. On 10 Nov 2014, a suicide bomber killed at least 48 pupils at a high school in Nigeria. On 28 Nov 2014, Boko Haram attacked a mosque in Kano, killing more than 102 people. On 3-7 Jan 2015, Boko Haram attacked 17 towns and slaughtered approximately 2000 people, "too many to count". [Guardian](#).
5. On 18 May 2014, a former Libyan general led an assault against the Libyan Parliament building, causing another crisis in **Libya**. Various parts of the government and military supported the general's anti-Islamist campaign. On 16 July, Islamic rebels attacked the airport at Tripoli, destroying airplanes and damaging the terminal building. On 31 July, Islamic extremist rebels seized control of Benghazi. On 23 Aug 2014, Islamic extremists captured the airport at Tripoli.
6. On 10 June 2014, ISIL — an Al-Qaeda inspired group that operates in both Iraq and Syria — captured Mosul, the second-largest city in **Iraq**. On 11 June, ISIL captured Tikrit. (See my essays for [June](#), [July](#), and [August](#) 2014.) The crisis in Iraq pushed Syria out of the news in Western newsmedia. Moreover, the capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — [changed](#) the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.
7. On 12 June 2014, palestinians kidnapped three boys in **Israel** and killed them. Their dead bodies were found in a field on 30 June. After terrorists in Gaza fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells into Israel, the Israeli military began a military campaign in Gaza on 8 July. Despite the blatant provocations by the palestinians, the Arab newsmedia pushed Syria and Iraq out of the news in order to hysterically report the so-called "Israeli aggression" in Gaza. On 14 July 2014, Egypt proposed a ceasefire in Gaza, which Israel accepted but Hamas in Gaza rejected. After more than 1300 rockets and mortar shells were fired from Gaza into Israel since 8 July 2014, the Israeli Army invaded Gaza on the evening of 17 July. On 26 August 2014, a ceasefire of indefinite duration was arranged in Gaza.
8. Ebola hemorrhagic fever in western Africa (e.g., Liberia and Sierra Leone), which had killed approximately 2800 people by 23 Sep 2014. On 23 Sep 2014, the U.S. Government forecasts between 0.5 and 1.4 million people infected by 20 Jan 2015, killing perhaps half of those infected. After massive intervention by the USA and other nations, the death toll on 14 Jan 2016 was only 11,300.
9. For many years, **Yemen** has been an impoverished, failed nation, infested by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2012, longtime president Saleh was deposed. On 19 Jan 2015, Houthi (Shiite) rebels surrounded the home of the president (a Sunni) who is supported by the U.S.-government. On 22 Jan 2015, the president and cabinet resigned, plunging Yemen deeper into anarchy. On 10 Feb 2015, the U.S. [State Department](#) closed the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, because of rapidly deteriorating security. On

20 March, ISIL attacked two Shiite mosques in Yemen during Friday prayers, killing at least 137 people. [AP](#). On 26 March 2015, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

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

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## Deaths in Syria

On 6 April 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published the death toll for the month of March:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 2658 persons in the month of March 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 588 civilians, including 125 boys and girls under the age of eighteen, and 89 female citizens over the age of 18, they were killed as follows:
  - 223 citizens including 43 children and 45 citizen women killed in raids by Russian and Syrian warplanes' bombing and helicopters' barrel bombs,
  - 90 civilians including 23 children and 5 citizen women were killed in the shelling and sniper fire of the regime forces,
  - 28 civilians were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons and dungeons of its intelligence branches,
  - 5 citizens including 3 children and a citizen women died due to poor health conditions and the bad living conditions and the lack of medication,
  - 13 civilians including 7 children and 2 citizen women were killed in the bombing by warplanes of the international coalition,
  - 67 civilians including 23 children and 12 citizen women killed by the mortar shells and sniper fire of the rebel and Islamic Factions and Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant),
  - 7 citizens were executed at the hands of the rebel and Islamic Factions and Jabhat Al-Nusra,
  - 38 civilians including 4 children and 3 citizen women executed by the "Islamic state",
  - 45 civilians including 10 children and 12 citizen women killed by mortar shells and sniper fire and gunshot by the "Islamic state",
  - 60 citizens including 10 children and 9 citizen women were killed in the bombing of booby trapped vehicles, explosive belts and IEDs by unidentified gunmen in several areas,
  - 11 civilians including a female child and a male child and a citizen woman (and 7 of those 11 citizens are still unidentified) killed by the Turkish border guards, and
  - [1] citizen killed by the Jordanian border guards.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters: 376

- Defected soldiers and officers: 2
- Regime soldiers and officers: 414
- Members from Popular Committees, NDF and regime's informers: 335
- Militiamen from Hezbollah guerrilla: 13
- Non-Syrian Pro-regime mostly Shia militiamen: 65
- Fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions, the "Islamic State", Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant) and Jaish al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar of non-Syrian nationalities: 854
- Unidentified casualties: 11

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

"588 civilian citizens including 214 child and citizen women killed in March 2016," [SOHR](#), 6 April 2016. [Indented lists by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

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On 30 April 2016, the the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published the death toll for the nine weeks of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was able to document the death of 2407 people during nine weeks of the cease-fire in Syria, **in places that are considered as truce areas**, since the 27th of February [2016] until the dawn of the 30th of April 2016[:]

- 682 civilian citizens, including 140 person under the age of 18, and 111 citizen women over the age of 18[:]
  - including 8 children, 5 citizen women and 46 men killed by snipers, and
  - 53 children, 34 citizen women and 111 men killed by shells launched by Jabhat Al-Nusra and factions on Sheikh Maqsood neighborhood in Aleppo and on other areas in Aleppo and on other places in the Syrian cities and towns, and
  - 57 children, 55 citizen women and 213 men were killed in bombing by warplane and helicopters on several areas of Syria, and
  - 22 children, 17 citizen women and 61 men were killed by shelling by the for regime forces on several areas of Syria[.]
- 465 fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions killed in the shelling and airstrikes by the regime forces and in the clashes against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them,
- 702 members from the regime forces, NDF and the gunmen loyal to the regime, and

- 71 fighters from Asayish, YPG and The Syrian Democratic Forces, and
- 102 fighters from the Islamic factions, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Caucasians fighters and other factions, and
- 369 fighters from al-Nusra, the Islamic Turkestan Party and other Islamic factions who were killed in clashes against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them.
- And 16 members of the internal security Kurdish forces “Asayish” and YPG were killed in the clashes that took place between them against the regime forces and NDF in the city of Qameshly.

[explanation of above deaths deleted here]

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was able to document the death of 3186 persons during 9 weeks of ceasefire in Syria, **outside the truce areas**, in which the “Islamic state” resides or in contact with these areas in the provinces of Al-Raqqah, Aleppo, Al-Hasakah, Deir Ezzor, Damascus, Rif Dimashq and the countryside of both Hama and Homs and other areas, since the 27th of February [2016] until the 30th of April 2016, and the casualties were as follows:

- 33 fighters from Thowwar Suraya Front (The Front of Syria’s Rebels) and other Islamic factions, and
- 178 fighters from the Islamic factions, and
- 380 civilian citizens, including 72 person under the age of 18, and 84 citizen women over the age of 18, and
- 81 persons including 4 children and 2 citizen women were executed by the “Islamic state”, Islamic factions and other factions, and
- 926 members from the regime forces and NDF, and
- 128 fighters from The Syrian Democratic Forces, and
- 1298 members from the “Islamic state” organization, and
- 127 residents, including 26 children and 4 citizen women were killed affected by injuries they had before the start of the truce and in other circumstances, and
- 20 persons including two children and 2 citizen women were killed by Turkish border guards, and
- 15 civilians including 9 children and a citizen woman from Douma, Madaya and Darayya and other areas in Syria, died due to poor health conditions and the lack of necessary treatment and medication.

"9 weeks of the “truce and cease of fight operations” kills almost 5,600 people in most of the Syrian provinces," [SOHR](#), 30 April 2016. [Indented lists and boldface added by Standler. Some text in the "truce areas" paragraph was rearranged or edited by Standler.]

2407 + 3186 = 5593 dead in Syria during 63 days (3 in February, 31 in March, and 29 in April). This is an average of 89/day, which should be compared with 166/day in February, before the ceasefire began.

There is a discrepancy that I am *not* able to explain. The SOHR reports 2658 deaths during March and 3116 deaths during April, for a total of 5774 deaths during those two months. We

can use the March death rate of 85.7/day to estimate 257 deaths during the first three days of the ceasefire during 27-29 February. Adding 5774 and 257 gives a total of 6031 deaths during the ceasefire. But the above report by SOHR cites only 5593 deaths, a discrepancy of 438 dead.

The estimate of 257 deaths during 27-29 Feb may be too high. If one estimates 100 deaths during 27-29 Feb, then we would have 5874 deaths during the ceasefire, compared with the above report by SOHR of 5593 deaths, a discrepancy of 281 deaths.

Looking at this discrepancy another way, there were 86 dead/day during March and 104 dead/day during April. The average of these two monthly death rates is 95/day. But the SOHR data for the entire ceasefire shows an average of 89/day (i.e., 5593/63 days), which is near the March rate. But everyone agrees there were substantially more deaths/day during April than March, owing to an unraveling of the ceasefire in Syria. (This simple comparison ignores the 3 days of ceasefire in February.)

As a result of this discrepancy, I am ignoring the SOHR report on 30 April of the number of people killed during the ceasefire. Apparently, there are discrepancies of the order of a few hundred deaths/month in the statistics from Syria. Such discrepancies are probably significantly less than the underreporting of deaths in Syria.

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On 1 May 2016, the the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published the death toll for April.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 3116 people, during the month of April 2016, and were casualties distributed as following:

- Civilians casualties: 859, including 143 persons under the age of 18, and 118 citizen women above the age of 18 were killed also follows:
  - 410 including 61 children and 56 citizen women killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria, and
  - 113 including 23 children and 20 citizen women killed in shelling by the regime forces and using rocket and artillery shells, and missiles believed to be ground-to-ground and snipers, and
  - 28 men were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons, and
  - 13 men including a young man were killed by the airstrikes of the International coalition's warplanes, and
  - 162 including 37 children and 27 citizen women were killed in targeting and mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions on the city of Aleppo and several other areas in Rif Dimashq, Hama and Idlib countryside, and
  - 40 including a citizen woman executed by the "Islamic state", and
  - 3 executed by Shuhada'a al-Yarmouk Brigade and Jabhat al-Nusra , and
  - 14 including a child and a citizen woman killed by the gunshot of the Turkish and Jordanian border guards, and
  - 11 including three children and a citizen woman died due to poor sanitary

- conditions and the lack of treatment, and
  - 39 including 12 children and 10 citizen women killed by targeting and shelling by the “Islamic State” on areas in the provinces of Deir Ezzor and Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria, and
  - 5 including a citizen woman killed in the land of shells and gunfire from the Syrian Democratic Forces in the provinces of Al-Hasakah and Aleppo, and
  - 21 including 9 children and a citizen woman killed in different circumstances like unidentified gunfire, explosions, landmines and unknown circumstances.
- Fighters from the rebel and Islamic Factions and The Syrian Democratic Forces of Syrian nationality: 524
  - Persons defected from the regime forces: 3
  - The regime forces: 490
  - Members from the popular committees, NDF, and gunmen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 395
  - Hezbollah fighters: 18
  - Fighters loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities, most of them belong to the Shiite community: 87
  - Unidentified persons: 4
  - Fighters from the Islamic and rebel factions, the “Islamic state”, Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant), The Army of al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar and the Islamic Turkestan Party of non-Syrian nationalities: 736

We, in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, and with the continued daily killing of the sons of the Syrian people, despite more than two months of the alleged truce, we call Mr. Staffan de Mistura International — the United Nations’ special envoy for Syria crisis — to work in earnest, with the active parties in Syria, the United States of America and Russia to really activate the truce and stop the daily blood shedding in Syria, otherwise he should resign from his position, due to his failure to achieve peace in Syria, because the blood and lives of the Syrian people are not just words in a condemning statement published in the media.

"Despite the alleged truce and the data of De Mistura; 3116 were killed during the second month of it.," [SOHR](#), 1 May 2016. [Indented lists added by Standler.]

The SOHR's hysterical call for de Mistura either "to work in earnest" or "should resign" is outrageous. It is *not* de Mistura's fault that *both* the insurgents in Syria *and* Assad's forces are barbarians. History during April 2016 clearly shows that there was fighting in Aleppo, which motivated the main opposition delegation (HNC) to walk out of the negotiations in Geneva on 18 April. Simultaneously, the HNC called for the opposition to attack Assad's troops in Latakia province, which was a deliberate violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement by jihadists (e.g., Ahrar al-Sham).

The total of 3116 dead in Syria during 30 days of April is an average of 104/day, which should be compared with 166/day in February, before the ceasefire began. The death rate in April should also be compared with 86/day in March, the first full month of the ceasefire.

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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* 278,000.

On 21 April, U.N. Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, claimed that the correct death toll in Syria was now 400,000 dead. On 22 April, in response to a question at a [press briefing](#), de Mistura admitted "I don't have any proof of it". The SOHR actually counts deaths, but clearly states that it has no accurate knowledge of deaths in insurgent groups, in Assad's military, and in Assad's prisons. There are also numerous people in Syria who were kidnapped or abducted, and then disappeared. So the true death toll is *higher* than SOHR's reported total. SOHR estimates at least 100,000 higher.

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### **Free Syrian Army is Leaderless since June 2015**

On 14 June 2015, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) formed a committee to create a new Free Syrian Army (FSA) Supreme Military Command during the next month. [SNC](#) and [SNC](#).

On 20 July 2015, the SNC issued a press release that denounced efforts by "the dissolved FSA Supreme Military Council" to establish military leadership. [SNC](#). On 1 August 2015, the SNC extended the task to create a new FSA High Military Command for "another two months". [SNC](#) On 25 August 2015, the SNC announced it "is finalizing new plans for forming a new FSA High Military Command." [SNC](#).

On 1 May 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 10 months to choose a leader for the Free Syrian Army, during an existential war.

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### **U.S. troops in Syria**

My essay for [October 2015](#) mentions that on 30 October Obama decided to send 50 U.S. special operations forces into Syria to advise Kurds and Arabs who were fighting against ISIL. The first U.S. soldiers arrived in Syria sometime around 27 Nov 2015.

On 24 April 2016, an anonymous U.S. government official leaked Obama's decision to send an additional 250 U.S. troops into Syria. [Wall Street Journal](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Pentagon](#).

On 25 April 2016, Obama stood in Hannover, Germany and gave a speech "to the people of Europe". Here is what Obama said on the fight against ISIL and the extra 250 U.S. special operations troops in Syria:

[Obama mentions "pulling the global economy back from the brink of depression"; an



agreement that ends Iran's development of nuclear weapons; an agreement to "fight climate change"; "stopping Ebola in West Africa"; "new sustainable development, including our goal to end extreme poverty."]

That's what's possible when Europe and America and the world stand as one. And that's precisely what we're going to need to face down the very real dangers that we face today. So let me just lay out the kind of cooperation that we're going to need. We need a strong Europe to bear its share of the burden, working with us on behalf of our collective security. The United States has an extraordinary military, the best the world has ever known, but the nature of today's threats means we can't deal with these challenges by ourselves.

Right now, the most urgent threat to our nations is ISIL, and that's why we're united in our determination to destroy it. And all 28 NATO allies are contributing to our coalition — whether it's striking ISIL targets in Syria and Iraq, or supporting the air campaign, or training local forces in Iraq, or providing critical humanitarian aid. And we continue to make progress, pushing ISIL back from territory that it controlled.

And just as I've approved additional support for Iraqi forces against ISIL, I've decided to increase U.S. support for local forces fighting ISIL in Syria. A small number of American Special Operations Forces are already on the ground in Syria and their expertise has been critical as local forces have driven ISIL out of key areas. So given the success, I've approved the deployment of up to 250 additional U.S. personnel in Syria, including Special Forces, to keep up this momentum. They're not going to be leading the fight on the ground, but they will be essential in providing the training and assisting local forces that continue to drive ISIL back.

So, make no mistake. These terrorists will learn the same lesson as others before them have, which is, your hatred is no match for our nations united in the defense of our way of life. And just as we remain relentless on the military front, we're not going to give up on diplomacy to end the civil war in Syria, because the suffering of the Syrian people has to end, and that requires an effective political transition. (Applause.)

But this remains a difficult fight, and none of us can solve this problem by ourselves. Even as European countries make important contributions against ISIL, Europe, including NATO, can still do more. So I've spoken to Chancellor Merkel and I'll be meeting later with the Presidents of France and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain and of Italy. In Syria and Iraq, we need more nations contributing to the air campaign. We need more nations contributing trainers to help build up local forces in Iraq. We need more nations to contribute economic assistance to Iraq so it can stabilize liberated areas and break the cycle of violent extremism so that ISIL cannot come back.

These terrorists are doing everything in their power to strike our cities and kill our citizens, so we need to do everything in our power to stop them. And that includes closing gaps so terrorists can't pull off attacks like those in Paris and Brussels.

Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama in Address to the People of Europe," [White House](#), 25 April 2016.

My comment is that you can see clearly that Obama was a "community organizer" in Chicago before he became a politician. Obama *really believes* in unity and consensus. Further, when journalists are reporting that the ceasefire in Syria is unraveling is a very bad time to be escalating military operations in Syria, even though ISIL is excluded from the cessation of hostilities agreement.

On 28 April, Syria claimed that 150 U.S. soldiers entered Syria on 27 April. The Syrian Foreign Ministry called the U.S. troops a "blatant act of aggression that constitutes a dangerous intervention and a gross violation of the Syrian sovereignty." [SANA](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). On 29 April, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov agreed that the U.S. troops violate the sovereignty of Syria. [TASS](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that Obama's deployment of U.S. troops is not only a violation of Syria's sovereignty, but also a violation of U.S. law, because the U.S. Congress has *not* passed an authorization of force that specifically allows Obama to fight ISIL.

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### **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 journalists in Turkey are criminally charged for reporting the news. 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.

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### **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.

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## Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

### Introduction

Beginning on 10 March 2014 and continuing through October 2014, journalists reported that Assad is winning the civil war in Syria. Some of these reports by journalists are cited in my previous essays.

On 7 May 2014, the rebels and jihadists withdrew from Homs. Assad then moved to take control of the city of Aleppo. But Assad's assault on Aleppo stalled, raising the possibility that Assad is now unable to take control of Aleppo.

My essay for [Nov 2014](#) cites a *Washington Post* article on 29 Nov that Assad may lack economic resources to win the civil war.

My essay for [Dec 2014](#) cites a *Washington Post* article on 28 Dec that Assad's army has been depleted by recent "soaring casualties" and desertions. Replacements are not arriving because of "evasions of compulsory military service". Further, in a rare speech on 26 July 2015, Assad admitted a shortage of soldiers in the Syrian army. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

From December 2014 through September 2015, I no longer believed that Assad can win the civil war against a large number of opponents, when only two nations (i.e., Russia and Iran) are supporting Assad with military equipment and money. Not only are there *only two*

nations supporting Assad, but also both of those two have their own significant problems. Iran is suffering crippling economic sanctions because of its development of nuclear weapons, and Iran is diverting resources to fighting ISIL in neighboring Iraq. Russia is suffering economic sanctions because of its support for rebels in the Ukraine, beginning in Feb 2014.

My essay for [November 2015](#) explains that the massive Russian airstrikes in Syria that began on 30 Sep 2015 was a game changer, which swung the balance of power in favor of Assad.

On 16 December 2015, Zeina Karam, the Associated Press bureau chief in Beirut, wrote:

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

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

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

On 27 March 2016, Assad liberated Palmyra from ISIL, as described in my essay for [March 2016](#). On 29-30 March, Assad seems confident after his victory in Palmyra. [Associated Press](#).

On 3 April 2016, it was announced that Assad had liberated the town of Qaryatain from ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). Qaryatain is known to Westerners as the place where ISIL kidnapped approximately 230 hostages — including dozens of Christians — in August 2015 and where ISIL destroyed the ancient Saint Eliane Monastery.

On 8 April 2016, Reuters reported:

As the Syria peace talks resume next week, President Bashar al-Assad, backed militarily by Iran and Russia, shows no willingness to compromise, much less step aside to allow a transition Western powers claim is the solution to the conflict.

Threatened by rebel advances last year, Assad is now pumped up with confidence after Russian air strikes reversed the tide and enabled his army to recover lost ground from Sunni insurgents as well as the jihadis of Islamic State.

While Syria experts doubt he can recapture the whole country without an unlikely full-scale ground intervention by Russia and Iran, they also doubt President Vladimir Putin will force him out — unless there is a clear path to stability, which could take years. "Syria's Assad shows no willingness to compromise," [Reuters](#), 20:52 GMT, 8 April 2016.

Let us recognize reality. Assad is firmly in command of the Syrian government. The rebels and jihadists have attempted for more than five years to depose Assad, but the rebels and

jihadists have failed. It is time to end the Syrian civil war, by having the rebels and jihadists surrender and be re-integrated into Syria. Despite what Reuters says about Assad not compromising, Assad is willing to have a national unity government that includes the former rebels and jihadists. (See my essay for [March 2016](#), in the section titled "Assad rejects transitional governing body".)

Despite all of the predictions in 2011 and 2012 about Assad relinquishing power, Assad outlasted U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius. In January 2017, Assad will have outlasted Obama and John Kerry.

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## 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."

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## 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 three 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 suspension of negotiations.

My essay for [March 2016](#) chronicled the second round of negotiations in Geneva.

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On 24 March 2016, de Mistura scheduled the third round of negotiations to begin on 9 April. On 5 April, the United Nations announced that the beginning of the negotiations had been postponed until 11 April. [Reuters](#).

On 7 April, de Mistura postponed the beginning of negotiations to 13 April. Because of parliamentary elections in Syria on 13 April, the Syrian government delegation is expected to arrive in Geneva on 15 April. [U.N. Geneva](#); [Reuters](#). The postponement will give de Mistura time to visit Damascus and Tehran, and discuss ideas he learned during his 5 April visit to Moscow. De Mistura may also visit Amman Jordan, and he will meet with the Turkish government somewhere in Europe. His aides will visit Saudi Arabia.

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## Geneva Negotiations Resume

The main opposition negotiating team in Geneva has an Arabic name. Since the team was created on 10 December 2015 in Saudi Arabia, I have called it Hijab's "Supreme Commission", because that was the translation that Hijab used in his English-language press releases and the Saudi government used at the Saudi Press Agency website. But in April 2016, de Mistura and everyone else was calling the team the High Negotiations Committee (HNC). Therefore, I am changing the name that I use in this essay from Hijab's "Supreme Commission" to HNC.

### 13 April 2016 — Day 16 in Geneva

On 13 April, the Associated Press obtained an exclusive interview with Syrian Deputy

Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad.

A top Syrian official said on Wednesday [13 April] that the opposition has to let go of its "dream" for a transitional government, saying that such a thing amounts to a coup d'etat and "will never be accepted."

....

"This will not happen, not now, nor tomorrow nor ever," he said, in response to the opposition's calls for Assad's departure.

....

Assad recently floated the idea of a national unity government, rejecting a key opposition demand for a transitional ruling body with full powers which major powers agreed on at a Geneva conference in June 2012. Mekdad echoed the rejection Wednesday [13 April].

"We believe such an idea has failed, it is outdated, it will never be acceptable. This amounts in fact to a coup d'etat. People organize a certain rebellion and then they get power. This will never happen in Syria," he said.

"We believe that if we have to proceed then we need to forget or we need others to forget the dreams they had for the last five years and to come with factual actual solutions to the problem," he said. "This includes the possibility of establishing a national unity government or a broad government that includes members of the opposition."

Zeina Karam, "AP INTERVIEW: Top Syrian official rules out Assad departure," [Associated Press](#), 21:14 GMT, 13 April 2016.

Assad's proposed national unity government was discussed in my essay for [March 2016](#), in the section titled "Assad rejects transitional governing body (30 Mar)".

On 13 April 2016 — the first day of the third round of the negotiations in Geneva — the Associated Press reported an outburst from the opposition:

A Syrian opposition leader says President Bashar Assad is a "disease" and must give up power for the country to heal itself.

Asaad al-Zoubi of the opposition High Negotiations Committee also insisted that Russia is "not serious" about seeing the Syrian president go.

Al-Zoubi accused Assad's government of not being "interested" in a peaceful solution, and criticized as a "farce" parliament elections held Wednesday [13 April] in government-controlled parts of Syria.

"The Latest: Syrian opposition in Geneva lashes out at Assad," [Associated Press](#), 19:38 GMT, 13 April 2016.

On the afternoon of 13 April, de Mistura met with the opposition High Negotiations



Committee (HNC). Afterwards, de Mistura held a press conference:

**Staffan de Mistura (SdeM):** Since we have not seen each other for a while, I will try to be a little bit more extensive. I just returned actually today after a quite intensive visit to Moscow, Amman, Damascus, Teheran, and the main purpose was to sound the authorities in these capitals about their own advice on how to make sure that this current phase of the Intra-Syrian talks are as productive or as effective as possible.

I must say all of them — that's why I have to correct a little bit the perception of those who preceded me — indicated interest and support actually in the progress of a political discussion aiming at a political transition.

With all of them I have been very clear that what we aim at is actually an agenda which is based on political transition, with the issue of governance and constitution as per (Security Council) resolution 2254, and none of them actually expressed any doubt that that is the priority and agenda.

And the word governance is crucial, and no one had any objection to that point.

Today, we started as promised — you remember, it was going to be during the week, it had to wait for at least this round of visits, I arrived this morning, we started anyway the first meeting with the delegation of the HNC (High Negotiations Committee).

I briefed them about the visits, and I indicated that we are going to pursue exactly that agenda and that will be the agenda that I will also pursue with the government: political transitional, governance and constitution. I did raise, and by the way I raised it in all capitals, my concern on the deterioration in some places of the security situation. But they have been still incidents and not a bush fire, and therefore we consider, and I have been discussing it with all concerned, that in spite of the several and serious incidents the cessation of hostilities is still holding, particularly when we compare to what it used to be in the past.

We need to make sure, at any cost, that the cessation of hostilities, in spirit and in substance, continues to give hope to the Syrian people, because that is what made all of them believe that, in fact, even if they have to wait for the Intra-Syrian talks, their lives are at least improved.

That is why tomorrow, at the taskforce, we will be raising very actively the issue about making sure that those incidents, which have been serious, but are still incidents, are contained by those who can do so.

Indeed, it will be quite appropriate I think, just because we need to make sure that if incidents in the cessation of hostilities are too often repeated they could at least deteriorate the spirit and the confidence in it. That's why perhaps it will be good timing for a reaffirmation, by those who have been supporting and promoting the cessation of hostilities, in their faith and determination in protecting it, because at the beginning of the second round of talks that would be a significant help.

As you know, on Friday [15 April] I think, the government delegation, which is confirmed, will be coming, to my understanding when I was in Damascus, will be led again by Ambassador Jaafari, so that we will be able to expand discussions and negotiations related to the three points of the agenda.

You will know and you will see, and you have already seen, it is normal that each delegation normally states its own strong position. But that does not indicate at all that when we come here, we come here to negotiate. That's why with all due respect to statements, the reality is that, at a certain point, we are going to go deeper and deeper into the issue of political transition.

[One question and answer omitted here.]

**QUESTION:** The expectation is that this round will tackle the core issue of a political transition, and Assad's future. How do you comment on Assad saying that the TGB is not constitutional?

**SdeM:** I am not commenting on constitutional matters. I work for the UN, so I am only commenting on UN Security Council resolutions. And the Security Council resolution refers to the Geneva communiqué, and the Geneva communiqué refers to the Transitional Governing Body. And the resolution which is guiding me is 2254, so that is my comment.

**QUESTION:** The HNC just discussed with us that they had a negative impression; you addressed that slightly. But how do you explain that they come away with the impression that your trip through the region was negative, when you say that it was not? Please also discuss the political transition because we spoke just today with Deputy Foreign Minister Mekdad in Damascus, who says that it will never be accepted, that it is a dream. Is that the same message you got from Walid Moallem?

**SdeM:** I don't know why this negative perception, perhaps because I am a little bit tired from my long trip, or perhaps because I did look and expressed concern about the humanitarian situation, and I did indicate there was concern, like we should all, when we see many incidents and we are worried about the cessation of hostilities. But I did also confirm to them that my visits to each of those capitals indicated clearly that they were supportive to what we are trying to do in terms of political transition; there was no doubt on that. From Moscow to Teheran, even Damascus agreed on the fact that this was the agenda. I believe that if you look at it carefully — I think in the Novosti interview of President Bashaar al-Assad, there was a reference to political transition more than once so I don't see anyone doubting that that is the agenda. Now, of course, how you go deeper into it that will be the issue. But that is why we have this type of talks.

"Transcript of press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura,"  
[U.N. Geneva](#), 13 April 2016.

**14 April 2016 — Day 17 in Geneva**

Because de Mistura on 22 April said he met with the HNC on both 13 and 14 April, I am counting 14 April in the centered heading as a day of negotiation.

On 14 April, the Associated Press reported that the opposition in Geneva was continuing to demand that Assad resign at the beginning of the Transitional Governing Body (TGB) mentioned in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012.

The spokesman for the main Syrian opposition group says it accepts that members of President Bashar Assad's government could be included in a possible future transitional authority — but not Assad himself.

Salem Al Meslet of the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee says it wouldn't object to members of Assad's coterie taking part in an internationally sought Transitional Governing Body that would help Syria emerge from war "as long as they are not involved in killing, they are not involved in crimes." "But again, we repeat that Assad will not be in it."

"The Latest: Opposition: Assad allies OK for transition," [Associated Press](#), 19:38 GMT, 14 April 2016.

My comment is that, unless de Mistura has some way to break this stalemate over the future of Assad, the talks in Geneva are futile. In mid-March 2016, because of the then glimmer of hope in Geneva negotiations, I deleted the word "futile" in several places in my main HTML webpage on Syria at [rbs0.com](#), and also in my essay for [March 2016](#). But on 15 April, I restored the deleted mentions of "futile" negotiations in my HTML webpage and in this essay for April. The inability of the two delegations to meet face-to-face and their inability to compromise on the future of Assad leads me to conclude that the negotiations are futile. That having been said, I am glad that de Mistura will continue the negotiations, because unanticipated events can occur, and the negotiations *might* eventually be successful.

*If* Arabs believed in democracy, then they would let the future of Assad be settled by a vote of the people in Syria. But, during the past century, Arab nations have been controlled by either royal families or a dictator. When the king or dictator is removed, the result is worse — as shown by the removal of the Shah of Iran, the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and the removal of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

On 14 April, de Mistura had a press conference about problems with delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. De Mistura did *not* mention negotiations or talks in Geneva.

**SdeM:** Let me raise some points that have been raised so far in these meetings. I cannot deny that everyone in the meeting was disappointed; indeed many of them are actually frustrated by the lack of new convoys, in particular in some areas which, as you know, have been identified as besieged areas and identified also by the various international documents. We have not been able to reach so far Douma, Daraya, east Harasta and we need to do more to Madaya, Zabadani, Kefraya and Fouah.

That does not mean — and I recognize it and we did raise it — that, meanwhile, the picture should not be completely negative, in the sense that, while we have to, and we must, insist on reaching these hard-to-reach or besieged areas, there is still a lot happening in Syria. Sometimes we tend to forget it so we did a little bit of a review: there are 5.8 million Syrian people who have been reached by the UN, NGOs, which

are doing a remarkable work as well, and of course, in some places, the government as well in the areas controlled by it, every month by food — 5.8 million Syrians.

One million Syrians have been reached in January and February with non-food items, and 6.8 million have been reached every month with assistance on water and sanitation.

But that doesn't take away what I just said at the beginning: disappointment, frustration indeed, particularly in this period we are expecting incremental improvement of reaching places which are besieged, and therefore the possibility by the task force to actually suggest, as they have been discussing, to reaching the issue at a higher level as a wakeup call in order to make sure that we don't passively, during these meetings, just acknowledge the fact that there is no improvement. We need improvement.

Some good news, because we need to see the angle from every angle. Airdrops in Deir Ez Zor: the World Food Programme has been able to succeed with three airdrops in succession in the last one today — 26 pallets, which have all reached Deir Ez Zor, and the distribution is likely to start through SARC very soon.

The next airdrops are also likely to include not only food items but medical items, which are very much needed in the area. So far fifty-five tons have been airdropped by World Food Programme airplanes. This is quite encouraging, but also in my opinion, since I have been doing myself airdrops in my life, it is quite an achievement in view of technical problems, but also quite a beautiful combination of what international cooperation should be. We have been assisted technically and practically by Canada, the United States and the Russian Federation, working together with items and technical support. And then contributions through Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, just to mention some that are financially supporting that. That's World Food Programme airdrops in Deir Ez Zor.

Another element that has been coming up, with some type of hope we believe, is the issue that I raised with the government of Syria about vaccinations. They are expected to start on the 24th of April. We hope that will be the case, because there are some technical reasons why it appeared to be very delayed and that would be very bad, because Syrian people need to see for their own children, wherever they are, the possibility to see this vaccination campaign in view of the reduction of the coverage and on the fact that regardless what we have been hearing in terms of tense moments in some parts, the cessation of hostilities is still holding, and therefore should be allowing the vaccination; there is no excuse to not do it.

On Palmyra, there is obviously an important signal that the international community wants to give in order to make sure that this unique place — important for the whole world — is restored as soon as possible in terms, at least, of security. There has been some updates on the demining, which has already been done by the Russian Federation. There is also a possibility with UNMAS. We had a meeting with the UN organization specialized in demining, on how they can be actually contributing to demining.

I raised the issue of medical items was raised in Damascus and it was obviously discussed again here in the task force. I did raise the issue with the authorities and they assured me that they were going to henceforth allow all medical items, except the following: surgical items atropine and anxiety pills, but would allow at our own request, caesarean surgery surgical items and all other medical items.

We, of course, need to go through that, and I hope that what I got as a promise will actually materialize and therefore that we can be able to at least report on that. We are still concerned about surgical items, which are not just for military use, but they can be and should be used for children for instance, which happen to be falling through the rubbles of incidents and would require this.

You will probably remember the last time, Jan Egeland referred to the possibility or imminent possibility of a massive medical evacuation — up to 500 people in need of medical evacuation from the four towns in particular. That has not happened, and we regret it and I do have a proposal for that. There seems to have been too much concentration of a reciprocity. You have people sick on both sides, we then evacuate one and the other.

But that's not how life, God and things happen. People sometimes get sick, like this young man of 18 years old who died because we were not able to medically evacuate him, and the other side may not have the same case of medical emergency. So the proposal is, if you do have a case of medical emergency, to allow it to be evacuated and when there is one on the other side that would be at least equivalent. In theory we should never discuss this, it is a duty to do that. But if this is all blocked by reciprocity, let's at least have a much more creative reciprocity for the sake of saving lives.

(Inaudible) my visit to Damascus, the government of Syria indicated to me their complaint that there is no indication of the meetings about all they are doing for humanitarian assistance to the average Syrian people. I said to them, fine, do produce a paper every week or every meeting that we have, we will certainly acknowledge it, recognize it, but it does not take away the urgency of reaching those people that we have mentioned in the besieged areas and all those issues that are still pending such as the medical aspect.

There was also a reference with great sadness to the killing of a medical doctor who, in Hama, was killed by a target rocket, missile or whatever it was, but to kill a man who has been actively involved in supporting the medical facility in Hama and that was brought to the attention sadly of the Humanitarian [Access] Task Force.

"Transcript of the stakeout by the Special Envoy for Syria after the meeting of the Humanitarian Access Task Force," [U.N. Geneva](#), 14 April 2016. [Three questions and answers omitted here. Brackets in original.]

### **15 April 2016 — Day 18 in Geneva**

On the afternoon of 15 April, the delegation from Assad's government arrived in Geneva, then met with de Mistura. The Associated Press reported:

A Syrian government envoy says he had "constructive and fruitful" discussions with a U.N. mediator in the resumption of peace talks in Geneva.

Syria's U.N. ambassador Bashar Ja'afari spoke briefly to reporters Friday [15 April] after his delegation provided proposed "amendments" to a working paper laid out by U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura as the talks took a break last month.

....

Ja'afari said de Mistura's team would examine the government's proposed changes to a list of fundamental principles for the talks before meeting again Monday [18 April]. "The Latest: Russia says no plans to capture Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 17:39 GMT, 15 April 2016.

De Mistura's "working paper" of 24 March is quoted in full in my essay for [March 2016](#).

A later news article by the Associated Press said:

Syria's U.N. ambassador Bashar Ja'afari said he had "constructive and fruitful" discussions with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and said his delegation proposed "amendments" to the de Mistura's blueprint for negotiations.

Ja'afari's brief comments to reporters suggested the government is still focusing on the basic principles toward a political solution in Syria, and not yet willing to consider what de Mistura calls the "mother of all issues" — political transition away from President Bashar Assad's rule.

De Mistura met with delegates from the High Negotiations Committee, an umbrella opposition coalition backed by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and other Western powers, later in the day.

Jamey Keaten & Philip Issa, "Syria government team joins peace talks amid Aleppo clashes," [Associated Press](#), 19:03 GMT, 15 April 2016.

*Al-Arabiya* summarized news reports from various agencies (e.g., Associated Press and [Reuters](#)):

Syria's chief government negotiator sought on Friday [15 April] to steer UN peace talks away from the issue of a political transition, saying his immediate focus at the start of a new round was to submit amendments to a framework document for the talks.

The Syrian government, buoyed by Russian and Iranian military support, arrived in Geneva six days after UN mediator Staffan de Mistura had hoped to begin the negotiations, and with increased fighting near Aleppo threatening to undermine the shaky truce that underpins the talks.

The previous round of indirect negotiations ended on March 24, with de Mistura issuing a document on 12 common guiding principles and vowing to shift the focus to a political transition to resolve the five-year-old civil war.

But after almost two hours with de Mistura, Bashar Ja'afari told reporters that he had given the UN envoy amendments to his document and would wait for him and his team to "study in-depth" the paper over the weekend and submit it to other groups.

"We agreed with de Mistura that we will once again discuss our proposal the next time we will meet on Monday," he said. Ja'afari declined to answer questions, and de Mistura cancelled a planned news briefing.

The main opposition delegation, the High Negotiations Committee, has been in Geneva for two days and was scheduled to meet de Mistura after he met Ja'afari.

....

The head of the Syrian opposition delegation said on Friday the government was sending a strong message that it did not want to negotiate a peace deal in Geneva and was seeking a military solution after launching an assault on Aleppo.

"Syrian govt avoids transition talk after UN meeting," [Al-Arabiya](#), 19:12 GMT, 15 April 2016.

### 16 April 2016

On Saturday, 16 April, the Associated Press in Beirut issued a pessimistic assessment of the Geneva negotiations:

Indirect peace talks between Syria's warring parties have resumed in Geneva to the backdrop of escalating violence in the country's north and a refusal by the Syrian government to negotiate a transitional government, a key opposition demand.

It is the third round of so-called proximity talks this year. The U.N. envoy for Syria says the talks this time are to focus on a political transition in the war-torn country, but chances for a breakthrough are slim as distrust and continuing disagreements between rival factions remain deep.

....

#### CAN THE VIOLENCE DERAIL THE TALKS?

Yes. The talks resume as fighting has escalated between pro-government forces, rebels, and the Islamic State group throughout Syria, and especially in its north. The opposition says alleged government plans to launch an offensive to capture the northern city of Aleppo will effectively spell the end of the talks.

....

#### WHAT ARE THE MAIN POINTS OF DISAGREEMENT?

The Syrian government delegation says the priority should be on fighting terrorism while the HNC says the focus should be on setting up a Transitional Government Body with full executive powers in which Assad will have no role. Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad told The Associated Press in an interview this week that a



transitional government would amount to a coup d'etat and will never be acceptable. Bassem Mroue, "Syria Talks Resume, Chances Seen As Very Slim Amid Violence," [Associated Press](#), 17:50 GMT, 16 April 2016. Also at [ABC News](#).

Reuters had a similar assessment of the talks in Geneva, when Reuters said "the negotiations appear more fragile than ever":

The United Nation's envoy to Syria sounded out the opposition at talks in Geneva on the idea that President Bashar al-Assad could stay on in power symbolically, two opposition sources said on Saturday [16 April], but they both had summarily dismissed it.

....

Just a few days into the new round, the negotiations appear more fragile than ever with increased fighting near Aleppo threatening to undermine a shaky truce. The government delegation after arriving on Friday also sought to steer the new round away from discussion of a transition.

Two opposition sources said that in a meeting late on Friday [15 April] with the High Negotiations Committee de Mistura had brought up an idea, among others, that would see Assad remain in power symbolically. In return the opposition would choose three vice-presidents, who would be handed military and executive powers. "There were no details and it's not something that we are taking seriously," said one opposition official. John Irish, "U.N. Syria envoy tests waters with opposition over Assad fate," [Reuters](#), 17:15 GMT, 16 April 2016.

The rejection by the HNC of the offer of three vice-president positions in a national unity government was also reported by the Associated Press:

Opposition official Yahya Kodmani said in Geneva that de Mistura told them that an expert suggested to the envoy that Assad stays and in return "the three vice presidents will be from the opposition. We consider that we did not hear this suggestion because we categorically reject it."

....

The HNC's chief negotiator Mohammed Alloush, when asked if de Mistura gave them an offer, responded by telephone text message: "Yes it is true but it is impossible to even think about it."

Bishr El Touni & Jamey Keaten, "Syrian opposition rejects offer over transitional period," [Associated Press](#), 19:11 GMT, 16 April 2016.

**My comments:** The Associated Press headline about "very slim" chances of successful negotiations in Geneva is probably accurate.

As explained in detail [below](#), the cessation of hostilities is holding in most of Syria, despite alarmist reports by journalists. The fighting against Nusra Front in Aleppo is technically *not* a violation of the ceasefire, because Nusra (and ISIL) are excluded from the cessation of

hostilities agreement.

Everyone is ignoring that a frequent violator of the cessation of hostilities agreement is Jaysh al-Islam, a jihadist group. Mohammed Alloush, the leader of the HNC's negotiations team in Geneva, is also a leader of Jaysh al-Islam. The opposition delegation hypocritically whines about alleged violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement, when the leader of the opposition delegation represents a frequent violator of that agreement!

The so-called "Transitional Government Body with full executive powers" is part of the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. This TGB is accepted by all diplomats, except those of Assad's government. But *everyone* is ignoring clear problems with the TGB. I explained these problems with the TGB in my [review](#) that was written in June 2014.

Assad's offer of a so-called "unity government" that includes rebels is an alternative path to the goals of the TGB. But the opposition summarily rejected consideration of Assad's "unity government", with Assad remaining as president during the transition.

The rebels and jihadists have waged a civil war for five years to remove Assad, but the rebels and jihadists *failed*. Now the rebels and jihadists demand in Geneva what they failed to accomplish on the battlefield in Syria.

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Adding to the huge problems in Geneva, on 16 April, a large jihadist group began to withdraw its support for negotiations. Reuters reports:

A Syrian rebel group on Saturday [16 April] said United Nations-led peace talks had so far been extremely negative and criticised opposition negotiators as divorced from a deteriorating military situation on the ground.

The statement from Ahrar al-Sham, an Islamist group and one of the biggest rebel factions involved in the conflict, indicates the pressure facing the opposition High Negotiations Committee as it takes part in a second round of indirect talks with the government in Geneva.

The talks appear to be making no progress towards ending the five-year-long war that has killed more than 250,000 people, while a military escalation has stretched to breaking point a truce agreement brokered by the United States and Russia.

....

Ahrar al-Sham withdrew from the Riyadh meeting [in Dec 2015], citing reasons including what it described as the sidelining of "revolutionary groups". Further distancing itself from the political process, Ahrar al-Sham said in its statement on Saturday that it had not taken part in any of the Geneva talks.

....

Ahrar al-Sham is an ultra-orthodox Salafist group and has fought as part of a military alliance including the al Qaeda-linked Nusra Front, which was not part of the cessation

of hostilities agreement brokered in February.

Ahrar al-Sham, whose late leader had fought alongside Osama bin Laden, last year denied sharing al Qaeda's ideology or having organisational ties to the group.

The Ahrar statement also noted that important opposition conditions for the start of the political process had not been realised, including an end to government blockades of opposition-held territory and a release of detainees.

"Syria rebel group slams Geneva talks, opposition body," [Reuters](#), 22:26 GMT, 16 April 2016.

### 17 April 2016

On Sunday, 17 April, Reuters issued a news story that suggests the opposition may end the Geneva talks soon.

Senior Syrian opposition negotiators on Sunday urged rebels to strike back against the Syrian army, accusing it of using a cessation of hostilities to gain ground, and cast doubt over whether they would continue Geneva peace talks indefinitely.

A senior opposition figure who asked not to be quoted by name said pressure was growing for a speedy decision to leave talks.

In a internet message to fighters on the ground, chief negotiator Asaad al-Zoubi said there was a limit to how long he would negotiate if government advances continued and there was no progress on a key opposition demand for political transition without President Bashar al Assad. He gave no deadline.

....

Both comments by Geneva negotiators [Asaad al-Zoubi & Mohammad Alloush] point to the possibility of the mainstream opposition leaving peace talks.

They have also been infuriated by an idea they say United Nations envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura had suggested to them in Geneva that Assad could stay on in power in a symbolic role.

"The regime is intransigent and de Mistura is clearly now tilting towards a much more ambiguous stance on a political transition without Assad," he [Alloush?] said.

....

Zoubi said in the internet recording he had told de Mistura they would not be ready discuss to any other proposal other than the transfer of power from Assad to a transitional body.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Syrian opposition say rebels should retaliate against army; hint at talks exit," [Reuters](#), 19:52 GMT, 17 April 2016.

My comment is that I can see the Geneva talks collapsing very quickly, as the HNC is adamant that Assad *must* relinquish power, and Assad's government refuses to do that. Further, the HNC is adamant that the TGB of the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 be implemented, while Assad's government offers an alternative path to the same goal in a "national unity government". Moreover, there is disagreement between the opposition and Assad's government over who is violating the cessation of hostilities agreement.

### **My suggestions for ending futility of talks in Geneva**

I wrote this section on 17 April, two days after I was convinced that the negotiations in Geneva were futile as long as the HNC was the main opposition group. Accordingly, on 17 April, I recommended here that the HNC be banned from the negotiations in Geneva. Then on 18-19 April, the HNC indefinitely suspended their participation in the Geneva negotiations, which was equivalent to the HNC banning itself. I decided to leave this section in this essay, to explain how the HNC had become an impediment to negotiations in Geneva. And someday, the HNC may desire to return to the Geneva negotiations. I suggest that the HNC should be replaced with an opposition delegation that will negotiate in good faith, and that the HNC *never* be allowed to return to the negotiations.

(Skip this section and continue with the history of the negotiations in Geneva.)

On 3 February 2016, de Mistura suspended the talks in Geneva, in response to demands and pre-conditions by the main opposition negotiators, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), also known as Hijab's Supreme Commission. The ISSG — mostly Russia and the USA — then arranged a cessation of hostilities that began on 27 February. The talks in Geneva resumed on 14 March, but accomplished nothing.

My essay for February 2016 suggested that de Mistura replace the intransigent opposition delegation with a different group of Syrian opposition:

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

Standler, "Syria & Iraq: February 2016," [www.rbs0.com](http://www.rbs0.com), 1 March 2016.

The HNC has continued both (1) its intransigent demand that Assad resign at the beginning of the transitional governing body (TGB) and (2) its demand that the Geneva negotiations implement the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. These intransigent demands have scuttled the negotiations in Geneva and frustrated de Mistura's efforts. Making rigid demands is the anthesis of successful negotiations. Successful negotiations require that the two sides listen to each other, and make counter-proposals that narrow the differences between the two sides.

On 15 April, HNC summarily rejected Assad's proposal for a unity government, in an example of HNC's refusal to negotiate. Obviously, one can *not* have successful negotiations with a party who refuses to negotiate.

Just because Saudi Arabia and Turkey created the HNC in mid-December 2015 does *not* mean that de Mistura must accept that group as the main negotiating group. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 says "the goal to bring together the broadest possible spectrum of the opposition, chosen by Syrians, ... and looking forward to the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria finalizing efforts to this end". That Resolution gives de Mistura the authority to assemble a representative group of Syrian opposition to participate in negotiations.

Indeed, beginning in mid-March 2016, de Mistura invited "advisers" from Syria to Geneva. They are called "advisers" to avoid angering the HNC, which insists that the HNC is the *only* opposition. The so-called "advisers" include women and members of the political opposition inside Syria. De Mistura has repeatedly said that he appointed these "advisers" to obtain a more representative view of people inside Syria. I suggest these "advisers" should become the main opposition group in the Geneva negotiations.

Once the HNC is rejected, de Mistura could allow some members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to join the new opposition group, to include representative of moderate insurgents on the ground in Syria. Including the FSA in future Geneva negotiations should require the FSA to agree to two items: (1) participate with neither conditions nor demands, and (2) the FSA continues to obey the cessation of hostilities agreement.

I also suggest that the United Nations officially designate both (1) Ahrar al-Sham and (2) Jaysh al-Islam as terrorist groups, because of their repeated violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement. Members of these terrorist groups should be excluded from negotiations in Geneva.

I suggest the cessation of hostilities agreement be amended to explicitly exclude from the agreement *any* group who is fighting with a designated terrorist group (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, etc.).

Someone might observe that Assad is also being intransigent in the negotiations in Geneva. My response is that, like it or not, Assad is the lawful ruler of Syria. Further, like it or not, Assad is winning the civil war in Syria. Assad has easily resisted five years of efforts by insurgents to remove Assad as president of Syria. Those political and military accomplishments naturally put Assad in a dominant position in any negotiations to end the civil war.

Finally, I observe that the USA and Western Europe gave munitions and supplies to the Free Syrian Army, which enabled the civil war in Syria to continue longer than it would have without foreign meddlers. Further, the USA and Western Europe gave financial aid and political credibility to the Syrian National Coalition during 2013-2014. The Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Coalition constitute approximately half of the HNC, the monster that scuttled the peace negotiations in Geneva. In my view, the USA and Western Europe should be blamed for allowing their proxies to get out of control, and to prolong the civil war in

Syria.

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### 18 April 2016 — Day 19 in Geneva

At 12:13 GMT on 18 April, [Reuters](#) tersely reported: "The coordinator of Syria's main opposition body Riad Hijab said on Monday [18 April] that it was 'unacceptable' for peace talks in Geneva to go on if the government and its allies did not lift sieges and stop bombing civilian areas."

At 13:28 GMT on 18 April, [Reuters](#) reports that only 3 opposition delegates met with de Mistura today (the usual opposition delegation has 15 members). Also, the HNC "postponed a news conference by its chief coordinator Riyadh Hijab from Monday [18 April] until midday on Tuesday."

At 18:46 GMT on 18 April, the Associated Press reported:

Syria peace talks ran into trouble on Monday [18 April], with the U.N. mediator saying the opposition has suspended its formal participation in the indirect discussions with President Bashar Assad's government to protest "worrisome" new violence, especially near the northern city of Aleppo, and rising concerns about the humanitarian situation.

Staffan de Mistura, the U.N. envoy for Syria, said he will press on with the talks despite the suspension by the opposition High Negotiations Committee. The HNC said it would no longer attend meetings at the U.N. office in Geneva that has hosted weeks of on-and-off peace talks aimed ultimately at ending the country's devastating five-year war.

The HNC delegation will remain at their hotel in Geneva, and de Mistura said he will continue "technical" discussions with its envoys by phone or off-site in hopes of firming up a blueprint for a political transition in Syria. He said he would "take stock" of progress toward that goal on Friday [22 April].

....

The suspension came just hours after Syrian opposition fighters launched a new offensive against government forces in a number of northwestern areas. Rebel groups said attacks in rural parts of Latakia province, a government stronghold, were in retaliation for violations of a U.S. and Russian-brokered cease-fire.

Sarah El Deeb & Jamey Keaten, "Amid fighting, Syria opposition backs away from Geneva talks," [Associated Press](#), 18:46 GMT, 18 April 2016.

At 19:08 GMT on 18 April, Reuters has a news article with the dire headline: "Syria peace talks near collapse as opposition declares 'pause'."

Syrian peace talks came close to collapse on Monday [18 April], with the mainstream opposition announcing a "pause" in talks at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, although it agreed to keep its negotiating team in the city.

The Western-backed opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) said in a letter to

rebel fighters that government military advances meant a ceasefire was "effectively over" and it was calling a postponement in the talks.

Rebels, who accuse the government of breaking the ceasefire to try to recapture the northern city of Aleppo, announced an offensive of their own, launching an assault against government forces in Latakia province on the Mediterranean coast.

....

Nevertheless, U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura played down the decision by the opposition delegation to stay away from his headquarters, saying his team would continue to meet the delegates elsewhere as long as they were still in town.

....

De Mistura said the opposition delegation had told him it would "postpone" its "formal participation" in negotiations at the U.N.'s headquarters, known as the Palais. Suleiman Al-Khalidi, John Irish, & Tom Miles, "Syria peace talks near collapse as opposition declares 'pause'," [Reuters](#), 19:08 GMT, 18 April 2016. Final version at [Reuters](#) at 00:40 GMT on 19 April 2016.

At 22:00 in Geneva on 18 April, the most recent transcript of a press conference on the negotiations at the United Nations website is dated 14 April. The transcript of the 18 April press conference appeared at the United Nations website on the morning of 19 April. I have boldfaced the text that I find particularly significant.

**Staffan de Mistura (SdM):** Good evening, it has been an intense day so let me recap my points if I may. Let me make some comments and then it will take some questions because I think it is worth it having your questions and I would take exceptionally five questions, in view of the long day.

First of all some general comments, if I may. No one can deny that the fighting currently taking place in some areas, particularly in Aleppo, is becoming particularly worrisome. Our assessment, however, and in this I think an objective assessment based on our information and on the analysis of the whole country (we have an operation centre), and when we compare it to what it used to be some time ago is that **the cessation of hostilities is still holding in many areas but increase in fighting is indeed worrisome.**

Second point: no one can deny also that **the humanitarian access is still going too slowly.** Yes we did succeed finally to having a small fact-finding mission and you will hear more about it tomorrow, in Daraya, led by a strong and courageous woman working on behalf of my office, Khawla Mattar, who went to Daraya and will report about this tomorrow, but there was no food following that we hope to be able to do so.

We may have tomorrow some convoys moving; we may even have indications about evacuations of wounded and sick people. And we may even have, over the weekend, some campaign of vaccinations, but still too slow. So tomorrow, at the HTF and at the



CTF, the two task forces, both issues and concerns will be raised. And, indeed, if this trend continues, which is still worrisome, we will be obviously expecting and hoping that the two co-chairs of ISSG will be convening a special meeting.

All this to start preparing you for the political message, which I know you're aware of and I would like to elaborate on it. **On the political track, we should not, and no one should, expect that after five years of conflict, a political transition by miracle in one week is sold.** Let's be frank about that. In fact, indeed, there is one major improvement in what we used to have: everybody agrees the word "political transition" is the point of the agenda. So far our discussion with the two sides has been focusing on what is the interpretation of the political transition, but (there is) no doubt about the need of doing that.

There is no secret that one side is insisting on the implementation of the TGB (Transitional Governing Body), and the other side — the government — has been now indicating their interest in launching an initiative for a broad-based government.

Both of them are claiming that this is the road towards political transition. The gap is clearly wide, but this is exactly the nature of negotiations. Especially when the agreement exists about the fact that there is no doubt that there needs to be a political transition, according to Resolution 2254.

Our strategy is to be able to get, from each of the two sides, as much information as possible of their own vision and see whether there are some areas that can be combined in view of the need of producing a real political transition. As you know, the timetable is up to **August**, that is what has been so far seen as a timetable for getting a new constitution and getting the political transition. So, we do have some time, not much in history but we do, and it is certainly not today or tomorrow.

Now let me get to the point that you must have heard: we heard today, **I heard today, by meeting the delegation of the HNC, their intention to postpone their formal participation in the Palais to the negotiations in order to express their own displeasure and concern on the humanitarian situation degradation and on the problems related to the cessation of hostilities.**

They told us, however, their intention to remain in Geneva, in their hotel, and possibly at my own suggestion, to pursue technical discussions, with myself and my team, particularly on the issues related to resolution 2254 and the political transition. Because they do realize that this requires time and cannot be solved in one week or three days.

Anyway you must know that we plan to continue our discussions and consultations with every side, in the Palais or anywhere else — proximity talks are very flexible —, and on Friday take stock of the discussions, review what we have come up with, having learned from every side their own positions, and then decide on how and when to move forward on what is expected to be a series of discussions, on and off, in order to focus on concrete political transition.

That is where we are at the moment. Now the questions are open.

**QUESTION:** What are the conditions for the opposition to come back around the table here? Is that the humanitarian situation or is it the suspension of hostilities, particularly around Aleppo. Could you please give us more details if possible?

**SdM:** I thought I did by having repeated twice what was my understanding on their own suspension of their formal presence in the Palais while still staying in Geneva in their hotel and possibly still continuing technical discussions regarding the TGB. And I think I refer to it that it is one way for them to express their displeasure and concern for what they perceive being a substantial deterioration of the humanitarian situation and a deterioration of the security environment, particularly in Aleppo.

....

**QUESTION:** Apart from the issue of political transition, today Mr. Jaafari focused on two instances of breaches of the ceasefire affecting the situation, first of all ... as well as the call by one member of the Riyadh group to open a battlefield everywhere.

**SdM:** .... Regarding the other issue, my comment is that any inflammatory speech should be avoided because they are not helpful and especially while we are part of a negotiating team.

"Transcript of press encounter by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, after his separate meetings with the delegations of the Syrian Arab Republic and the High Negotiations Committee," [U.N. Geneva](#), 18 April 2016. [Boldface added by Standler.]

My comment is let history show that the opposition impeded the negotiations in Geneva, and also the opposition grossly violated the cessation of hostilities agreement with their assaults in Latakia province. Sadly, who is to blame is less important than the obvious fact that the Syrian civil war will continue for the foreseeable future.

While the HNC is refusing to attend meetings at the United Nations office at the Palais des Nations, de Mistura can take a taxi to the hotel where the HNC is hiding. The real problem is that the talks are stalemated, with the HNC and Assad unable to agree on the organization of the Syrian government, and unable to agree on whether Assad should continue to be president of Syria.

I view the HNC's alleged concern about delivery of humanitarian aid as propaganda, to divert attention from the facts that the opposition is continuing to violate the cessation of hostilities agreement and that the HNC is misbehaving in Geneva.

De Mistura mentions an August 2016 deadline for forming the transitional government in Syria. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §4 specifies a target date of six months, but does not say from when. If one counts six months from the target date for the beginning of negotiations of "early January 2016" (§2), the deadline is early July. If one counts six months from the actual beginning of negotiations on 29 January, the deadline is the end of July. My essay for [March 2016](#) mentions that de Mistura "reset the clock" by calling 14 March the beginning of negotiations, which gives a mid-September deadline. Of

course, these deadlines are arbitrary. The important thing is to move forward, and end the Syrian civil war as soon as possible.

### 19 April 2016 — Day 20 in Geneva

Because de Mistura on 22 April said he continued to meet with the Syrian government, and also met with "representatives of the Moscow, Cairo, Damascus platforms, the Women Advisory Board, Civil Society", I am counting 19 April in the centered heading as a day of negotiation.

At 18:57 GMT on 19 April, *Al-Arabiya* summarized news stories from Reuters and the Associated Press:

Syria's main opposition chief on Tuesday [19 April] lamented a crumbled truce, calling for major powers to meet on the crisis, as his group left Geneva in protest against the escalating violence.

UN peace envoy Staffan de Mistura said Monday [18 April] he had been informed that the US and Saudi-backed opposition group, known as the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), would suspend its "formal participation" in the talks.

....

Hijab told journalists later on Tuesday that he and other colleagues were leaving a day after the group put its participation at the talks on hold to protest escalating violence and restrictions on humanitarian access in Syria.

Some delegation members will meanwhile remain in Geneva for technical discussions at their hotel with UN staff and for workshops on humanitarian issues and detainees, Hijab said.

"Lack of 'pressure' on Syria regime as truce fails," [Al-Arabiya](#), 18:57 GMT, 19 April 2016.

On the morning of 20 April, I looked at the website of the official government Saudi Press Agency, but there were *no* news articles on either 18 or 19 April about the decision of the HNC to indefinitely suspend the HNC's participation in Geneva negotiations. There were also *no* news articles from the Saudi Press Agency about the HNC abandoning the cessation of hostilities agreement. Perhaps the Saudi government was embarrassed at the misbehavior of the HNC, which the Saudis created in December 2015.

At 20:09 GMT on 19 April, the Associated Press reported the angry rhetoric of the HNC:

Syria's top opposition leader vowed to fight "even with stones" to depose President Bashar Assad, shifting sharply to a tone of conflict over conciliation as peace talks in Geneva teetered near collapse Tuesday [19 April] amid a new surge in fighting — including government airstrikes that left dozens dead.

Angry and defiant, Riad Hijab of the Western-backed Syrian High Negotiations Committee thundered home the opposition coalition's decision to walk back — if not entirely away — from U.N.-brokered peace talks in Geneva. He demanded more

Security Council oversight of an increasingly wobbly cease-fire as Assad's troops battled rebel fighters in various parts of the country.

The calculated gamble to jeopardize what diplomats have called the best chance in years to bring a diplomatic end to Syria's five-year war came amid the opposition group's growing frustration over unproductive peace talks and hundreds of government cease-fire violations in recent weeks.

....

The opposition coalition accuses the government of preparing an assault on the city of Aleppo, ignoring its demands for the release of thousands of detainees, and rejecting or avoiding requests for U.N.-led humanitarian aid shipments in recent weeks. The opposition says those are signs of bad faith by Assad's side and accuses it of stalling for time in the Geneva talks.

"We cannot continue to be in discussions in Geneva when our people are dying of hunger and bombardments," Hijab told a news conference. "We will fight no matter the circumstances. We will fight even with stones, and will not surrender."

"There cannot be a political process that prolongs the life of this regime," he said. "For us, as of yesterday, we are out of the political process."

....

Mohammed Alloush, the opposition coalition's main negotiator, said its delegation would only return if Assad's government implemented international agreements and halted airstrikes. In comments to The Associated Press, Alloush said he was leaving Geneva because he didn't want to be part of an "absurd" process that may not reach a viable political solution.

Hijab said he too was leaving, but that a High Negotiations Committee team will remain — even if its members won't go to the U.N. offices that have hosted the talks on-and-off since early February.

Jamey Keaten & Philip Issa, with contributions by Sarah El Deeb, "Fighting in Syria intensifies as opposition digs in heels," [Associated Press](#), 20:09 GMT, 19 April 2016.

In a news blog, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "[Alloush said] the opposition would return to direct talks once the Syrian government meets international resolutions including end the siege on rebel held areas, allowing aid in, releasing detainees, and ending airstrikes on civilians." My comment is that this list is almost the complete list of demands that the HNC has made since its creation in December 2015. And do not forget the HNC's demand that Assad must resign before the transitional governing body becomes effective in Syria!

The same Associated Press news blog reported the reaction from the Russian ambassador to the United Nations Office in Geneva.

Russia's ambassador to the international organizations in Geneva says extremists took

control of the Syrian opposition group, effectively hijacking the Syrian peace talks.

Alexei Borodavkin told the Russian Tass news agency on Tuesday that "the suspension of the Syrian opposition delegation's participation in peace talks is proof that, unfortunately, extremists took control within the delegation."

Borodavkin said the talks will continue without the groups who pulled out, implying that the extremists were backed by Saudi Arabia, and saying that opposition groups "other than the 'Al Riyadh' groups, would still participate in the peace talks.

"The Latest: US to press on for transition to end Syria war," [Associated Press](#), 18:36 GMT, 19 April 2016.

See also interview with Borodavkin by [Reuters](#).

I looked for the original TASS news article that was mentioned in the previous quotation from the Associated Press. Here are the relevant parts of what I found:

Decision of the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee to suspend participation in the inter-Syrian talks in Geneva proves that extremists have raised the upper hand in its delegation, Borodavkin said.

"We regret the HNC delegation's decision to suspend its participation in the talks," he said. "It's an erroneous step on their part."

"The reasons the HNC cites to explain for its renunciation of the talks can't stand any criticism," Borodavkin said.

"Suspended participation in the talks only proves that, unfortunately, extremists have prevailed in its delegation," he went on. "In fact they didn't want any negotiations at all from the very beginning and they kept putting forward conditions and ultimatums."

"They hope for a continuation of the armed conflict in the country," Borodavkin said. "Unfortunately we can see quite clearly they draw on support from some of the regional countries."

[Borodavkin] said the talks would continue anyway, since there are the Moscow, Cairo, and Hmeimim delegations of the opposition apart from the 'Riyadh group'. They maintain close political positions and make up the sector of the moderate Syrian opposition capable of signing agreements.

"Combat operations against terrorists in Syria to continue — Russian diplomat," [TASS](#), 19 April 2016.

When Borodavkin says the HNC has "support from some of the regional countries", he means Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and maybe Qatar. I am delighted that Borodavkin says negotiations will continue, now with the "Moscow, Cairo, and Hmeimim delegations" in the lead, in place of "the Riyadh group" (i.e., HNC). In my opinion, the boycott of Geneva negotiations by the HNC may have improved the talks in Geneva, by removing the obstructionist HNC.

On 19 April 2016, the United Nations Office in Geneva published *neither* a transcript of any press briefing on the negotiations, *nor* any press release about the negotiation.

Summarizing, here is what happened in the debacle on 18-19 April:

1. HNC and Ahrar al-Sham essentially abandoned the cessation of hostilities agreement, and began military offensives in Latakia province.
2. HNC refused to attend meetings at U.N. offices in Palais des Nations in Geneva. Most of the HNC delegation will depart from Geneva, leaving a small crew at a hotel in Geneva for "technical discussions" with the U.N. at that hotel.
3. HNC indefinitely suspended participation in negotiations in Geneva, until Assad complies with *all* of the pre-conditions (i.e., demands) of the HNC.

**My comments:**

The HNC purports to be concerned about (1) alleged violations of the cessations of hostilities by Assad, (2) release of political prisoners, and (3) delivery of humanitarian aid. My opinion is that these three alleged concerns are *all propaganda*. Groups represented in the HNC, and other insurgent groups, have continued to violate the cessation of hostilities — which makes it hypocritical for the HNC to complain of violations. The release of prisoners is a longstanding demand of the opposition, but the HNC was willing to negotiate in March without that demand being satisfied. Monthly reports by the U.N. Secretary General show that insurgent groups also interfere with the delivery of humanitarian aid and insurgent groups have besieged towns in Syria — again making it hypocritical for the HNC to complain of similar behavior by Assad. These three issues are a poor excuse for the the HNC to essentially withdraw from negotiations in Geneva.

The HNC piously claims to be concerned about the welfare of civilians in Syria. How are the *increased hostilities* by members of the HNC in Latakia province, beginning 18 April, going to make life better for Syrians? Statistics cited at my webpage at [www.rbs0.com](http://www.rbs0.com) show a death toll of 4968 dead/30 days during February 2016, before the ceasefire began. In March 2016, during the ceasefire, there were only 2672 dead/30 days. Clearly, the ceasefire has saved approximately 2300 lives in 30 days. Deliberate violations of the ceasefire by members of the HNC will kill more civilians, and expose the insincerity of the HNC's assertion that the HNC wants to improve the welfare of people in Syria. Equally important, the misbehavior of the HNC in Geneva will prolong the civil war in Syria.

The obstructionist HNC's self-removal may make the Geneva negotiations more successful. However, *if* agreement is reached in Geneva without the HNC, then I expect the rebels and jihadists in Syria will be *less likely* to recognize the agreement, than if the HNC had been an active participant in the negotiations. That is because the HNC includes significant representation from the Free Syrian Army (i.e., rebels) and some jihadist groups.

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**20 April 2016 — Day 21 in Geneva**

Because de Mistura on 22 April said he continued to meet with the Syrian government, and

also met with "representatives of the Moscow, Cairo, Damascus platforms, the Women Advisory Board, Civil Society", I am counting 20 April in the centered heading as a day of negotiation.

In the evening of 20 April, Reuters reported:

Syria's fragile peace talks might not resume for at least a year if they are abandoned now, [an anonymous] senior Western diplomat warned on Wednesday [20 April], as the opposition urged more military support for rebels after declaring a truce was over.

[Two paragraphs of background information deleted here.]

"If this ends now, it will be over for at least a year ... The Russians will steamroll — taking advantage of a U.S. vacuum," the Western diplomat said, referring to fears Washington will be preoccupied by November's U.S. presidential election.

....

On Wednesday experts were meeting in Geneva but the opposition's Riad Hijab, chief coordinator of the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC), had quit the talks with senior delegates while de Mistura had left for personal reasons. About half of the HNC delegation remained.

The Syrian government negotiator Bashar Ja'afari poured contempt on the opposition for its partial walkout, accusing it of sulking and political immaturity.

"By leaving they may be taking away a major obstacle that will allow us to reach a solution," he told reporters.

John Irish, Stephanie Nebehay, & Tom Perry, "Syrian peace talks in quagmire as rebels prepare for more war," [Reuters](#), 20:58 GMT, 20 April 2016.

The anonymous Western diplomat might appear to engage in hyperbole when he says the "talks might not resume for at least a year". But remember, the first set of peace negotiations collapsed on 15 February 2014 and did not resume until 14 March 2016 — an interval of 25 months. (See my essay for [February 2014](#) for a description of the collapse of the first set of negotiations.)

My comment is that I do not understand why the negotiations have stopped. De Mistura could meet with Assad's delegation. Russian Ambassador Borodavkin mentioned on 19 April that the "Moscow, Cairo, and Hmeimim delegations" could continue as the main opposition. So there is *no* need to stop the negotiations.

On 20 April 2016, the United Nations Office in Geneva published *neither* a transcript of any press briefing on the negotiations, *nor* any press release about the negotiation. The lack of definitive information from the United Nations gives the impression that everyone just quit working.

Meanwhile, on 20 April, France announced that the heads of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States would meet on 25 April to discuss convening a



meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). [Reuters](#). My comment is that the meeting to discuss the situation comes 7 days after the HNC withdrew from negotiations in Geneva and after Ahrar al-Sham (a jihadist group) began deliberate violations of the cessation of hostilities in Latakia province. The next meeting of the ISSG *might* begin two weeks after the current crisis began on 18 April, a very slow response.

### 21 April 2016 — Day 22 in Geneva

21 April is the third consecutive apparent do-nothing day in Geneva — absence of HNC delegation, *no* transcript of any press briefing on the negotiations, and *no* press release about the negotiation.

The absence of public statements by de Mistura since 18 April has allowed the HNC and Assad's delegation to dominate the news with inflammatory propaganda that damaged the credibility of the negotiations in Geneva.

But, because de Mistura on 22 April said he continued to meet with the Syrian government, and also met with "representatives of the Moscow, Cairo, Damascus platforms, the Women Advisory Board, Civil Society", I am counting 21 April in the centered heading as a day of negotiation.

Note that 21 April is day 112 of 2016, which has seen only 22 days of negotiations in Geneva. In other words, there have been negotiations in Geneva on only 20% of the days in 2016, despite an urgent need to end the civil war in Syria. It is appropriate to count from 1 Jan, because U.N. Resolution 2254 set a target date of "early January" for the Geneva negotiations to begin.

On 19 April, the HNC announced it was leaving a few HNC members in a hotel in Geneva. United Nations personnel were going to travel to the hotel to meet with the remnants of the HNC delegation. But on 21 April, the HNC said it was withdrawing *all* of its people from Geneva. Reuters reported:

All members of the main Syrian opposition will leave peace talks in Geneva by Friday, their chief negotiator Asaad Zoubi said on Thursday [21 April], with little prospect of talks resuming unless the situation radically changes on the ground.

.....

"We say to (government negotiator Bashar) Ja'afari: if he wants a real national unity government, first he must release the 10,000 women in his prisons, and the tens of thousands more there," another opposition negotiator Mohammad Alloush, representing Jaish al Islam, a major rebel group, told reporters before leaving Geneva. "And (he must) stop the massacres he is committing every day, so he can be a human with an ounce of nationalism. Then maybe the negotiations will resume."

John Irish & Bushra Shakhshir, "Syrian HNC opposition to leave Geneva talks by Friday: sources," [Reuters](#), 15:35 GMT, 21 April 2016.

Copy at [Al-Arabiya](#).

But later, the Associated Press reported that the HNC was keeping a few "technical experts" in a hotel in Geneva during next week:

The main Syrian opposition group says it's keeping "technical experts" in Geneva next week to focus on humanitarian aid for the war-ravaged country, a wobbly cease-fire and a stepped-up push to win the release of detainees.

The statement by the High Negotiations Committee comes days after it pulled back from, but didn't formally leave, the main U.N. sponsored effort on Syria: Indirect peace talks between the HNC and President Bashar Assad's government. The HNC walked off largely to protest alleged government violations of a U.S. and Russia-engineered truce.

"Talks stalled, Syrian opposition to stay in Geneva next week," [Associated Press](#), 22:58 GMT, 21 April 2016.

[Reuters](#) reports that de Mistura was interviewed by French-language Radio Television Suisse (RTS). Reuters says de Mistura told RTS that the "peace talks will continue next week despite the main opposition's decision to leave early, a move he dismissed as 'diplomatic posturing'." See also [BBC](#).

Reuters reported:

The United Nations said on Thursday [21 April] it would name a coordinator to probe the fate of Syrian detainees, a move sought by the opposition which accuses President Bashar al-Assad's government of torturing, starving and killing people in custody.

More than 100,000 people are believed to be languishing in government detention centres after five years of civil war. An unknown number are held by rebel and jihadi groups.

Staffan de Mistura, U.N. Special Envoy on Syria, said he would appoint "in the next few days" a senior technical expert. Diplomats say it could be the only concrete result of this round of stalled peace talks.

"It's a very delicate issue," de Mistura told reporters. "There have been some rumours that when you actually mention the name of a detainee, that detainee disappears."

Two diplomats told Reuters a former expert of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would be named. One said the woman coordinator would start working on Monday [25 April].

....

"We know that the reason why this issue is so difficult is because it will reveal the magnitude of the atrocities that the regime committed," HNC negotiator Basma Kodmani said.

Stephanie Nebehay, "U.N. set to name coordinator on Syrian detainees," [Reuters](#), 18:50 GMT, 21 April 2016.

My comment on the release of prisoners from Assad's prisons is that this issue *appears* to be

pandering to the demands of the HNC. But de Mistura's actions can also be seen as enforcement of requirements in long-forgotten parts of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. My quick search shows:

- Resolution 2042 in April 2012 — four years ago — endorsed Kofi Annan's proposal for, amongst other things, "release of arbitrarily detained persons, including especially vulnerable categories of persons, and persons involved in peaceful political activities".
- In September 2013, Resolution 2118 at §16 endorsed the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012, which repeated Kofi Annan's proposal for "release of arbitrarily detained persons".
- Resolution 2139 at §11 in February 2014 demanded "the release of all arbitrarily detained persons starting with women and children".
- Resolution 2254 at §12 in December 2015 called for "release any arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children".

I am sorry to see that Mistura's implementation of U.N. Resolutions will be interpreted as pandering to the demands of the misbehaving HNC, which will likely encourage the HNC to make more demands in the future. The HNC refused to negotiate during the first round of the talks, which forced de Mistura to "pause" the talks on 3 Feb, and motivated the ISSG to impose a cessation of hostilities agreement. The HNC refused to negotiate on 18 April, and already de Mistura is increasing efforts to encourage Assad to release political prisoners. Both times the HNC refused to negotiate, they received benefits. This will teach the HNC that the way to obtain benefits is to refuse to negotiate, which can only lead to more misbehavior by the HNC in the future.

In my opinion, de Mistura should react to the departure of the HNC — and should react to *two* refusals by the HNC to negotiate — is to say "You want to leave? Goodbye. Do *not* expect to be invited to return." [Above](#), I suggest how to find a new opposition delegation that will negotiate in good faith, instead of misbehaving. However, de Mistura is right to move forward to implement the four U.N. Resolutions that I mention two paragraphs above.

### **22 April 2016 — Day 23 in Geneva**

On 22 April, de Mistura gave his first press briefing since the talks collapsed on 18 April. I have boldfaced the parts that I believe are especially significant.

Good evening. Monday [18 April] I think I told you that today I was going to make a pause in the moment and come out from the meetings and come here and talk to you about what we have come up with, in terms of taking stock and what are the next steps of this round of negotiations, the Intra-Syrian Talks.

So that is what I am planning to do, and focusing on that on my own explanation, and of course I will take questions.

Let me, if you allow me, remind you and remind myself about what are these Intra-

Syrian talks, because we have to put it into perspective. The Intra-Syrian talks that we have convened in view of the extremely polarized situation in terms of format, they are, as you know, proximity talks. Now proximity talks means both in time and in location and we have been able, I think, on the first and second, we called the first round as you know that lasted very little, the second one is the one you were with us and this is the third round, proximity was not only in time and location but also showed a lot of flexibility. That is the method we are using.

So, just to talk on flexibility on time, we started on the 13th and you remember why, we started on the very day of the elections but we did not wait for the outcome of the elections.

So we started on the 13th with the HNC, they came earlier and we had two days of discussions with them prior to the arrival of the government delegation which arrived on the 15th. So we were able basically to take advantage of those two days to get more and more analysis and meetings with the HNC. Now let's remember the central point for us is to get, as many as possible, ideas, concepts, any type of possible vision of what could be either the Transitional Governing Body or, what the government seems to be referring to, the government of broad-base.

The secret for us and the usefulness of these proximity talks is to get the respective visions of what is their view of the political transition and that is what we have been working on, and we are working on.

And you must have noted, anyway if you didn't I will like you to note, the big difference from the past. This time it is both sides, both sides, are actually talking only about one subject: political transition, nothing else, there is no questions that we are talking about going back, we are going to political transition.

So we have to be aware that after five years of war, conflict, and horrible conflict, we must also be using some patience when we are looking together at the roadmap, at the timeline and be linking what is the different visions with what is considered a very important roadmap for us, resolution 2254 in the light of the Geneva Communiqué.

As you remember therefore now we get to the point, this is the background to put it into perspective. As you remember since Monday, we indicated that the HNC, and the HNC indicated itself, was going to show their displeasure, unhappiness about the non-progress on the humanitarian situation, and the worrisome situation of the cessation of hostilities, by postponing, suspending their official participation, formal participation to the talks. That was the situation on Monday, as you remember.

Well, but luckily there is also a strong feeling of urgency in not dropping what is the mother of all issues: political transition, and getting deeper in this. And therefore **since Monday, we have been having formal meetings with the government, and been able to consult and meet representatives of the Moscow, Cairo, Damascus platforms, the Women Advisory Board, Civil Society and indeed at the technical level, we had very deep meetings with the HNC representatives in their hotel**, but

as I told you, we are flexible.

Yes, with HNC representatives we have been able during the last few days, perhaps to go even deeper than we ever had in understanding their vision and trying to explain how we can help in materializing that vision of the Transitional Governing Body. They have been up till late at night and have been very very productive, at least for us.

With the government we have been trying to go deeper on their own vision /concept but getting more practically into deeper details about what they understand about a broad-base government, what do you mean by that? Is it going to be cosmetic? Is it going to be real? And if it is real, what does it mean for the opposition, and so on. We are not yet got there and we hope that Monday we can go deeper on that aspect, because that is what we need to understand.

Now we must not forget all this, what we are trying to do in terms of vision, and getting deeper into political transition can and needs to be helped by facts of the ground. And on the ground we have been witnessing worrisome trends, no doubt. What happened today in Aleppo again is very worrisome.

According to all objective criteria comparing to the past, the cessation of hostilities is still in effect, I repeat, is still in effect. None of the sides have renounced to it, delegitimized it, and it is still in effect. But it is in great trouble if we do not act quickly.

We can definitely get back on track but it will require urgent efforts because of what we have been witnessing the last few days.

On the humanitarian side, we had an opportunity yesterday to talk about it, therefore I will summarize it again, modest improvement, real but modest, but not enough.

We did succeed today to reach Rastan which has about 25,000 people, but for instance, we are really looking forward to be able to follow-up on the “recce” (reconnaissance) visit by Khawla Mattar, which went empty handed because she was doing a “recce” (reconnaissance), but the realities she did find out the needs of the people, now we need to be able to reach those people in Darayya. That means also other places, such as Kefraya, Foah, Deir ez-Zor, we are very much concerned about those places where we heard that the people are not eating.

So bottom line, I plan to continue the proximity talks both at formal level and at technical level until next week, probably Wednesday [27 April] as originally planned.

We need to try until Wednesday [27 April] to get as deep as possible in the areas we have been starting discussing and we can do that both formally, informally, technically, practically but we need to do it.

And we will definitely keep you informed because by next Wednesday I think I will be in a position of having a wrap up and giving you a feeling of where we are and what

did we do in terms of reaching an understanding during this third round.

So the message is: we continue, at all levels, both technical, practical, and political, in the hotel, or inside this building as long as we go deeper, for the sake of understanding how to move on political transition, humanitarian aid and reducing the violence or not, putting in danger the ceasefire.

Thank you.

....

**QUESTION:** ... when we asked the UN why the government was blocking the humanitarian aid, the UN told us to ask this question to the Syrian government, and when we had the chance to ask this question, their response was there were no besieged areas by the government and that all areas were besieged by the terrorists and also the humanitarian aid was blocked by Turkey, what is your response to that?

**SdM:** .... Regarding the second question, let me reply by facts. The facts I believe, I work for the UN, is the UN official analysis on that, which is the humanitarian analysis done by OCHA and by those who are involved in humanitarian assistance. So, there are 18 besieged areas, the name besieged requires a special case in other words, not reachable, except through special convoys, special air drops or special type of mission. Of those 18, 15, I repeat 15, according to our analysis, are besieged by the government, 2 are besieged by the armed opposition, one, Deir ez-Zor is besieged completely by ISIS (Daesh), that's why we have to organize dangerous, complicated, expensive air drops.

**QUESTION:** Yesterday you commented on the decision of HNC to suspend their participation in the proximity talks, you said that this is more of a "political gesticulation or positioning", what exactly do you mean by that? And second question, other delegations participating in these talks are saying that you will continue even if the HNC is not in Geneva, can you continue without them?

**SdM:** Well, let me see. I have been in international diplomacy now for 45 years and 7 months; I agree it is too long according to some, so I have some experience in the field of diplomatic negotiations. And there are political messages that are done and can be done through gestures, this is a pattern and what I meant was that the political message by HNC to actually protest, to show disappointment, great disappointment, about the humanitarian situation and also the fact that the cessation of hostilities was being very much in danger, was shown through a political gesture, that is a standard procedure, everyone does it, some do it better than others but it is a standard procedure, that is what I meant.

To the second point, as I told you I have decided to actually continue the Intra-Syrian talks until most likely Wednesday next week, as forecasted. And those talks will continue with those who are around, but that means also technical talks with those who want to have technical discussion and those who want to have formal discussion here,

we will have that as well. The main purpose is getting and absorbing as many as possible ideas from anyone, we are not formal, we want an outcome, I want to be able to say on Wednesday, that I was able to make the best use on all the different concepts/ideas both on humanitarian aid and on the political process, political transition.

**QUESTION:** I was wondering if you can elaborate when do think the ISSG will meet at ministerial level, they are the ones sponsoring these talks and as you mentioned the cessation of hostilities in particular is in trouble and you need their support to go forward, we hear about certain areas, do you have anything more to tell us on that?

**SdM:** The short answer is yes, **we do need certainly a new ISSG [meeting] at the ministerial level** because the level of danger of the table made of three legs and the table of three legs is always fragile, by definition, it is urgently required. I will elaborate [on] the table, of course.

One leg as you know is the humanitarian assistance which should move forward. The second leg is the cessation of hostilities (which) needs to be solidified, and the third leg which is in a way helped by the first two is the issue about political transition.

When one of them is in difficulty, we can make it, but when all three of them are finding difficulties, it is time to call the ISSG.

"Verbatim transcript of press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 22 April 2016. [Boldface and brackets added by Standler. Parentheses are in the original transcript.]

### 23 April 2016

On 23 April, [Reuters](#) reported that the head of the HNC, Riad Hijab, harshly criticized de Mistura for the increase in fighting in Syria. Hijab said: "For two years, Mr de Mistura was appointed in his task as a U.N. envoy and during this period the killing was increased or doubled in Syria and also the number of villages and areas that were under siege also increased where is Mr De Mistura and his team."

### 24 April 2016

On Sunday, 24 April, Obama was visiting Germany, where he held a press conference with the German chancellor. In a terse little paragraph, Obama said:

One thing I do want to say with respect to Syria — we all care deeply about the tragic humanitarian crisis inside of Syrian. I live with this every day. I read about it every day. We talk to people who are experiencing suffering or witness the suffering that's going on there. We are in constant communications with Turkey, our NATO ally, in finding ways in which we can resolve this situation. As you know, I spoke to President Putin early last week to try to make sure that we could reinstate the cessation of hostilities and make sure that the political process does not unwind.

Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama and Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference," [White House](#), 25 April 2016.



**My comment:** Obama publicly declared that the cessation of hostilities agreement needed to be "reinstated", as if the agreement had expired or unraveled. But the facts are that the agreement is holding in most of Syria. The jihadists are attacking Assad's military in Latakia and Damascus provinces, and there is fighting with Nusra Front (which is excluded from the agreement) in Aleppo. Assad's warplanes appear to have bombed civilians in Syria on several recent occasions, beginning 30 March 2016. So I am concerned that Obama is publicly declaring that the cessation of hostilities agreement needs to be "reinstated". Instead, the USA needs to publicly identify violators of the agreement and — together with Russia — punish those violators.

As for the Geneva negotiations "unwind[ing]", the blame is solely on the HNC that is supported by the USA, Western Europe, and Saudi Arabia. The HNC walked out of the negotiations on 18 April and there is *no* indication that they will return. It is pointless to call Russian president Putin, when the problem is the HNC that was created by Saudi Arabia.

### 25 April 2016 — Day 24 in Geneva

De Mistura gave *no* press conference on 25 April.

On 25 April, Reuters tersely reported:

Russia is seriously concerned about the degenerating situation at Syria peace talks in Geneva, the Kremlin said on Monday [25 April].

"Russia has been consistently doing whatever it can to help develop and support this negotiating process, and not allow this process to be disrupted," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a conference call with journalists.

"At the same time, we still state with serious concern that the situation is degenerating at these negotiations."

Dmitry Solovyov, "Russia seriously worried about degenerating Syria peace talks - Kremlin," [Reuters](#), 23:26 GMT, 25 April 2016.

### 26 April 2016 — Day 25 in Geneva

The spokesman for the United Nations in New York City said:

**Question:** And how do you describe the cessation of hostilities, especially in Aleppo, because we see that escalation is rising rapidly? And do you think that Mr. de Mistura needs more support from the Security Council and the International Support Group?

**Spokesman:** I think, you know, obviously, the increase in violence that we've seen is worrying. The cessation of hostilities has been mainly holding, but obviously, for those who live in areas where it has not been holding, it only causes tremendous pain and continued destruction. I think, as Mr. de Mistura said recently, there is a role for the ISSG (International Syria Support Group) to renew the pressure and renew its efforts on the cessation of hostilities. I think Mr. de Mistura will be briefing the Council, and I think we'll also be holding some sort of a press encounter tomorrow [27 April] in

Geneva, where he'll be able to update you.  
Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 26 April 2016.

### 27 April 2016 — Day 26 in Geneva

At 07:14 GMT on 27 April, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported "According to [Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail] Bogdanov, Moscow hopes that the next round of the talks will resume on May 10." Also see [Reuters](#) at 08:52 GMT.

At 13:48 GMT on 27 April, Reuters reported confusion on when the next round of talks in Geneva will begin.

The United Nations said on Wednesday [27 April] no date had been set for the next round of Syria peace talks, contradicting a report quoting Russia's deputy foreign minister as saying talks would resume in Geneva on May 10.

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Asked on Wednesday whether a new date had been set, the HNC said it was up to the United Nations to say when peace talks would resume but that it would not take part until its demands were met.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov's comments were reported [by] RIA news agency earlier on Wednesday, but a spokeswoman for de Mistura said in an email that May 10 was speculation.

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De Mistura is talking about May 14-15 for starting the next round, a Western diplomat said.

"Parties in struggling Syria talks unclear on date of next round," [Reuters](#), 13:48 GMT, 27 April 2016.

The 15:35 GMT version of the same Reuters news article added:

De Mistura is talking about May 14-15 for starting the next round, a second Western diplomat said.

"But it is very, very theoretical," [the anonymous second Western] diplomat said. "It is not at all a given that the two parties will return to Geneva. De Mistura feels that ending the round without giving a date for the next one would not be a good sign."

....

Mistura still aims to convene a ministerial meeting of major and regional powers under the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), before the next round is held, the second Western diplomat said.

This would probably be next week, although Russia was not yet on board, he said. "Parties in struggling Syria talks unclear on date of next round," [Reuters](#), 15:35 GMT, 27 April 2016.

At 21:00 GMT (23:00 Geneva time, 17:00 New York time), de Mistura was scheduled via videoconferencing to begin a briefing to the U.N. Security Council. [Reuters](#).

On the early morning of 28 April in Geneva, de Mistura gave his first press conference since 22 April.

Again, my apologies for the delay. Sit, if you want to sit instead of standing. No, please. I and the colleagues here will allow that. Please, please. Let me say a few words, and since you have been waiting for so long, I will be also giving a chance for questions beyond the usual three and four, because you deserve my respect for you staying as late as now.

So today, as you know, we ended this round of intra-Syrian talks and I just briefed the Security Council a few minutes ago. The last round of talks were the ones previous to this one, received a boost, support, and that was by a very favourable wind. That was a wind of hope, linked to the beginning of the cessation of hostilities and a clear commitment to move ahead with an accelerated pattern of humanitarian access to besieged areas.

This round of talks have instead been overshadowed, let's be frank, by a substantial and indeed worrisome deterioration of the cessation of hostilities. We cannot ignore that and we have not ignored it, and I have mentioned it to the Security Council. We cannot ignore the fact that, during these talks, we have been having incidents, one after the other — symbolized to me, at least just to mention one, a few hours ago, we had an air strike on a hospital in Aleppo, on eastern Aleppo. And probably, what I heard, the last doctor, paediatric doctor, was killed. A few days ago in Damascus, we had people, 15 of them killed in Damascus and 30 wounded. And you know what? Two of those 15 killed happened to be the very people we finally managed to evacuate from Foah. And then what we heard yesterday in Aleppo, nearby Aleppo, five of the white helmets, the very people we know are working and risking their lives to save other people, were clearly targeted by some form of rockets or air strikes. And then the attacks on markets.

Let's put it in a few words: In the last 48 hours, we have had an average of one Syrian killed every 25 minutes. One Syrian wounded every 13 minutes. In spite of this, the talks went on, from the 13th until this morning. The suspension of the formal presence, as you know, in the Palais on the 19th by the HNC was partially compensated by substantial technical meetings, which took place in other locations. Indeed, we had the possibility to acquire quite a lot of ideas on the political transition from both the opposition, the HNC and the Government. And some inputs which we received from the consultations we had with the Cairo, Moscow platforms. And we benefitted even from very interesting, constructive ideas from the civil society and the women's advisory board.

We have therefore prepared what we call a [mediator's summary](#), which you are going

to have access to — what we believe has been some progress and my own understanding of what has been the differing visions of the political transition from the different points of view. So in spite of clearly — and we should admit it and we have to admit it and you should not be surprised — differences after all, we are talking about a political discussion regarding a conflict which has been going on for more than five years, and as you can see is still ongoing, there are some commonalities on the political transition. I just mentioned a few, but you will see in the paper which you will have access to, there are many more.

The first one is: No one is doubting any more that there is an urgent need for a true and credible political transition. You remember when the word transition, at least in certain area, was taboo? Not any more. Everyone acknowledges that that is the agenda. Second, there is a clear understanding that a credible political transition should be overseen by a new — I repeat, new — credible and inclusive transitional governance which will be replacing the present governance arrangements. The other common point is that the transitional governance should include members of the present Government, opposition, independents and others.

And next point: That Syria does require a new constitution. And that the key responsibility for this transitional governance will be, in fact by the transitional governance, will be to oversee the drafting of this new constitution. Next point: That women should enjoy equal rights and representation in every institution. We need to test that, of course. It's easy to say and often is said. We need to test it. When I look at delegations, I'm not seeing it yet. The next point is that any new governance shall be agreed upon in UN-facilitated intra-Syrian talks on the basis of mutual consent.

Having said that, no denial that there are still major differences officially on the major issues. But you can see that there is a movement in a certain area, which before you didn't have an idea that that could have been the case. So there is an opportunity of going deeper. And that's exactly what we want to do, obviously being followed and following the principle of the Geneva Communiqué and Resolution 2254.

So I did share this commonality with the Security Council. I am doing it also with you. My intention is to use more intensely what we have been applying this time, for the first time. Apart from proximity talks, what we have been doing is also now using technical meetings, in the hotel or in the building, in order to get deeper on these types of aspects. Otherwise, we would not have been able to detect these commonalities.

My aim is therefore to continue, obviously, these talks. We have at least one or two more rounds before July, which is our timetable which we been setting in order to be able to take stock of where we are and to announce a new target date during the course of May in order to build on these points.

But now, here I need to go back to where I started from, if you allow me to. But one thing is to look at it professionally, like a diplomat has to do, the process, and the other one is to look through the eyes of the Syrian people. So the Syrian voices that I am getting from everywhere, and you are probably getting the same, by emails, by phone

calls, they are saying one thing: Hudna, hudna, hudna. This is the one thing they are telling us. They are telling me, they are saying: Thank you. Thank you for trying hard. Thank you very much for doing what you are trying to do in trying to see if there is any commonality. But what we need to do and to hear is that the cessation of hostilities is salvaged and that the cessation of hostilities is saved from a total collapse. It's still there. It's still there because in many areas, it's still there. But it's in great danger. It's still alive, but barely. And the perception is that it could collapse at any time. But it's enough to look at images. So the bottom line they are telling me, and we are hearing it, is hudna, hudna, hudna.

The Russian Federation and the US, as you remember, had a very strong initiative, which produced basically a miracle, because on 27 February, suddenly within hours, we had a dramatic collapse not of the cessation of hostilities but of the hostilities. And that produced a great feeling among everyone that in fact the political discussions and everything else had and should have a chance. And that produced the feeling of hope, unexpected hope, which then produced in turn credibility and sustainability of what is a political process. We need that to be urgently revitalized. And only the Russian Federation and the US, as they did when they launched suddenly everything related to the cessation of hostilities, need to come back again and relaunch it.

The next round of talks are going to take place, because we need and we want to keep the momentum. But let's be frank: They will be meaningful only if and when the cessation of hostilities is brought back to the level we saw in February and in March. Hence, my appeal for a US-Russian urgent initiative at the highest levels, because the legacy of both President Obama and President Putin is linked to the success of what has been a unique initiative which started very well and needs to end very well: the hudna. Plus an ISSG new meeting at the ministerial level, in order to relaunch what has been for a moment put in danger. That is what we want to obtain before we actually announce the new round of talks, because that would certainly help the round of talks to become credible and effective. And we are ready for doing so because a lot has been done so far.

Thank you, and I am ready for questions.

[questions & answers omitted from the U.N. transcript]

"Transcript of press remarks by Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geneva, 27 April 2016," [U.N. Geneva](#), 28 April 2016. [Link added to Mediator's Summary.]

I posted a copy of the Mediator's Summary at [www.rbs0.com](http://www.rbs0.com).

There are two big problems: (1) the ceasefire supposedly unraveled during April and (2) the HNC walked out of the negotiations on 18 April. (I say "supposedly unraveled" because the [facts](#) clearly show that fewer people are dying in Syria in April than before the ceasefire.) These two problems are intertwined, because the HNC refused to negotiate in early February owing to the continued fighting in Syria. The ceasefire began on 27 February to induce the HNC to negotiate.

On 19 April, as documented above, the HNC [Alloush] declared it would *not* return to

negotiations in Geneva until *all* of the following demands were satisfied:

1. "end the siege on rebel held areas",
2. "allowing [humanitarian] aid in",
3. "releasing detainees", and
4. "ending airstrikes on civilians."

*When* will these four demands be met?

1. Assad shows no sign of lifting the sieges on 15 rebel-held areas. The sieges will continue for the foreseeable future.
2. Back in February 2014 — more than two years ago — U.N. Security Council Resolution 2139 demanded that all parties in Syria allow deliveries of humanitarian aid. This Resolution was ignored by every party in Syria. Occasionally, Assad allows some token delivery of humanitarian aid, but Assad is really stubborn.
3. Back in April 2012 — four years ago — U.N. Security Council Resolution 2042 endorsed Kofi Annan's proposal for, amongst other things, "release of arbitrarily detained persons". This release has *not* happened and is *not* likely to happen in the foreseeable future.
4. My essay for February 2014 mentions that Assad was using helicopters to drop barrels full of explosives on civilians. In April 2014, Assad began dropping cylinders of chlorine gas on civilian areas. In my essay for [May 2014](#), I rhetorically asked if Assad was sane, because there was *no* military advantage to Assad for these attacks, and a huge detriment to Assad. But Assad appears to continue to attack civilians. For example: Assad had airstrikes on civilians in a suburb of Damascus on 30-31 March 2016, and airstrikes on a marketplace in Idlib province on 19 April 2016. Given Assad's more than two year history of attacking civilians, Assad is *not* likely to stop in the foreseeable future.

Even if one demand were met, there will still be three unsatisfied demands. I conclude that the HNC will *not* return to the negotiations in Geneva in the foreseeable future. However, de Mistura can continue negotiating with other groups from Syria (e.g., the Moscow-Cairo group, the women's group, the Hmeimim delegation). Hijab's HNC *might* send a few people to a hotel in Geneva to have "technical discussions" with de Mistura's team at that hotel.

On 22 April, de Mistura publicly declared he needed another ISSG meeting to help solve problems. On 1 May there is still *no* announcement of when the ISSG will meet.

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## **March 2016 Cessation of Hostilities**

Full-text of agreements on a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria is posted at [rbs0.com](http://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. My essay for [March 2016](#) chronicled more violations of the cessation of hostilities, although the ceasefire was generally respected. It was amazing that the ceasefire generally held, given that there was *no* investigation of violations, and *no* punishment of violators.

The last paragraph of the cessation of hostilities agreement states that "the cessation of hostilities will be monitored in an impartial and transparent manner and with broad media coverage." Russia created a [website](#) with daily reports of violations of the agreement, beginning 28 Feb 2016. When I searched Google on 13 April, I could not find any website for the U.S. center in Jordan. The USA has failed to publish daily reports of violations that the U.S. received at its center in Jordan.

The Russians are *not* reporting alleged violations by Assad and his allies (e.g., Hezbollah, Russia), so the world *needs* to hear the U.S. view of violations in Syria.

To distinguish the centered headings above for the daily reports of [Geneva](#) negotiations from the centered headings below for the cessation of hostilities, I have added "of ceasefire" to each heading below. Technically, "cessation of hostilities" is the correct phrase, but it is too long for a heading.

### **1 April 2016: 35<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

The bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense on 1 April says:

In general, the ceasefire regime in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic has been observed. In the course of last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 5, Aleppo and Damascus — 1 for each).

In the Latakia province, armed formations of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, opened fire with mortars and large-caliber machine guns against Mazraat Omaro and Sandran.

Mortar shelling was performed against positions of the government troops near Shmaisa from Zaytunjik.

In Aleppo, Sultan Murad Brigade militants carried out mortar attack against Sheikh Maqsood from Ashrafiyah. There are wounded.

In Damascus, militants of Jaysh al-Islam opened mortar fire against living houses in al-Sakhiyah.

....



Jubhat al-Nusra formations continue performing acts of provocations in the north-west of Aleppo. Sheikh Maqsood suffered shelling four times from Bustan al-Basha. Terrorists fired more than 15 bombs and 20 improvised projectiles. Two civilians have been wounded.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 1, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 1 April 2016.

I looked at the website of the Syrian Arab News Agency to find their view of what was happening, but there was no report there. But *PressTV* in Iran said:

Syrian authorities announced on Friday [1 April] that the airborne attacks in the Deir al-Asafir district, which is situated southeast of Damascus, the previous day targeted members of the Takfiri Daesh and al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front terrorist groups.

The announcement came in response to claims by French Foreign Ministry spokesman Romain Nadal, who said civilians were killed in the Syrian government airstrikes. Western media reports had earlier alleged that 14 airstrikes on the fringes of the capital killed 32 people, mostly women and children.

Parts of the Eastern Ghouta region east of Damascus, where Deir al-Asafir is situated, are being controlled by different militant groups such as the so-called Jaysh al-Islam and al-Nusra Front.

"Syria rejects French claims of ceasefire violation," [PressTV](#), 1 April 2016.

My comment is that Assad's government was inconsistent with their ~~propaganda~~ story. Jaysh al-Islam fired mortar shells at a suburb of Damascus, so Assad retaliated by bombing ISIL (Daesh) and Nusra! *Not* a credible story.

## **2 April 2016: 36<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

The bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense on 2 April says:

In general, the ceasefire regime in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic has been observed. In the course of last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo — 3, Latakia and Damascus — 2 for each).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, after shelling with multiple launch rocket systems from al-Jandul launched an offensive on Sheikh Maqsood (Aleppo).

After a two-hour long combat militants returned to the positions, which they had kept before. A member of the Kurdish militia detachment was killed and two civilians were wounded during the combat.

Sheikh Maqsood (near Farauni Mosque) suffered mortar shelling conducted by Shugada Badrasyon Brigade. One civilian was wounded.

Militants of Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki performed mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near al-Bohos (Aleppo) from Rashidin.

In the Latakia province, armed formations of Ahrar al-Sham grouping opened fire with mortars and large-caliber machine guns against positions of the government troops in Mazraat Omaro and Sandran.

Jaysh al-Islam militants opened fire with mortars and small arms against al-Sakhiyah and Muazamiyah (Damascus) from Zibdin.

.....

Leadership of the Russian and American Coordination Centres discussed ceasefire violations, which had taken place in several Syrian regions.

Military servicemen of the Syrian engineer troops continue mine-clearing operations near Palmyra. The sappers have defused 1230 mines and improvised explosive devices in the city, which had been liberated from terrorists.

Armed formations of Jabhat al-Nusra continue performing acts of provocations in the north-west of the Aleppo province.

Handrat suffered mortar shelling three times from Muhain Handrat. Two civilians were wounded.

Mortar fire was opened twice from suburbs of Kafr Hamra against positions of the government troops near Hara village.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 2, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 2 April 2016.

On 2 April, the Associated Press published an alarmist news report that claims the ceasefire in Syria was "unraveling".

Syria's partial cease-fire appeared to be unraveling Saturday [2 April] as fierce fighting between government forces and opposition fighters, including members of the al-Qaida affiliated Nusra Front, erupted outside the country's second largest city of Aleppo and other parts in the country's north.

At least 25 pro-government and 16 opposition fighters died in the clashes south of Aleppo, where the Nusra Front and rebel militias captured a village overlooking a major highway, a Britain-based monitoring group told The Associated Press.

The fighting was the most serious in the area since the cease-fire, engineered by the U.S. and Russia, took effect Feb. 27. The violence in the north, along with heavy government airstrikes that killed more than 30 civilians near Damascus this week [30-31 March], threatened to completely dissolve the truce, which had sharply reduced overall violence across the war-ravaged country.

The rebel advances also risk drawing Russia back into the conflict after it shored up the government's position through a fierce bombing campaign that wound down nearly

three weeks ago [15 March]. The opposition's advances threaten to reverse some of the gains made by the government during the Russian campaign.

....

The truce agreement, the first of its kind in Syria's five year war, excludes the Nusra Front and the Islamic State group. But the Nusra Front is embedded with other groups throughout the country. The government has taken advantage of this ambiguity to strike and besiege opposition-held areas across Syria.

....

A spokesman for a U.S.-backed division of the Free Syrian Army accused the government of scrapping the cease-fire and undermining the Geneva talks. The group said one of its fighters was killed in the offensive against government forces in the south Aleppo countryside. [9] "The truce is considered over," Zakariya Qaytaz of the Division 13 brigade told AP through Twitter. "This battle is a notice to the regime."

The United States and Russia had hoped a halt in fighting would cause opposition factions to distance themselves from extremist groups such as the Nusra Front. Instead, rebel militia seem to have united in their opposition to the government.

The nationalist Division 13 brigade is now fighting alongside Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, a powerful jihadist militia that is internally divided over its association with the al-Qaida affiliate.

Qaytaz said his faction remained wary of the Nusra Front after the latter stole their weapons and expelled them from the town of Maarat al-Nouman in March.

Philip Issa, "Syria cease-fire at risk as heavy fighting erupts," [Associated Press](#), 18:27 GMT, 2 April 2016.

My comment is that the fighting near Aleppo is by Nusra Front, which is *not* part of the cessation of hostilities agreement. Therefore, Nusra can *not* violate the agreement. However, rebel or jihadist groups who cooperate with Nusra might be encouraged to violate the cessation of hostilities, to retaliate for acts by Assad's government.

The fighting in eastern suburbs of Damascus seems to be by Jaish al-Islam jihadists, who did agree to the cessation of hostilities. Indeed, a member of Jaish al-Islam is part of Hijab's opposition delegation to negotiations in Geneva.

### **3 April 2016: 37<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 3 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic has been observed. In the course of last 24 hours, 11 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 7, Aleppo — 3, and Damascus — 1).

In the Latakia province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Nahshebba and Ikko.

Mortar shelling of units of the Syrian Armed Forces near Sandran Deiruna, Shmaisa and Mazraat Omaro (Latakia province) has continued.

Ahrar al-Sham armed grouping performed shelling with improvised multiple launch rocket systems against military airfield near Minnik from al-Jandul (Aleppo).

Sultan Murad Brigade performed two attacks with improvised multiple launch rocket systems and large-caliber machine guns against Sheikh Maqsood (Aleppo) from Sakan al-Shababi. Six civilians were killed and 4 ones were wounded.

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam shelled positions of the Syrian troops in Jaubar (Damascus) from al-Kasa with mortars and small arms.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 3, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 3 April 2016.

On 3 April, the Associated Press continued their alarmist reporting, despite *no* facts to support their conclusion.

The Latest on the fighting in Syria that's threatening to undermine a U.S.-Russia-brokered cease-fire that has held for over a month (all times local [in Beirut]):

[Only three news items:

1. 03:00 on 4 April — "a leader of an al-Qaida faction in Syria was killed in a U.S. air strike"
2. 12:50 on 3 April — Assad's army liberated Qaryatain from ISIL
3. 12:20 — "The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says 12 Hezbollah fighters were killed and dozens were wounded in Saturday's [2 April] attack by militants led by al-Qaida's Syria branch — known as the Nusra Front — on the northern village of al-Ais." .... "Though Nusra Front is not part of a U.S.-Russia-engineered truce between the Syrian government forces and Western-backed rebels, the fighting has threatened to undermine the cease-fire that has held for over a month."]

"The Latest: Strike kills leader of al-Qaida faction in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 24:58 GMT, 3 April 2016.

My comment is that the dire prediction of the Associated Press on 2 April about the "unraveling" ceasefire has not come true. Most of the violations of the ceasefire reported on 3 April were by the jihadist group, Ahrar al-Sham, in Latakia province — which are distinct from the fighting by Nusra in Aleppo, and the bombings on 30-31 March by Assad near Damascus. There was one violation reported on 3 April when Jaysh al-Islam fired mortar shells in a suburb of Damascus. Any battles with either ISIL or al-Qaida are *not* violations of the cessation of hostilities.

#### 4 April 2016: 38<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire

On 4 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

In general, the ceasefire regime in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic has been observed. In the course of last 24 hours, 4 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

....

In course of last 24 hours, tension escalation has been observed in the northern and north-eastern suburbs of Aleppo.

....

The US Coordination Centre in Amman has been informed about combat actions in Aleppo, which had been launched by Jabhat al-Nusra.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 4, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 4 April 2016.

Obviously, the cessation of hostilities did *not* "unravel", as there were only four violations reported on 4 April, and none of those four violations were in the two problems areas of Damascus or Aleppo.

#### 5 April 2016: 39<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire

On 5 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic.

In the course of last 24 hours, 5 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 2, Daraa, Homs and Damascus — 1 for each).

In the Latakia province, unidentified armed formations continue shelling against units of the Syrian Armed Forces near Sandran and Mazraat Omaro.

In the Daraa province, militants of the Free Syrian Army opened fire with large-caliber machine guns against positions of the government troops near al-Makhatta.

Near Dar al-Kabira, an automobile of a citizen from Tahun Donguziyah has been destroyed in course of an attack carried out by illegal armed formations on the Homs-Hama highway (Homs province).

In the Damascus province, mortar fire was opened from Harzma, which had been controlled by Jaysh al-Islam, against Marg Sultan. A civilian was wounded.

....

Tension escalation has been observed in Aleppo and its suburbs. Within last two

weeks, 26 civilians were killed and 38 ones received wounds of varying severity during attacks of militants.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 5, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 5 April 2016.

Once again, the Associated Press continues their alarmist reporting that is *not* supported by facts:

The Latest on the fighting in Syria that's threatening to undermine a U.S.-Russia-brokered cease-fire that has held for over a month (all times local [in Beirut]):

....

12:20 p.m.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says Tuesday's [5 April] shelling came amid clashes between militants, including members of al-Qaida's branch in Syria, and Kurdish fighters. The activist group says nine were killed.

"The Latest: US accuses Syria of blocking aid to many areas," [Associated Press](#), 5 April 2016.

The Associated Press cites only this one incident involving Nusra Front, which is excluded from the cessation of hostilities, to support the AP's assertion that the ceasefire is being "undermined". On 6-8 April, the Associated Press abandoned their alarmist prediction that the ceasefire was "unraveling".

On 5 April, a jihadist group, Ahrar al-Sham, shot down a Syrian air force Su-22 airplane near Aleppo city. The Syrian government claims their jet was shot down by an anti-aircraft missile, while the jihadists claim they used anti-aircraft guns. [Reuters](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

Previously, on 12 March 2016, an insurgent group, Jaish al-Nasr, shot down a Syrian air force MiG-21 airplane in Hama province. The Syrian government claims their jet was shot down by an anti-aircraft missile, while the insurgents claim they used anti-aircraft guns. [Reuters](#)(12 Mar); [Reuters](#)(13 Mar); [RIA-Novosti](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

In my opinion, it would be irresponsible to give insurgents in Syria anti-aircraft missiles. The missiles would be intended to shoot down Assad's and Russian aircraft, leading to a significant escalation of hostilities. Also ISIL or Nusra might capture some of the anti-aircraft missiles and use them to shoot down civilian airliners in Europe. Despite these obvious dangers, Saudi Arabia publicly advocates giving rebels anti-aircraft missiles. [Arab News](#).

### **6 April 2016: 40<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 6 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 4 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 3, Homs — 1).

In the Latakia province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, continued mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Sandran, Quinsibba, and Faraa. One Syrian serviceman was killed and eleven ones were wounded.

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Kafr Nan from Tajar Amir (Homs province).

....

Armed groups of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra (not included in the Russian-American agreement on ceasefire in Syria) continue taking efforts to perform armed provocative actions and attacks against civilians and the government troops.

....

Because of rough escalation, aircraft of Russian Aerospace Forces hit positions of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists in suburbs of Aleppo and quelled their attempts for offensive after conducting aerial reconnaissance and detecting sharp locations of targets.

Hotline of the Russian Centre continues receiving information about increasing of number of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists in Aleppo. According to the received information, a group (more than 90 men) has arrived in Ashrafiyah from Bshantara. This is the evidence of possible preparation for large-scale offensive by terrorists.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 6, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 6 April 2016.

RIA-Novosti had an alternative translation of part of bulletin about Russian airstrikes on Nusra Front:

Russian combat jets deployed in Syria have carried out airstrikes against Nusra Front militants to thwart their attempted offensive against Kurdish militia in the outskirts of the city of Aleppo, the Russian Defense Ministry said Wednesday [6 April]. "In light of the escalation of the situation, after an aerial reconnaissance and thorough target-designation, the Russian aircraft have carried out airstrikes against Nusra Front positions in the outskirts of Aleppo, thwarting terrorists' attempt to launch an offensive," the ministry said in a daily bulletin posted on its website.

"Russian Airstrikes Thwart Nusra Front Attacks Near Syria's Aleppo," [RIA-Novosti](#), 17:46 GMT, 6 April 2016.

It is significant that Russian airstrikes targeted Nusra in suburbs of Aleppo. Russia did *not* disclose the number of targets hit.

### **7 April 2016: 41<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 7 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Within last 24 hours, 4 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 2, Homs — 1, Hama — 1).

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, opened fire with improvised multiple launch rocket systems against Tahun Donguziyah from Teir Maala (Homs province).

In the Hama province, militants of Free Syrian Army carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops from Kafr Nbuda.

Mortar shelling against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Sandran and Shmaisa (Latakia province) were continued.

....

Militants of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist groupings (not included in the Russian-American agreement on ceasefire in Syria) continue taking efforts to perform armed provocative actions and attacks against civilians and the government troops.

Within last 24 hours, near Aleppo, terrorists of Jabhat al-Nusra took efforts to capture Handrat and Sheikh Maqsood.

According to the information, which had been received from citizens, more than 1,000 militants of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping are concentrated in Muheim Handrat, Jandul, Hraitan and Kafr Hamra (to the north from Aleppo). They are armed with 7 tanks and 24 off-roaders with large-caliber machine guns.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 7, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 7 April 2016.

### **8 April 2016: 42<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 8 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Within last 24 hours, 6 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 4, Homs — 1, Hama — 1).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, continued shelling with multiple launch rocket systems against positions of the Syrian army near Sandran, Shmaisa and Nekhshebbba. One civilian was killed.

In the Homs province, Ahrar al-Sham militants performed mortar shelling against Tesnin from Umm Sharshukh.

In the Hama province, Jaysh al-Islam militants opened fire with multiple launch rocket systems against Handek al-Sharqi from Qalat al-Mudik.



....

Militants of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist groupings (not included in the Russian-American agreement on ceasefire in Syria) continue performing armed provocative actions and attacks against civilians and the government troops.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist formations do not stop warfare in Aleppo and its suburbs. 18 civilians were killed and 61 citizen received wounds of different severity by mortar shelling performed by terrorists taking efforts to capture Sheikh Maqsood.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping (up to 400 men) launched an offensive on positions of Kurdish units.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 8, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 8 April 2016.

### **9 April 2016: 43<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 9 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Within last 24 hours, 6 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 4, Homs — 1, Quneitra — 1).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against units of the Syrian army near Sandran, Ard al-Wata, Mazraat Omaro and Rasha (Latakia province). One civilian was killed, two citizens were heavily wounded.

Ahrar al-Sham militants performed mortar shelling against Tesnin village (Homs province) from Umm Sharshukh.

In Quneitra province, opposition formations of the Free Syrian Army systematically fired with small arms against Saasa. One civilian was killed.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 9, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 9 April 2016.

Reuters reported an alarmist statement from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights:

Syrian government forces and their allies battled insurgents including al Qaeda fighters in fierce clashes south of Aleppo late on Saturday [9 April], and the rebels advanced taking over two hilltops, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The Britain-based monitoring group's director Rami Abdulrahman said this might mark a breakdown in the area of a fragile cessation of hostilities agreement which has been in place for several weeks and slowed fighting but not halted it.

Insurgent fighters including those from the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front had earlier begun an assault nearby and southwest of Syria's former commercial hub Aleppo, the

Observatory said. Syrian and Russian warplanes launched dozens of air strikes in the area, it said.

....

Warring sides in the conflict have traded blame for violations of the truce. "Rebels and Syrian government forces battle in fierce clashes near Aleppo — monitor," [Reuters](#), 22:40 GMT, 9 April 2016.

### 10 April 2016: 44<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire

On 10 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 5 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 4, Hama — 1).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, continued firing with mortars and small arms against units of the Syrian army near Sandran, Karmel and Ain al-Qantara (Latakia province). Two citizens were wounded.

In the Hama province, militants of the Free Syrian Army carried out mortar shelling against Harbet al-Arus village. One citizen was killed, a woman was heavily wounded.

....

According to information, which had been received from civilians and opposition forces, Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping continue concentrating its forces to the north-west from Aleppo.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 10, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 10 April 2016.

On 10 April, the Associated Press issued another alarmist news article:

Government forces and rebels clashed Sunday [10 April] across northern and western Syria, imperiling a monthlong cease-fire ahead of peace talks in Geneva, while airstrikes pounded the Islamic State group's de facto capital of Raqqa, killing dozens.

....

[Syrian] Observatory [for Human Rights] head Rami Abdurrahman said fighting was intensifying around the northern city of Aleppo and "definitely" threatens the cease-fire.

....

But expectations of progress [in Geneva] have been dampened by the surge in fighting, the continued obstruction to humanitarian access[,] and the staunch positions by the government, the opposition[,] and their international backers.

A leading member of the opposition High Negotiations Committee, which is scheduled to participate in the indirect talks, warned that the cease-fire is on "the brink of collapse."

Philip Issa, "Syrian cease-fire strained by new clashes ahead of talks," [Associated Press](#), 20:07 GMT, 10 April 2016.

Reuters also reported the same alarmist predictions of a collapsing cessation of hostilities.

The Russian air force and Syrian military are preparing a joint operation to take Aleppo from rebels, the Syrian prime minister was quoted saying on Sunday [10 April], and an opposition official said a ceasefire was on the verge of collapse.

With a U.N. envoy due in Damascus in a bid to advance struggling diplomatic efforts, the "cessation of hostilities agreement" brokered by Russia and the United States came under new strain as government and rebel forces fought near Aleppo.

....

A member of the main opposition council said the last 10 days had "witnessed a serious deterioration, to the point where the ceasefire is about to collapse". Bassma Kodmani of the High Negotiations Committee also told Journal du Dimanche that a U.S.-Russian ceasefire monitoring mission was "powerless".

....

Rami Abdulrahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said "in Aleppo there is a real collapse of the truce".

Tom Perry & Vladimir Soldatkin, "Syrian PM says Russia to back new Aleppo attack; opposition says truce near collapse," [Reuters](#), 22:31 GMT, 10 April 2016.

These alarmist reports are puzzling. Nusra Front is excluded from the cessation of hostilities. So any fighting between Nusra and others is *not* a violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement. When rebel or jihadist groups join Nusra in an attack on Assad's army, those rebel or jihadist groups are presumed also excluded from the cessation of hostilities agreement, because they are allied with Nusra and indistinguishable from Nusra.

Note that the Cessation of Hostilities [Agreement](#) specifically requires all parties to the Agreement: "To refrain from acquiring or seeking to acquire territory from other parties to the ceasefire". That means that Assad and Russia may attack Nusra — and may liberate cities from Nusra — because Nusra is *not* a party to the Agreement. That also means that rebels/jihadist allied with Nusra violate the Agreement when they attempt to "acquire territory" from the Syrian government.

### **11 April 2016: 45<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 11 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Within last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 6, Homs — 1).

In the Latakia province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out firing with mortars and small arms against units of the Syrian army from Sandran Mazraat Omaro. One citizen was killed and three ones were wounded after shelling against Rasha and Quelaz.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April [11], 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 11 April 2016.

On 11 April, the Associated Press reports that Russia denies any plans to liberate Aleppo, and the opposition shot down another Syrian warplane.

The Russian military says it is helping the Syrian army fight the al-Qaida-affiliated Nusra Front around Aleppo, but has no plan to storm the city.

....

[Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi of the Russian military's general staff] said that the Syrian army backed by Russian warplanes is taking action to derail Nusra's plan. He added that "there is no plan to storm Aleppo."

Rudskoi's comment contradicted a statement by Syrian Prime Minister Wael Nader al-Halki, who reportedly told Russian lawmakers in Damascus on Sunday [10 April] that Syrian troops backed by the Russian air force are preparing a joint operation to capture Aleppo.

....

A conflict monitoring group and the Islamic State group both say that IS militants have shot down a Syrian government war plane during violent clashes to the west of Damascus.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says the fate of the pilot was unknown. It said his plane was shot down in the vicinity of the Dumayr Air Base in the eastern Qalamoun mountains, which straddle the border with Lebanon.

A news agency for the extremist group says the wreckage landed inside the base, damaging three other planes. The Aamaq News Agency posted a video on social media that shows thick smoke emerging from what it says is the Dumayr base.

"The Latest: Activists: IS militants down Syrian warplane," [Associated Press](#), 20:36 GMT, 11 April 2016.

[Reuters](#) also reports Gen. Rudskoy said: "No storming of the city of Aleppo is planned." Reuters reports "around 9,500 Al-Nusra fighters had gathered to the south-west and north of Aleppo".

Because the USA does *not* post on the Internet reports of alleged violations of cessations of

hostilities, beginning 11 April, I have looked at transcripts of Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department to obtain the U.S. view of the situation in Syria. Most days nothing significant was mentioned. Below, on 14 April I quote from a Daily Press Briefing. There is a terse mention in a 19 April Daily Press Briefing that is quoted below. My impression is that the U.S. Government is *not* serious about enforcing the cessation of hostilities agreement, because of the absence of publicity about violations.

### **12 April 2016: 46<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 12 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 4 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Formations of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, continued shelling with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against Jub al-Mgara, Aku Baer, Ain al-Ashara, and Shmaisa. Three citizens were killed and three ones received wounds of different severity.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 12, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 12 April 2016.

According to the Russian reports from 1-12 April, there are two problems:

1. in Aleppo province, Nusra Front is fighting against Assad's government. There are numerous rebel or jihadist groups who are covered by the cessation of hostilities agreement who are also allied with Nusra in Aleppo.
2. in Latakia province, the Ahrar al-Sham jihadist group had repeatedly violated the cessation of hostilities agreement.

Elsewhere, the cessation of hostilities is holding.

On 12 April, an Agence France Press article in [Al-Arabiya](#) had a headline: "Syria ceasefire withers as 'Russia plans offensive' ". The AFP says: "Aleppo is home to a variety of rebel forces, however, and Washington is concerned that any Russian-backed assault on Al-Nusra may spread to also target moderate factions. This in turn could cause the ceasefire to collapse and even derail the UN-mediated political peace process due to resume in Geneva on Wednesday [13 April]."

### **13 April 2016: 47<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 13 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 3 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Ahrar al-Sham formations continued shelling with mortars and improvised multiple launch rocket systems against Sandran, Beit Smaira and Kermel.

....

Militants of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping continue shelling against inhabited areas and positions of the government troops in order to set off ceasefire in the Aleppo, Homs, and Latakia provinces.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 13, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 13 April 2016.

The spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve in Baghdad, Col. Steve Warren, gave his perspective on the status of the cessation of hostilities in Syria.

Well, the cessation of hostilities still largely holds. There have been violations, of course, primarily in the Aleppo area.

But largely speaking, it's holding. And I know there's — there's talks going on in Geneva that are about to start, there's several working groups. I know the Americans and the Russians are co-chairs of one of them.

So that process appears to be going from a purely military perspective. There have been violations, none of them significant enough to declare that it's collapsed or anything. They do seem to be increasing, but marginally at this point. So difficult to tell whether it's a trend or if it's just happening right now for some reason.

"Department of Defense Press Briefing by Col. Warren via Teleconference from Baghdad, Iraq," [Pentagon](#), 13 April 2016.

#### **14 April 2016: 48<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 14 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 4 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham carried out shelling with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against Sandran, Beit Smaira, Kinsibba and Kermel. One civilian was killed and four ones were wounded.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 14, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 14 April 2016.

On 14 April, the Associated Press reports fighting in Aleppo. Because journalists vaguely use words like "rebel" to refer to *all* insurgents, it is not clear precisely which groups are fighting. Syrian activists and state media are reporting an exchange of shelling in the northern city of Aleppo on the second day of the new round of peace talks in Geneva.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and Aleppo-based activist Bahaa al-Halaby say government warplanes, helicopter gunships and artillery have been bombarding rebel-held parts of the city on Thursday [14 April].

The pro-government Addounia TV says one person was killed and five were wounded by mortar rounds fired by insurgents into the predominantly Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud district of the city.

....

Government forces and their allies have rebel-held parts of Aleppo almost surrounded from all sides, except for a corridor from the northwestern edge of the city.

"The Latest: Opposition: Assad allies OK for transition," [Associated Press](#), 19:38 GMT, 14 April 2016.

On 14 April, Reuters reported:

Syria's army backed by Russian warplanes launched an assault north of Aleppo on Thursday, threatening to block a vital rebel route into the city in fighting that has cast new clouds over Geneva peace talks.

Syria's recent upsurge in fighting, particularly around the northern city of Aleppo, has proven the most acute challenge yet to a cessation of hostilities deal agreed in February and soured an already bleak mood as opposing sides gather in Geneva.

Angus McDowall & Tom Miles, "New Aleppo assault casts fresh cloud over Syria peace talks," [Reuters](#), 22:34 GMT, 14 April 2016.

On 14 April, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department, John Kirby, said at his daily press briefing:

QUESTION: All right. More broadly on Syria, you probably have seen that the situation in Aleppo has gotten pretty bad. Thousands of people are fleeing. The atmosphere in Geneva appears to be one of pretty much doom and gloom on the humanitarian aid front, and I'm just wondering what your thoughts are about both of those.

MR KIRBY: Well, we're watching the Syrian regime offensive near Aleppo very, very closely, and we've seen reports that Russian airstrikes are also supporting this offensive. And we are concerned about what they're doing, what their intentions are, and who they're striking. Certainly mindful that civilians are fleeing, and I think no one should be surprised by that. But we're watching it as closely as we can and we are concerned about it.

....

MR KIRBY: Aleppo in particular — and it's important to remember that there is — it's a mixed environment there. I mean, to be honest, there aren't just opposition groups there. We do believe that there are pockets of Nusra and perhaps even Daesh in and around Aleppo. So we're watching this — I don't want to call it a campaign. That's probably not a fair way of describing it. This offensive in Aleppo, we're watching it very, very closely. And to the degree that opposition or civilians are being targeted, we're going to — we're going to monitor that, we're going to track that, and we're going to raise that case.

....

MR KIRBY: And look, largely [the cessation of hostilities] is still holding. There have been and continue to be violations. I note that. I admit that. But largely, it's still holding. And the violence in Syria is largely down. And there's no question about that. And it's lasted a heck of a lot longer than I think anybody originally thought at the outset that it would.

....

MR KIRBY: I think it's hard to assume or to conclude anything differently when you have a military offensive on an entire city like Aleppo. It's difficult to come to any other kind of conclusion that they are in fact — the regime is trying to retake the city. Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 14 April 2016.

### **15 April 2016: 49<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 15 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 5 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Formations of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, continued shelling with mortars and improvised multiple launch rocket systems against Sandran, Beit Smaira, Shakur Tahtani, Ruweisa Rashu and Kermel. Two citizens were killed and four ones received wounds of different severity.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 15, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 15 April 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

Russia says its warplanes are helping the Syrian army fight the al-Qaida-affiliated Nusra Front around Aleppo, adding that there is no plan to capture the city.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said Friday [15 April] that Syrian troops' attacks on the Nusra Front are necessary to prevent the militants from blocking civilian areas. It emphasized that "there is no plan for storming Aleppo."

"The Latest: Russia says no plans to capture Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 17:39 GMT, 15 April 2016.

### **16 April 2016: 50<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 16 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 6, Damascus — 2).



Formations of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, continued artillery shelling Sandran, Beit Smaira, Hakur Tahtani, Rasha and Qilaz. Ain al-Shara was shelled twice.

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam carried out mortar shelling against al-Tabala (Damascus province) for two times.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 16, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 16 April 2016.

### **17 April 2016: 51<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On Sunday, 17 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia and Homs — 3 for each, Damascus — 2).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with multiple launch rocket systems and mortars against Sandran, Ain al-Ashara and Qilaz (Latakia province).

In the Homs province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham performed mortar shelling against Ashrafiyah, al-Ganto and Ard al-Jaburin.

Jaysh al-Islam opposition grouping carried out mortar firing against al-Malikha and ak-Sakhiyah sections of Damascus from Zibdin.

....

ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists continue taking efforts to control Aleppo-Homs highway in order to escalate humanitarian situation in Aleppo.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 17, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 17 April 2016.

### **18 April 2016: 52<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 18 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 5 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 4, Hama — 1).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with multiple launch rocket systems and mortars against Sandran, Ain al-Ashara, Ard al-Wata and Qellaz (Latakia province) as well as positions of the government troops near Maharda in the Hama province. Three civilians were killed and four ones were wounded.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 18, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 18 April 2016.

As negotiations almost collapsed in Geneva on 18 April, the opposition announced it was beginning assaults in Latakia province, in retaliation for alleged violations of the ceasefire by Assad's forces in Aleppo. Note that this was a deliberate decision by the highest levels of the opposition, *not* some rogue commander in the field deciding to violate the ceasefire.

[Reuters](#) reports the opposition "launched a fierce attack" against Assad's forces in Latakia province on the early morning of 18 April. The opposition also made attacks in Hama province. Reuters reports: "The groups attacking [in Hama] included factions that did not commit to the truce."

Reuters summarized the problems in Aleppo, Latakia, and Hama:

Russia has been backing Syrian government operations around Aleppo under the pretext that it is only targeting Islamic State and the Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of al Qaeda, said a U.S. intelligence official speaking on condition of anonymity. The official cited "credible reports" that Russia has been employing air strikes and long-range artillery.

"Despite holding back initially, Russian forces now seem to be directly engaging to support Assad's violations," said the U.S. intelligence official.

The opposition considers government attempts to recapture Aleppo as a violation of the ceasefire. The government says it is trying to capture areas held by Islamist militants who are not covered by the truce.

....

The Latakia and Hama assaults appeared to be part of a new battle announced by rebel groups early in the day, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said. A Syrian military source confirmed intense fighting in the area.

"Today they attacked in the northern Latakia countryside in several areas, in violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement, and also in the northwestern Hama countryside," the [Syrian] military source said.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi, John Irish, & Tom Miles, "Syria peace talks near collapse as opposition declares pause," [Reuters](#), 00:40 GMT, 19 April 2016.

### **19 April 2016: 53<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On Tuesday, 19 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition,

carried out mortar shelling against Nehshebba, Ard al-Wata, Qaramanli and Shmaisa.

....

Intensification of warfare by Jabhat al-Nusra in the north-east of the Latakia province has been registered. Within last 24 hours, terrorists have launched offensive against the government troops for two times.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 19, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 19 April 2016.

On 19 April, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 44 people dead (including 37 civilians) in two "massacres" in Idlib province by Assad's warplanes. [SOHR](#).

On 19 April, the [New York Times](#) reported that Assad's warplanes had bombed a marketplace in Maarat al-Noaman where citizens had held protest demonstrations against Assad.

On 19 April, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department, John Kirby, said at his daily press briefing:

QUESTION: And do you believe that — the opposition believes — says that the truce has ended. There's been a — airstrikes that killed 40 people in this marketplace in opposition territory. Do you know who — does — is the U.S. ready to say who actually is responsible for those —

MR KIRBY: We've seen the reports of that. It is our understanding at this time that it was most likely regime forces, but information's still coming in. So I want to be a little careful here on how I couch that. And it has been — as we've said, by and large, the majority of the violations have been by the regime. We have reason to believe at this point that that was the case with this particular bombing.

....

So the trend lines are not going in the right direction, but it is still a noteworthy reduction in violence, and more Syrians today are — even with the increase in tensions, they're still living safer — not completely safe, but safer lives than they were before the cessation. So we still believe the cessation is in place, that it is still largely holding, and that it is important to keep it in place and to keep it going. And we'd like to see — frankly, we'd like to see the conditions improve, not decrease. But we're very mindful of the tensions that it's creating on the political process.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 19 April 2016.

If Assad deliberately bombed a marketplace to kill civilians, then that is a war crime. But let us put the deaths of 44 civilians in context. Statistics cited at my webpage at [www.rbs0.com](#) show a death rate of 4968 dead/30 days (166/day) during February 2016, before the ceasefire began. In March 2016, during the ceasefire, there were only 2672 dead/30 days. Clearly, the ceasefire has saved approximately 2300 lives in 30 days, which is an average of 77 lives/day. Therefore, the imperfect ceasefire in March and early April is a substantial improvement over

the carnage before the ceasefire began on 27 February. It is an improvement, even when occasional bad days with 44 deaths occur. I conclude that Assad's bombing of a marketplace is *not* a rational reason for insurgents to abandon the ceasefire.

### **20 April 2016: 54<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 20 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 6 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 5, Homs — 1).

In the Latakia province, opposition formations of Free Syrian Army fired with mortars and small arms from al-Ziara against Fara village.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against Quisibba, Hakur Tahtani, Ard al-Wata, and Deiruna.

In the Homs province, Ahrar al-Sham militants shelled against Tisnin village.  
"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 20, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 20 April 2016.

The Associated Press summarized their view of the cessation of hostilities:

The deal [to evacuate 500 people who need medical care] is also part of the now-teetering cease-fire agreement in place since Feb. 27, which greatly reduced violence in the first weeks but has all but collapsed now amid fierce fighting in Syria's north in the past week.

On Tuesday [19 April], at least 44 people, mostly civilians were killed in government airstrikes on opposition-held areas in northern Idlib province. The day before, the opposition declared that the government's violations of the cease-fire were unacceptable.

Sarah El Deeb And Jamey Keaten, "Syria's warring parties spar over collapsing cease-fire," [Associated Press](#), 18:42 GMT, 20 April 2016.

My comment is that phrases like "now-teetering cease-fire agreement" and "all but collapsed" (and "collapsing cease-fire" in the headline) are exaggerations. It is true that fighting has increased in the past week or so, but the death rate is still significantly below the carnage seen before the cessation of hostilities began. Russia, the USA, and de Mistura all agree that the cessation of hostilities is still holding in *most* of Syria. I worry that journalists may be encouraging insurgents to violate the ceasefire, when journalists release alarmist reports of how the ceasefire has nearly collapsed.

Note also that the Associated Press mentions the bombing of a marketplace in Idlib province by Assad on 19 April, but fails to mention deliberate violations of the ceasefire by Ahrar al-Sham in Latakia province.

During a 20 April press briefing, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve in Baghdad said that Nusra Front controlled Aleppo.

QUESTION: And do you believe at this point that [the Russians are] preparing for an end to the cease-fire? Does it look that way from their positioning?

COL. WARREN: Well, you know, I'm not going to predict — (inaudible) — what their intentions are. What I do know is that we have seen, you know, regime forces with some Russian support as well begin to mass and concentrate combat power around Aleppo. So this is something we're concerned about and something we'll keep an eye on.

That said, it's primarily al-Nusra who holds Aleppo, and of course, al-Nusra is not part of the cessation of hostilities. So it's complicated. We're watching it. Our focus, though, as the Combined Joint Task Force, is ISIL. And so don't forget that, that's our focus. The cessation of hostilities, the diplomatic and political processes — while they certainly have — are of interest to us and potentially could influence our operations peripherally, our focus remains ISIL.

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

### **21 April 2016: 55<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 21 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 5 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 3, Homs — 2).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and improvised multiple launch rocket systems against Kormos village (Homs province), Quinsibba, Hakur Tahtani, and Ard al-Wata (Latakia province).

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 21, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 21 April 2016.

There is little factual information in the news media about what is happening in Aleppo province. On 21 April, [Reuters](#) reports an anonymous "U.S. official" said that "Russia has been repositioning artillery to northern Syria, including near the city of Aleppo".

My comment: The artillery *could* be used to attack Nusra, which is *not* part of the cessation of hostilities agreement. Or the artillery *might* be used to assist Assad in retaking control of Aleppo. Liberating parts of Aleppo that are controlled by Nusra would *not* be a violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

However, some rebel and jihadist groups fight alongside Nusra in Aleppo. The cessation of hostilities agreement is not clear on the status of insurgent groups who have accepted the agreement, but who now fight alongside Nusra. Personally, I think groups who fight alongside Nusra are indistinguishable from Nusra — to use language from U.S. criminal law:

a conspiracy with Nusra, or aiding and abetting Nusra.

### **22 April 2016: 56<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 22 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia and Damascus — 3 for each, Aleppo — 1).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and small arms against Sandran, Beit Smaira and Shmaisa in the Latakia province, and Salah al-Din city sector of Aleppo.

Jaysh al-Islam opposition grouping performed mortar shelling against Masaqid Barza, Basatin Abu Jarash and Dahit al-Asad city sectors of Damascus from Jaubar and Kharasta.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 22, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 22 April 2016.

*The Washington Post* reported:

Fresh air raids and deadly clashes across Syria are threatening to unravel the country's already fragile cease-fire, activists and rights monitors said Friday [22 April]. The renewed fighting comes as peace talks brokered by the United Nations also are on the verge of collapse.

Airstrikes on rebel-held areas of Aleppo killed at least 19 people Friday, some of the deadliest raids since a cessation of hostilities took hold in late February, activists said. Government strikes also reportedly killed civilians in the nearby province of Idlib.

....

With the cease-fire brokered by the United States and Russia under strain, the United States said this week that it was concerned about reports that Russia was rebuilding its military capabilities in Syria, where it began a military intervention last fall intended to boost Assad, a longtime ally. A few weeks ago, Russia said it was withdrawing its forces, but its troops and aircraft still appear to be participating in the fighting.

Erin Cunningham, "Deadly airstrikes in Syria further strain cease-fire as peace talks near collapse," [Washington Post](#), 19:22 GMT, 22 April 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

At least 18 people were killed Friday [22 April] when airstrikes hit several rebel-held neighborhoods in Syria's contested northern city of Aleppo, anti-government activists said, an escalation that placed added strain on a fragile cease-fire.

Aleppo, Syria's largest city and former commercial center, has seen sporadic clashes since the cease-fire took effect in late February, as government troops have advanced, boxing in opposition-held areas from all sides except for a corridor from the

northwestern edge of the city.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 19 people were killed in the airstrikes in Aleppo's Bustan al-Qasr neighborhood and other parts of the city controlled by rebels. The Observatory described the series of airstrikes as the most intense on the city since the cease-fire began. The Local Coordination Committees, an activist-operated media outlet, said at least 18 people were killed in Friday's airstrikes.

....

Also Friday, a government plane crashed southeast of Damascus, and the Islamic State group said its fighters downed the plane and captured the Syrian pilot.

The IS-affiliated Aamaq news agency on Friday posted a video that purported to show the wreckage of the MIG-23 plane which it said was shot down by anti-aircraft weapons. Aamaq later said that IS fighters captured the pilot, identified as Azzam Eid, after he landed with his parachute near the crash site.

"Deadly airstrikes hit northern Syria as talks stall," [Associated Press](#), 22:21 GMT, 22 April 2016.

### **23 April 2016: 57<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On Saturday, 23 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 9 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 4, Damascus — 5).

In the Latakia province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against Sandran, al-Fahhara, Rasha and Shmaisa.

In the Damascus province, units of Jaysh al-Islam opposition grouping performed mortar shelling against Jaubar, al-Maliha, Marj Sultan, Arbil and Adra.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 23, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 23 April 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

Syrian government strikes hit opposition-held areas near the capital and in the country's largest city, Aleppo, while rebels fired mortars in escalating violence that left at least 31 people killed and shattered a relative quiet in Damascus that has held since the teetering cease-fire took effect in late February.

Western officials, including the U.N. envoy leading negotiations with Syria's warring factions, have warned that a cease-fire was in danger of total collapse due to escalating violence and the walk-out by the Saudi-backed opposition group from the talks Monday [18 April]. The opposition accuses the government of wrecking the talks with ongoing attacks while the government says it is only targeting terrorist groups who are



not part of the cease-fire agreement.

....

For the second straight day Saturday [23 April], government airplanes pounded neighborhoods in Aleppo held by the opposition, in what activists described as the most intense campaign of airstrikes since the cease-fire.

The Saturday airstrikes in rebel-held areas in Aleppo killed at least 12 people, including children, when they targeted a residential area and market in the Tareeq al-Bab district in the contested city, the activist-run Aleppo Media Center said. Images of the destruction posted on the AMC Facebook page and other sites showed destroyed buildings and rescue teams removing civilians from under rubble and the upper floors of destroyed buildings, including terrified women and children.

....

Near the capital, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the opposition activist-run Syrian Press Center said government shelling of rebel strongholds in Douma, in eastern Ghouta, a Damascus suburb, on Saturday killed at least 13 people, including three women and two children.

And mortar shells returned to the capital — which has seen a relatively calm period during the cease-fire despite violence elsewhere.

Syria's Interior Ministry, meanwhile, said mortar shells fired by rebels fell in two neighborhoods in Damascus, including one several hundred meters from the Russian embassy. There were no reported injuries.

"At least 31 killed as violence spikes in Syria," [Associated Press](#), 16:17 GMT, 23 April 2016.

My comment is that the Associated Press is continuing to be alarmist. In February 2016, before the cessation of hostilities agreement, there was an average of 166 dead/day in Syria. (See my comment at the end of 19 April, above.) Only 31 dead/day is a huge improvement.

### **24 April 2016: 58<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On Sunday, 24 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 13 ceasefire violations have been registered (Damascus — 5, Latakia — 3, Homs and Aleppo — 2 for each).

Armed formations of Jaysh al-Islam opposition grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars against Jaubar, al-Sakhiyah, Harasta, Duma and Kabun in the Damascus province.

In the Latakia province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and multiple launch rocket



systems against Sandran, Beit Smaira and Shmaisa.

Formations of Free Syrian Army performed mortar shelling against Tell al-Tut in the Hama province, and positions of the government troops near Teir Maala and Tell al-Dahab in the Homs province.

In Aleppo, militants of Ahrar al-Sham fired with small arms and mortars against positions of the government troops in suburbs of Sheikh Maqsood and Salah al-Din city sectors.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 24, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 24 April 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

Air strikes and shelling pounded Aleppo for a third straight day on Sunday [24 April], killing two young siblings and at least 24 others in Syria's largest city and former commercial capital.

The northern city has been bitterly contested between insurgents and government forces since 2012. Opposition groups control the eastern part of the city but have come under intense strain as the government has choked off all routes to the area except a narrow and perilous passage to the northwest.

At least 10 people were killed by rebel shelling on government-held areas in the city, according to activists and Syria's state news agency, SANA. Rockets struck schools and residential areas, SANA reported. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said two young siblings were among the dead.

Air strikes on the opposition side of the city killed 16, including a mother and her daughter, the Observatory said.

....

The cease-fire is still technically in place, but may have completely unraveled on the ground — with violence returning to most of the contested areas of the country. The U.N.'s Special Envoy to Syria last week called on the two superpowers to salvage the truce before it totally collapses.

Albert Aji & Philip Issa, "At least 26 killed as fighting rages in Syria's Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 19:12 GMT, 24 April 2016.

There is a tautology in the quotation from the Associated Press: "with violence returning to most of the contested areas". When violence occurs, that area is automatically "contested".

### **25 April 2016: 59<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 25 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 9 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia and

Damascus — 4 for each, Aleppo — 1).

In the Latakia province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against positions of the government troops near Sandran, Rasha, Safar and Shmaisa.

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam opposition grouping carried out mortar shelling against a military hospital in Harasta and units of pro-government troops near Jaubar, Marj Sultan and Arbil (Damascus).

After performing artillery shelling, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping took efforts to launch offensive against units of the Syrian army near Jebel Agam (to the south from Aleppo). Having suffered losses, terrorists retreated to positions, which they had kept before.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 25, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 25 April 2016.

The Associated Press reports:

Violence in Syria continued for the fourth straight day to chip away at what remains from a cease-fire that has effectively collapsed, leaving at least 28 people dead Monday in reciprocal shellings between government forces and opposition in the country's largest city while a bomb blast disrupted a relative quiet in a Damascus suburb that is home to one of the holiest Shiite shrines here.

At least 20 people were killed in the shelling on Aleppo, pro-government media and activist-run monitoring groups said; while eight died when a suicide bomber detonated his explosive-packed vehicle at a military checkpoint in the Damascus suburb of Sayyida Zeinab.

In the past week, nearly 150 people have been killed in northern Syria and near Damascus, marking a major escalation that has seen a fragile truce take a downward spiral to levels of violence unseen since the Feb.27 cease-fire, engineered by the U.S. and Russia, took hold. The cease-fire doesn't include the Islamic State group and its rival al-Qaida branch in Syria, the Nusra Front.

Albert Aji, "At least 28 killed in violence in Syria's capital and Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 17:50 GMT, 25 April 2016.

### **26 April 2016: 60<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 26 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 11 ceasefire violations have been registered (Damascus — 4, Aleppo — 3, Homs and Latakia— 2 for each).

In Damascus suburbs, formations of Failak al-Rahman opposition grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling against Ibn al-Valid health

resort (near Harasta al-Basal) and living sectors of Maskid Barza.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham performed shelling with mortars against Sandran, Beit Smaira and Mazaat Omara in the Latakia province as well Sheikh Maqsood in Aleppo.

Formations of Free Syrian Army carried out shelling with multiple launch rocket systems against Kormos and Scalbiyah in the Homs province.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 26, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 26 April 2016.

Reuters reports a deliberate attack by aircraft on a volunteer rescue center in Aleppo province.

Overnight air strikes and a rocket attack on an opposition-held area west of Aleppo killed five rescue workers, who appeared to have been deliberately targeted, a monitoring group and colleagues nearby said.

The raids, which the rescue workers said consisted of two air strikes and at least one rocket, hit a centre for the Syrian Civil Defence, known as the "White Helmets", in the town of Atareb, some 25 km (15 miles) west of Aleppo.

....

"The targeting was very precise," Radi Saad, a Civil Defence worker based in northwestern Syria, told Reuters via internet.

"They were in the centre and ready to respond. When they heard warplanes in the area they did not think they would be the target."

It was unclear whether Syrian or Russian warplanes had launched the raids, he said.

There was no immediate comment from the Syrian government.

"Targeted air strikes kill five rescue workers near Syria's Aleppo - monitor," [Reuters](#), 13:39 GMT, 26 April 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

Airstrikes in rebel-held areas in and around the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on Tuesday killed at least 15 people, including at least one child and five volunteers with a rescue service, opposition activists said.

Ibrahim Alhaj from the Syrian Civil Defense, which conducts search and rescue operations in rebel-held areas, said government jets carried out some 40 airstrikes in rebel-controlled areas in the city of Aleppo that killed 10 people and wounded more than 40.

The daytime airstrikes came after at least five pre-dawn air raids on a training center run by the Civil Defense in Atareb, a town west of Aleppo, which killed five first responders.

.....

Violence in Syria has escalated as an internationally-backed cease-fire that took effect in late February has broken down in recent days, with the government and rebel groups trading blame. In the past week, nearly 200 people have been killed in Syria, straining the cessation of hostilities agreement, which was brokered by Washington and Moscow.

"Strikes on rebel-held areas of Syria kill 15," [Associated Press](#), 17:22 GMT, 26 April 2016.

Note that the Associated Press uses the word "rebels" to refer to all insurgents, including Nusra Front and ISIL. It is not clear whether the airstrikes targeted Nusra, which is permissible, or whether the airstrikes targeted rebels/jihadists who agreed to the cessation of hostilities.

About the airstrikes that targeted the Civil Defense building, Assad and/or Russia have allegedly bombed hospitals and medical clinics, as explained in my essays for [February 2016](#) and [March 2016](#) — see the section "Russian airstrikes in Syria".

### **27 April 2016: 61<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 27 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 6 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia — 3, Damascus — 2, and Aleppo — 1)

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, performed shelling with mortars against Sandran, Janajik, and Mazaat Omara in the Latakia province as well as Hai al-Ansari in Aleppo.

In Damascus, Jaysh al-Islam opposition formation performed mortar shelling against living houses near Dahiyat al-Asad and Masakid Barza city sector.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 27, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 27 April 2016.

[Reuters](#) reports that Russia has proposed that the United Nations Security Council add Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham to a sanctions list of terrorist groups. Because these two groups participate in the HNC, Western nations will be reluctant to designate the two groups as terrorists. In fact, the chief negotiator for the HNC, Mohammed Alloush, is a leader of Jaish al-Islam. [Associated Press](#).

On 27 April, the chief of the Associated Press bureau in Beirut declared that the ceasefire had ended.

A military buildup in northern Syria, coupled with heavy fighting and mounting civilian casualties, spells the end of a cease-fire that for two months brought some relief to a war-weary country. The renewed violence is ushering in what could be an even more ruinous chapter in the 5-year-old conflict.

About 200 civilians have been killed in the past week, nearly half of them around Aleppo. There has even been shelling in Damascus, along with a car bomb — both rarities for the capital.

With peace talks in Geneva completely deadlocked, Syrians are regarding the escalating bloodshed with dread, fearing a return to full war and slow destruction.

....

Aleppo is likely to be the focus of the next phase of the war, with both sides preparing for a major battle, according to senior rebel leaders and opposition activists who spoke to The Associated Press.

....

Rami Abdurrahman, director of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which closely monitors the conflict, said he believes the cease-fire has collapsed in all parts of Syria. He predicted the conflict will continue as a "war of attrition," with no real winner.

Zeina Karam, "Military buildup, fighting spells end of Syrian cease-fire," [Associated Press](#), 18:00 GMT, 27 April 2016.

My comment is, despite the alarmist reporting by journalists, the daily death rate in Syria remains significantly lower than the pre-ceasefire death rate. The Associated Press mentions 200 dead/7 days, which is only 857 dead/30 days. Compare that to *more than* 4000 dead/30 days in each of the months before the ceasefire began. (See my table of death rates at [www.rbs0.com](http://www.rbs0.com).) Therefore, the ceasefire has *not* collapsed. The rhetoric by diplomats and journalists is *not* consistent with the numbers that they mention in support of their alarmist opinions about the ceasefire.

Note also that much of the alarm is about *alleged preparations* by Assad to retake Aleppo sometime in the future. Because Nusra Front, which is excluded from the ceasefire agreement, is mixed with rebel and jihadist groups in Aleppo, it is not clear who Assad and Russia are attacking in Aleppo (except for the attack on the Civil Defense building in Aleppo on 26 April).

While diplomats and commentators are talking about alleged violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement by Assad and/or Russia, Russia reports daily violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement by Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam, two jihadist groups in Latakia and Damascus provinces. The U.S. Government is *not* publicly disputing these violations by the two jihadist groups.

On 27 April, the deputy spokesman for the U.S. State Department said at the daily press briefing:

And then last thing — and this is about the attacks that occurred, I believe yesterday, on the Syrian Civil Defense station in al-Atareb, Syria. The United States is appalled by Monday's multiple aerial strikes, reportedly by the Assad regime, on a Syrian Civil

Defense station in the town of, as I noted, al-Atareb in Aleppo province, where at least five members of the civil defense are believed to have been killed and many more innocent people were injured.

This attack fits with the Assad regime's abhorrent pattern of striking first responders, over 100 whom — of whom have been killed in action. Many are killed in so-called double-tap strikes, where warplanes return to a strike zone after first responders have gathered to assist victims, and the Syrian Civil Defense station in al-Atareb was reportedly hit five times on Monday [25 April].

We condemn in the strongest terms any such attacks and we urge Russia to use its influence and press the Assad regime to fulfill its commitments under UNSCR 2254 and immediately stop any further attacks of this nature. We also commend the heroic members of the Syrian Civil Defense who've saved more than 40,000 people by serving as impartial emergency responders on the front lines performing search and rescue missions following brutal attacks often perpetrated by the Assad regime and its allies. And the United States will continue to support this group and their courageous and tireless efforts to protect the Syrian people.

Mark Toner, Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 27 April 2016.

### **28 April 2016: 62<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 28 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo — 5, Damascus — 3).

In the north of the Aleppo province, formations of Free Syrian Army attacked pro-government troops near Tell Raf'at. Maraanaz has been blocked.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, performed shelling with multiple launch rocket systems against al-Khalidiyah and al-Zagra in Aleppo for two times.

In Damascus, Jaysh al-Islam militarized formation carried out mortar shelling against living houses in Dahiyat al-Asad, Masaqid Barza and Bastin Abu Jarash.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 28, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 28 April 2016.

But the real news on 28 April was missing from the above report by the Russians. Someone — either Assad or Russia — had bombed a hospital and other civilian locations in Aleppo city, killing more than 60 people.

The Associated Press reported:

Airstrikes and artillery killed more than 60 people in the past 24 hours in Aleppo, including dozens at a hospital in a rebel-held neighborhood, as Syria's largest city was turned once again into a major battleground in the civil war, officials said Thursday

[28 April].

Aid agencies warn that Aleppo is on the brink of a humanitarian disaster with the collapse of a two-month cease-fire and stalled peace talks.

The intensified violence — by far the worst since the partial cease-fire began — coincides with reports of a military buildup outside Aleppo that many fear is a prelude for a government attempt to force a complete siege of the city's neighborhoods.

Battle-hardened residents were shocked by the bloodshed. Opposition activists accused the government of carpet-bombing rebel-controlled areas, while Syrian state media said more than 1,000 mortar rounds and rockets were fired at government-held districts, killing 22 people.

....

In the rebel-held Sukkari neighborhood, 27 people died as a well-known field hospital supported by Doctors Without Borders and the International Committee for the Red Cross was hit overnight, along with nearby buildings, according to opposition activists and rescue workers.

....

A Damascus-based Syrian military official denied the government had hit the hospital. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov also denied bombing any hospitals in Aleppo, saying its aircraft have not flown any missions in the region for several days.

....

With the U.N.-sponsored peace talks in Geneva completely deadlocked, Syrians are watching the escalating violence with dread, fearing that Aleppo is likely to be the focus of the next, more vicious phase of the 5-year-old war.

The hospital that was hit in Sukkari has been one of the main medical centers for Aleppo since the city became divided in 2012.

Among the 27 dead were 14 patients and staff, including three children and six employees, officials said. A dentist and one of the last pediatricians in opposition-held areas of Aleppo were among the victims. The toll was expected to rise.

The 34-bed, multistory hospital, the area's main pediatric care center, was "hit by direct airstrike," according to a statement by Doctors Without Borders, also known by its French acronym MSF.

....

The civil defense, also known as the White Helmets, said the hospital and adjacent buildings were struck in four consecutive airstrikes.

Sarah El Deeb & Philip Issa, "Casualties mount from bombardment in Syria's largest city," [Associated Press](#), 19:32 GMT, 28 April 2016.

Earlier, *Al-Arabiya* reported:

United Nations Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura said on Thursday [28 April] he did not believe the targeting of a hospital hit by air strikes in Aleppo overnight was by mistake, *Al Arabiya al Hadath* television reported.

During an exclusive interview with *Al Arabiya's* sister *Al Hadath*, de Mistura said he does not believe the shelling of an Aleppo hospital earlier on Thursday was 'a mistake', describing it as a war crime.

He did not elaborate or comment on who might have been responsible.

....

The well-known al-Quds field hospital supported by MSF and ICRC and located in the rebel-held district of Sukkari was hit shortly before midnight Wednesday, according to opposition activists and rescue workers. Six hospital staff and three children were among the 27 who died there.

The Syrian Civil Defense, a volunteer first-responders agency whose members went to the scene of the attack, put the death toll at 30 and said the dead included six hospital staff. Among those slain was one of the last pediatricians remaining in opposition-held areas of the contested city and a dentist.

"De Mistura: Aleppo hospital strike appears deliberate," [Al-Arabiya](#), 17:38 GMT, 28 April 2016.

See [Reuters](#).

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was very upset that the hospital in Aleppo had been bombed.

The bombing of the MSF-supported Al Quds hospital in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on Wednesday night has killed at least 14 people, including at least two doctors.

According to hospital staff on the ground, the hospital was destroyed by at least one airstrike which directly hit the building, reducing it to rubble. Other airstrikes in the neighbourhood also hit areas close to the hospital.

"MSF categorically condemns this outrageous targeting of yet another medical facility in Syria" said Muskilda Zancada, MSF head of mission, Syria. "This devastating attack has destroyed a vital hospital in Aleppo, and the main referral centre for paediatric care



in the area. Where is the outrage among those with the power and obligation to stop this carnage?"

....

The 34-bed hospital offered services including an emergency room, obstetric care, an outpatients department, an inpatients department, an intensive care unit and an operating theatre. Eight doctors and 28 nurses worked full time in the hospital, which was the main referral centre for paediatrics in Aleppo.

MSF runs six medical facilities across northern Syria and supports more than 150 health centres and hospitals across the country, many of them in besieged areas. Several hospitals across north and south Syria have been bombed since the start of 2016, including seven supported by MSF — in which at least 42 people have been killed, including at least 16 medical staff.

"Syria: Airstrike destroys MSF-supported hospital in Aleppo killing 14," [MSF](#), 28 April 2016.

On 28 April, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department, John Kirby, said at his daily press briefing:

Now just briefly before we start, I want a quick note on this airstrike, which I know many of you have covered or have asked about, in Aleppo on a Doctors Without Borders hospital. And I want to preface this by saying I think you're going to hear something more specific from the Secretary soon on this. But I didn't want to relinquish the podium at the outset without mentioning that we're obviously — find this attack reprehensible in every possible way. We're looking at dozens, if not several dozens, of casualties in this strike on what was clear that was a medical facility. The details and the circumstances of the attack are still coming in, but it sure bears all the hallmarks of the kinds of strikes that the regime has done in the past on treatment facilities and, frankly, on first responders.

So once again, we call on the regime to cease these absolutely senseless attacks, which are, of course, violations of the cessation of hostilities. And we continue to call on and urge Russia to use its influence on the Assad regime to bring these kinds of strikes to an end. But again, you're going to hear more from the Secretary on this very shortly, but I did want to just put that out there right at the top since I know you've all been interested in it and it just happened.

John Kirby, Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 28 April 2016.

On 28 April, the U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry condemned the attack on the pediatric hospital in Aleppo. Here is Kerry's entire press statement:

We are outraged by yesterday's airstrikes in Aleppo on the al-Quds hospital supported by both Doctors Without Borders and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which killed dozens of people, including children, patients, and medical personnel.

While we are still trying to gather the facts surrounding the circumstances of this attack, it appears to have been a deliberate strike on a known medical facility and

follows the Assad regime's appalling record of striking such facilities and first responders. These strikes have killed hundreds of innocent Syrians.

The United Nations today assessed the situation in Aleppo to be catastrophic, and the regime's most recent offensive actions there — despite the cessation of hostilities — compound the violence and undermine the cessation of hostilities.

Russia has an urgent responsibility to press the regime to fulfill its commitments under UNSCR 2254, including in particular to stop attacking civilians, medical facilities, and first responders, and to abide fully by the cessation of hostilities.

John Kerry, "Attack on al-Quds Hospital in Aleppo, Syria," [State Dept.](#), 28 April 2016.

Notice that John Kerry did *not* say that the USA "has an urgent responsibility" to stop supplying munitions to rebels who are continuing the Syrian civil war. Kerry did *not* say that the USA "has an urgent responsibility" to stop insurgent attacks in Latakia and Damascus provinces. And Kerry did *not* say that this is what happens when barbarians are allowed to have airplanes and bombs. Furthermore, Kerry did *not* say it was a war crime to attack a hospital — Kerry was only concerned about violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

On 28 April, the Syrian [Observatory](#) for Human Rights reported 197 civilians dead in Aleppo during the past 7 days ("since the dawn of the 22nd of April until the afternoon of the 28th of [April]"). On 29 April, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the SOHR said there were 123 dead in parts of Aleppo occupied by insurgents, and 71 dead in government-held parts of Aleppo. My comment is that 197 dead/7 days may seem like a high death rate, but it is only 28/day. I say "only" because that number should be compared to the 166/day in Syria during February 2016, before the ceasefire began. While comparing deaths in Aleppo to deaths in Syria may seem inappropriate, *most* of the recent deaths in Syria have been in Aleppo.

### **29 April 2016: 63<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 29 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia— 4, Damascus and Aleppo — 2).

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Sandran, Beit Smaira, Nehshebba and Ain al-Ashara (Latakia province) and al-Ramusi (Aleppo).

In Damascus, Jaysh al-Islam units performed mortar shelling against living houses in Dahiyat al-Asad and Masaqid Barza.

....

“Silence regime” will be established near Eastern Ghuta (suburbs of Damascus) during 24 hours and in northern regions of the Latakia province during 72 hours starting from

12 a.m. on April 30 by Russian and American sides under with the approval of leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic and formations of moderate oppositions. "Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 29, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 29 April 2016.

On 29 April, *Al-Arabiya* summarized news reports from Reuters and Agence France-Presse: A "regime of calm" will be enforced in parts of Syria's Latakia and Damascus regions from 1:00 am (2200 GMT) on April 30, in order to "secure the implementation of the agreed cessation of hostilities", a Syrian military statement said on Friday [29 April].

A statement from the Syrian Army General Command did not mention the city of Aleppo, focus of fighting, and did not explain what military or non-military action a "regime of calm" would involve. "The regime of calm does not include Aleppo," the source told Reuters. "Because in Aleppo there are terrorists who have not stopped hitting the city and its residents."

....

[The regime of calm] would last for 24 hours in the Eastern Ghouta region east of Damascus and in Damascus, and for 72 hours in areas of the northern Latakia countryside.

....

The "regime of silence" has also been agreed by Russia and the United States which forbids military action in several parts of Syria, including the use of any kinds of weapons, the Interfax news agency quoted a senior Russian military official as saying on Friday.

General Sergei Kuralenko, in charge of Russia's ceasefire monitoring center in Syria, was also cited as saying he saw no risk that the situation would slide back into a full-blown military conflict.

"This announcement came after a request from the Americans and the Russians, who met in Geneva to calm down the situation in Damascus and Latakia," a security source in Damascus told AFP.

"The Americans asked for Aleppo to be included, but the Russians refused," the source said.

....

Shortly after the agreement of the ceasefire, Russia's foreign ministry on Friday denounced an attack on its consulate in Syria's war-ravaged city of Aleppo, accusing militants of shelling the compound.

"The building of Russia's Consulate General in Aleppo came under sudden mortar

attack on April 28 around 3 pm Moscow time (1200 GMT)," it said in a statement.

"One shell landed inside its grounds... and three more exploded near the fence on the outside. There were no deaths or injuries."

The consulate has not been operating since January 2013 and is manned only by Syrian-national staff, the ministry said, accusing the al-Qaeda linked al-Nusra Front of targeting the building.

"According to the information we have so far, the attack on the Consulate General was deliberate and carried out by the militants of Jabhat al-Nusra and groups associated with it," it said.

....

In another attack in Aleppo, three people were killed and 25 wounded when rebel-fired mortars hit a mosque in Aleppo as people were leaving Friday prayers, the Syrian state news agency SANA said.

"'Regime of calm' agreed as Syria fighting rages," [Al-Arabiya](#), 17:48 GMT, 29 April 2016.

Notice that the "regime of calm" was requested by the USA and Russia in Geneva, probably in response to the chorus of condemnation over the attack on the pediatric hospital in Aleppo that was reported on 28 April. This brief ceasefire — only *one* day in Damascus and three days in Latakia — will probably have little effect. A better reaffirmation of the cessation of hostilities agreement would have *no* expiration date, because we do *not* want the ceasefire to end.

The "regime of calm" begins at 01:00 Damascus time on 30 April. [SANA](#). This is equivalent to 22:00 GMT on 29 April. The Russian report of midnight was apparently the original proposal, which was later changed to 01:00.

At 15:44 GMT on 29 April, [Reuters](#) reported: "The death toll at [the al-Quds] hospital hit by air strikes in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo rose to at least 50 people, including six medics, the French charity Medecins sans Frontieres said on Friday [29 April]." The [Associated Press](#) says the 6 dead were medical staff.

On 29 April, there was a press briefing by an anonymous "senior State Department Official" on the situation in Syria. Here is some of what he said:

So obviously the fighting has increased of late, and now you see what we're working on in a couple of areas. But let me impress upon you that we're really working on all areas where we think there are significant threats to the cease — to the cessation of hostilities. There are still quiet areas, but there are several, as you know, areas that are real problems, and it's quite — the fighting is intense and obviously the casualties are, particularly the civilian casualties that we've seen.

So we are talking about a couple of discrete areas in the immediate sets of this, but we are actually working on all of the areas. So it's not just about Latakia and Damascus,

Eastern Ghouta east of Damascus, but also about Aleppo and other areas where we see problems or potential problems that we're trying to get back — get and then get this cessation of hostilities back on track.

....

QUESTION [by Margaret Brennan with CBS News]: Hi. Can you just talk us through what is concrete about this, the beginning and duration of time, does this just roll over day by day, who's monitoring it, and whether this is in any way linked to a resumption of talks? I mean, this has been described by other diplomats as a — an offer by the Russians of a real halt to fighting for a fake peace. What's reality at the table? Are the Syrians actually negotiating anything?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: Right. Okay, Margaret, thanks. So what this is about in this initial phase of Latakia and — what we hope would be an initial phase to Latakia and Eastern Ghouta — get — will be implemented, hopefully starting tonight — tomorrow — first thing tomorrow morning there, and that the fighting should in fact cease right after midnight. And it's a kind of a recommitment to or reaffirmation of cessation — of the cessation of hostilities.

And as to how far, how long it would last, we obviously want it to continue and last. Let's see how this goes. This is all something of a test, obviously, that we want to work, and we're working hard to make sure that it works. So hopefully in the end it will be open-ended. So that's the first part of it.

The second part of it, this — there isn't specifically a linkage to the political negotiations. We've just finished this round, but you have to have the environment. As you know, we've never set preconditions for going into this round of negotiations or that round, but we have always said that you need the right environment. And the right environment is a successful cessation of hostilities and successful delivery of humanitarian relief supplies — both of those issues, not as absolute preconditions for negotiations but as the things that can improve the environment for this.

As for the larger question of the political talks, we just have to wait still to see. Staffan de Mistura came up with his ideas of where he thinks there's commonality and differences. We still very much believe we can push the negotiations forward. It's true that we didn't — there is — there was no mention of a particular time, because I think, again, we have to improve the environment for the next set of these negotiations, and that's about the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access.

And as to your question about — I don't know if you were asking about bona fides. This too is a test about how much the regime is — how far the regime is going to go. What was different about this round than the past is that there's an acknowledgement of transition. If you remember, there wasn't previously an acknowledgement of a need for a transition. But of course, what is the definition of that transition and then also ideas about constitution, those are still out there.

....

[Part of the answer to questions by Elise Labott of CNN:]

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL: So I see value in the reaffirmation [of the cessation of hostilities agreement]. Whether it's a reaffirmation from us, which it is — the United States and Russia — we've been working to secure a general recommitment to the cessation by all the parties in Latakia and in Eastern Ghouta, again, at least as a first step hopefully to be — and hopefully to do this elsewhere, including Aleppo. We're talking to Russia urgently about in terms of de-escalation and reducing or diffusing tensions there. So it's both our commitment and what we hope to see at the end of today, beginning of tomorrow in Syria — the commitment of the parties in these two areas and then we go forward.

So what we're trying to do in some cases is to prove to the Syrian people that this is delivering benefits. If you look at Latakia, I don't think they've really seen the benefits of the cessation of hostilities, whereas other places, whether in southern Syria and some other places — and even Aleppo and Homs and Hama, at least initially, people saw the benefits of it and it made a difference to their material lives beyond the fact that the number of casualties was significantly reduced and we need to get back to that. They — we created the — we all created an expectation and we have to try to meet that.

"Senior State Department Official On Syria," [State Dept](#), 29 April 2016.

Because of the confidentiality of negotiations with the Russians, this U.S. diplomat was vague on details. There was very little information in his briefing.

My comment is that the explanation for why Aleppo was omitted from the "regime of calm" may be as simple as Assad is determined to either (1) control *all* of Aleppo or (2) pulverise Aleppo. Assad may eventually do both, as has happened to other liberated cities in Iraq and Syria.

On 29 April, the deputy spokesman for the U.S. State Department spoke about the "regime of calm" at the daily press briefing:

QUESTION: .... You call this a "reinforcement of the cessation of hostilities" for two specific areas, but in fact, why is it not like a retrenchment of the existing cessation of hostilities, which covered the — I mean, you've gone from having agreement on a cessation of hostilities in the whole country to now having a cessation of hostilities in places that are largely just held by the government. It seems to be a retracting rather than reinforcing.

MR TONER: No, that's not the intention at all. ... that's not the impression, certainly, that we want to give. I think, rather, this is a recognition that in some parts of the country, including the two parts that we've identified — North Latakia as well as Eastern Ghouta — that there has been, however you want to put it, a weakening of the cessation of hostilities. There have been numerous incidents on the ground of fighting, renewed fighting between the various groups — the regime and the opposition, armed

opposition, who had signed up to the cessation of hostility.

So I think this is an effort to not to simply focus on the cessation of hostility there. Certainly, we recognize it's a much broader issue and that — but that these are trouble areas, if I could put it so bluntly, and that we want to focus on strengthening the cessation of hostilities, renewing it, reaffirming it so that we can quell the fighting or the violations, the ongoing violations in these areas, with, as I think the senior State Department official alluded to earlier, with the expectation that it would be also applied to other trouble spots [e.g., Aleppo], if I could put it that way.

....

.... We're starting in North Latakia and Eastern Ghouta with the expectation, if this goes well, that we can then again reinforce it elsewhere.

... the cessation of hostilities is still — in many parts of where it applied to in Syria, was holding. I mean, we talked about this the last weeks. But there were areas, such as Aleppo but other areas as well, where we did see numerous violations.

....

QUESTION: Who agreed to what exactly in Latakia and Eastern Ghouta?

MR TONER: So this is an agreement within the task force, but certainly on the part of U.S. and Russia, that there would be a reinforcement of the cessation of hostilities in these specific areas — again, as a start, with the expectation that this reaffirmation, if you will, or recommitment, would be then extended elsewhere.

....

MR TONER: So, Ros, first of all to your first question, I absolutely don't have an argument with your point that any airstrikes that are carrying — that are being carried out targeting civilians or targeting the Syrian opposition have to be either the regime or the Russians. And we have been very, as you know, over the last few days especially, very clear in condemning those continued airstrikes. Certainly, what we saw over the last couple of days, strikes on first responders, strikes on hospitals, were beyond egregious. And we've been very clear, as I've said, about calling for an immediate halt to those airstrikes.

Mark Toner, Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 29 April 2016.

### **30 April 2016: 64<sup>th</sup> day of ceasefire**

On 30 April, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:  
“Silence regime” established in Eastern Ghuta and northern regions of the Latakia province on April 30 has been observed.

Within last 24 hours, 3 ceasefire violations have been registered Aleppo.

....

Leaders of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic and the US analytics military and political centre in Amman (Jordan) have held teleconferences. The sides discussed ceasefire observing in three provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Participants of the negotiations agreed to monitor "Silence regime", which had been established in Eastern Ghuta and northern regions of the Latakia province, 24 hours a day.

"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (April 30, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 30 April 2016.

On the morning of 30 April, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 44 people killed by rebel and Islamic Factions (i.e., insurgents) in the city of Aleppo during the past two days. [SOHR](#).

At 10:03 GMT on 30 April, Reuters reported:

At least 20 air strikes hit rebel-held areas of Syria's northern city of Aleppo on Saturday [30 April], in the ninth straight day of violence in which bombardments by both sides have killed nearly 250 civilians, a monitoring group said.

The British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights did not immediately say whether Syrian government warplanes or Russian jets, which have been supporting Damascus, carried out the strikes.

Bombing by the government side on rebel-held areas of Aleppo since April 22 have killed 140 people including 19 children, the Observatory said.

Insurgent shelling of government-held areas over the same period have killed 96 people, including 21 children, it said.

"Air strikes pound rebel-held areas of Aleppo - Syrian Observatory," [Reuters](#), 10:03 GMT, 30 April 2016.

U.S. State Department spokesman, John Kirby, posted a statement that included the following paragraph:

The Secretary [John Kerry] expressed his deep concern about the deteriorating situation in Aleppo, where the Assad regime continues to escalate the conflict by predominantly targeting innocent civilians and parties to the cessation of hostilities — not Nusra, as the regime falsely claims. Such attacks are direct violations of the cessation and must stop immediately.

John Kirby, "Secretary Kerry's Calls With UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura and General Coordinator of the High Negotiations Committee Riyad Hijab," [State Dept](#), 30 April 2016.

On 30 April, journalists emphasized the continued fighting in Aleppo and almost ignored the fact that the "regime of silence" was holding in Latakia province and in an eastern suburb of Damascus. The [Associated Press](#) tersely reported: "Activists said the truce appeared to be



holding in both areas on Saturday [30 April]." [Reuters](#) tersely reported: "The lull in fighting around the capital and parts of northwest coastal province Latakia, announced by the army, appeared to hold through most of Saturday but the bombing continued in Aleppo which was excluded from the plan." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights had a one-sentence report of "a state of calmness" in Latakia and the Eastern Ghouta. [SOHR](#).

[Reuters](#) reported a belligerent remark by the rebels and jihadist groups: "A number of rebel groups appeared to reject the 'regime of calm,' however. 'We won't accept any kind of... regional ceasefires,' a statement from a number of groups including Jaysh al-Islam, which controls areas east of Damascus, said."

On 6 April and 1 May 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published death toll data for March and April. (See [above](#).) These data show there were 86 dead/day during March and 104 dead/day during April. These death rates should be compared with 166 dead/day in February, before the ceasefire began.

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## 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.

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## 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. My essay for [March 2016](#) mentions the Russian partial withdrawal from Syria on 15 March, Assad's victory in Palmyra on 27 March, and Russian/Syrian airstrikes on hospitals.

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On 15 March 2016, Russia began a highly publicized partial withdrawal of its military aircraft from Syria. But on 15 April 2016, a [Reuters](#) news article had a headline claiming "scant evidence of draw down". The Reuters article said the Russian "military contingent there is as strong as ever, with fewer jets but many more attack helicopters able to provide closer combat support to government troops."

On 30 April 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Russian airstrikes had killed 2005 civilians in Syria, and 2035 ISIL personnel beginning 30 Sep 2015 to 30 April 2016. [SOHR](#).

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## Debate in Iraq

### Death Toll in Iraq

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

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 741 Iraqis killed in terrorism, violence, and armed conflict during April 2016. [UNAMI](#).

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## 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.
- 

### April 2016: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 4 April 2016, ISIL suicide bomb attacks in 6 Iraqi towns killed at least 29 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 16 Dec 2015, a group of 26 Qatari hunters were kidnapped in southern Iraq, and then they

vanished in the lawless nation of Iraq. Nine of those kidnapped escaped to Kuwait. On 6 April 2016, one Qatari was released by the kidnappers. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Although I checked Reuters and the Associated Press each day, they reported *no* terrorist attacks on civilians in Iraq during 5-22 April 2016.

On 23 April, two ISIL car bombs in Baghdad killed at least 14 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 24 April, Shiite militias and Kurdish peshmerga "exchanged mortar and machine-gun fire" that killed at least 12 people in Tuz Khurmatu, Iraq. In the Islamic tradition, rocket-propelled grenades were also fired. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 25 April, an ISIL car bomb in eastern Baghdad killed at least 12 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 30 April, ISIL detonated a three-ton truck bomb in Nahrawan (an eastern suburb of Baghdad), killing at least 21 people. The ISIL bomb detonated in an open-air food market, so it would kill many civilians. [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### No Prosecution for Fall of Mosul

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

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

On 1 May 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.

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### **No Prosecution for Rout at Ramadi**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 1 May 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.

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## 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 search Google every month, but I have seen no reports of criminal prosecutions of any of these corrupt army officers.

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## 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 planning to sell unsecured junk bonds to obtain money to operate its government, the slow progress of the draft National Guard Law, and a cholera epidemic in Iraq.

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

My essay for [January 2016](#) mentions that Iraq was eighth from the bottom of an international survey of 168 nations for corruption.

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### April 2016

On 31 March 2016, prime minister Abadi named a new group of ministers for his government, in an attempt to fight corruption. But Abadi's new choices need to be approved by the Iraqi parliament, which does *not* want to disrupt their personal enrichment. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 2 April, Abadi ordered an investigation into allegations of corruption in the Iraqi oil ministry, in which foreign companies paid bribes to Iraqi government officials in exchange for obtaining contracts for the sale of Iraqi oil. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Wall Street Journal](#). The corruption in the Iraqi oil ministry was publicly revealed, *not* by Iraqis, but by an Australian newspaper's investigation. [The Age](#)(31 Mar); [The Age](#)(1 Apr). My comment is that — given that previous investigations into both (1) army officers who hired "ghost soldiers" and (2) government officials responsible for desertion of the army at Mosul in June 2014 have produced *no* results — it is unlikely that any significant prosecution will result from the oil investigation. If Iraq is serious about fighting corruption, perhaps Abadi should outsource the investigation and beheadings to a firm in Saudi Arabia.

On 8 April, John Kerry visited Iraq to prop up Abadi. Reuters reported:

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Iraq on Friday [8 April] to show support for its prime minister, who is grappling with a political crisis, a collapsing economy and a fitful fight to retake ground from Islamic State militants. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi last week unsettled Iraq's political elite with a proposed cabinet reshuffle that aims to curb entrenched corruption by replacing long-time politicians with technocrats and academics.

"Kerry visits Iraq, showing support for embattled prime minister," [Reuters](#), 08:17 GMT, 8 April 2016.

After his meetings with Abadi and three other Iraqi politicians, Kerry held a press conference in Baghdad:



Before I take a few questions, let me reiterate my thanks, and particularly I want to reiterate the support of President Obama, Vice President Biden, myself as Secretary, and the entire Administration in the United States for Prime Minister Abadi, who has demonstrated critical leadership in the face of enormous security, economic, and political challenges.

We urge all of the parties in Iraq to work together, to come together, to advance the political process in ways that for certain advance the interests and the aspirations and hopes of the Iraqi people. We stand ready to assist the Iraqi Government in any way that we can as partners and as friends.

....

... my message to everybody I met with was very straightforward. We urge everybody to work together. We urge everybody to put the interests of Iraq writ large ahead of personal interests or sectarian interests and to find this — in this moment of crisis a way to be able to join together to come out strong and provide us with an ability to advance the interests of the Iraqi people. It's that simple. And the United States, we have said many times, values its partnership with the Government of Iraq. It's a partnership that's built on trust and respect for each other's sovereignty.

And what we have signaled very clearly today — and I've said it a moment ago — is we support Prime Minister Abadi and his government as it addresses these very complex security, economic, and political challenges. And it's up to the prime minister to make the choices as to what he's going to do and how he's going to do it. He knows how we feel about it.

I also stressed to them that with the fiscal crisis that Iraq faces because of the drop in the price of oil, and with the urgency of moving on Mosul and finishing the job of defeating Daesh, this is a time for unity, it is a time for people to come together and support the larger interests of all Iraqis who want peace and stability in their country. So that really sums up why I'm here.

John Kerry, "Press Availability in Baghdad, Iraq," [State Dept](#), 8 April 2016.

I doubt the corrupt members of the Iraqi parliament will care what Kerry said, but Kerry did support Abadi.

On 11 April, [Reuters](#) reported that the Iraqi parliament will refuse to vote on Abadi's proposed new ministers, thereby stalemating Abadi's proposed reforms. Reuters also says: "The three ministers from the political bloc led by powerful Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who has pressed Abadi for weeks to replace party-affiliated ministers with independents, resigned on Monday [11 April], citing frustration with the other parties' refusal to give up their posts."

On 13 April, [Reuters](#) reported a physical fight "between Kurdish and Shi'ite lawmakers" in Iraq's parliament during discussion of anti-corruption measures and consideration of Abadi's proposed new ministers. There were fistfights and water bottles were thrown. The speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Salim al-Jabouri, threatened to dissolve parliament and call for new

elections.

On 14 April, some members of the Iraqi parliament "attempted to oust the speaker of parliament amid a political crisis". [Associated Press](#).

On 16 April, members of the Iraqi parliament who were attempting to oust the speaker again failed to have a quorum, so the speaker canceled the meeting. Reuters says the dissenters had 131 members on 14 April, which is 40% of the 328 total members of parliament. In other news, the Associated Press reports: "Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr issued a handwritten statement giving parliament 72 hours to vote in a new Cabinet." If parliament fails, al-Sadr would presumably call for public protest demonstrations to begin on 20 April. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#)(al-Sadr); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On 19 April, the Iraqi parliament remains unable to resolve a dispute about whether Salim al-Jabouri should continue as speaker of parliament. [Associated Press](#).

On 20 April, cleric al-Sadr called for more demonstrations to force parliament to approve Abadi's proposed reforms, which include new ministers. Abadi restricted lawful demonstrations to Tahrir Square in Baghdad, because demonstrators had been surrounding government buildings and interfering with government operations. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

On Saturday, 23 April, the Iraqi parliament had done nothing in the past two weeks, except avoid a vote on Abadi's proposed reforms and make noise about replacing the current speaker of the Iraqi parliament. This is a disgusting spectacle of a dysfunctional government in a failed nation.

On 25 April, Reuters reports the conclusion to a week-long visit to Iraq by the United Nations deputy high commissioner for human rights.

A U.N. human rights envoy said on Monday [25 April] Iraq was being run by a failed government and warned foreign powers not to be "complicit" in its neglect of the plight of normal Iraqis.

The United Nations' deputy high commissioner for human rights said both Baghdad and its international supporters were too focused on defeating Islamic State and had no strategy for mending the country after that.

"It is beholden on the international community, that rightly focuses on the military action, to have ... comparable investment in non-military relief," Kate Gilmore said after a week-long trip to Iraq.

"The international community must not allow itself to be made complicit with the failed leadership of Iraq," she said, and urged Iraqi politicians to fight corruption, reform the judiciary and foster reconciliation.

"The first thing the politicians of Iraq have (to do is) to set aside their differences and form urgently a coherent, competent government of national unity," Gilmore said.

"There is political paralysis in Iraq. There is no government in Iraq," Gilmore said. Shadia Nasralla, "U.N. envoy says war goals in Iraq obscuring humanitarian crisis," [Reuters](#). 15:56 GMT, 25 April 2016.

On 26 April, the Iraqi parliament finally voted on reforms and a new group of ministers that Abadi proposed on 31 March 2016 (see above).

Agence France-Presse reported:

Thousands of supporters of powerful Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr answered his call to demonstrate in Baghdad on Tuesday [26 April] to pressure the Iraqi government to carry out stalled reforms.

Iraq has been hit by weeks of political turmoil surrounding Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's efforts to replace the cabinet of party-affiliated ministers with a government of technocrats.

The proposed changes [by Abadi] have been opposed by powerful political parties that rely on control of ministries for patronage and funds, and parliament has repeatedly failed to vote on a new cabinet list.

The demonstrators, many of them carrying Iraqi flags, marched from Tahrir Square in central Baghdad to an entrance to the heavily-fortified Green Zone, where the government is headquartered, chanting that politicians "are all thieves."

"Thousands of Iraqis answer calls to protest," [Al-Arabiya](#), 16:56 GMT, 26 April 2016.

Reuters reported:

On Tuesday [26 April], about 180 of 328 deputies moved to a separate hall after about an hour of chaos during which dissenting MPs chanted "invalid" and "treachery" and threw water bottles at Abadi. He was escorted out by security guards.

When they eventually voted, the lawmakers replaced six ministers with candidates first proposed by Abadi in March, before adjourning to vote on more cabinet changes on Thursday [28 April], according to state television. It cited its correspondent saying voting on the foreign minister was postponed after objections from the Kurdish alliance.

It was not clear if the sensitive portfolios of oil and finance were to be discussed. Both nominees had previously withdrawn their candidacies.

....

The largely peaceful gathering [of pro-Sadr demonstrators] was the biggest in the capital in weeks, with protesters filling a main road stretching nearly 2 km (1.3 miles) from Tahrir Square to the Green Zone.

Recent demonstrations have forced the government to bring back troops from front lines to secure the capital, according to security sources.

Stephen Kalin & Saif Hameed, "Ruckus forces Iraqi MPs to leave main chamber to vote on

cabinet rejig," [Reuters](#). 16:52 GMT, 26 April 2016.

*The Washington Post* reported:

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi desperately tried to steer his country out of political turmoil on Tuesday, partially reshuffling his cabinet amid stepped-up pressure as thousands of protesters threatened to storm parliament.

The demonstrators, answering a call from the outspoken Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, had gathered at the gates of Baghdad's fortified Green Zone, where parliament is located, demanding a new government. Women and children in the crowd were sent home as organizers said they would break through its perimeter if reforms were not enacted.

....

Abadi is performing a precarious balancing act: Attempting to clamp down on corruption in response to the struggling economy and the demonstrations risks the wrath of powerful political players with vested interests. ....

Loveday Morris & Mustafa Salim, "Thousands of protesters threaten to storm Iraq's parliament," [Washington Post](#), 17:19 GMT, 26 April 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

Iraq's parliament approved a partial Cabinet reshuffle proposed by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Tuesday, bowing to mounting public pressure for reform, including mass protests led by an influential Shiite cleric.

Thousands of followers of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr had earlier massed outside the capital's heavily fortified Green Zone, calling for political reform and an end to corruption.

The protesters back al-Abadi's planned reshuffle, which would hand key portfolios to independent technocrats in a bid to root out patronage and corruption that have hindered the provision of public services since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

....

It is unclear how many members the new Cabinet will have.

The protests by al-Sadr's supporters have paralyzed much of the capital. The political crisis has hindered the government's efforts to address a worsening financial crisis resulting from low oil prices and combat the Islamic State group, which still controls much of northern and western Iraq.

The protesters, who have been holding a sit-in in Baghdad's central Tahrir Square, crossed bridges Tuesday to mass in front of the Green Zone, where parliament, government offices and many foreign embassies are located. The heavily-guarded area is surrounded by blast walls and razor-wire.

Earlier on Tuesday, security forces blocked off all the roads leading to Tahrir Square with razor wire and concrete blocks, snarling traffic in much of Baghdad.

....

In August [2015], al-Abadi proposed a sweeping reform package to combat corruption, cut government spending and merge ministries, but his efforts have been stymied by sectarian tensions and entrenched interests.

Sinan Salaheddin, "Iraqi parliament approves partial Cabinet reshuffle," [Associated Press](#). 17:09 GMT, 26 April 2016.

My comment is that the dysfunctional Iraqi parliament only works when it is physically threatened by a mob of thousands of protesters. And after a few MPs threw water bottles and toilet paper at Abadi, who attempted to speak to parliament, the majority of parliament retreated to a separate room to vote. Although Abadi nominated 16 new ministers on 31 March, only 5 were approved by parliament on 26 April. The Associated Press says "it is unclear how many members the new Cabinet will have." That indicates the massive chaos in which — *after* voting on a new Cabinet — it is unclear how many ministers were approved.

On 28 April, the Iraqi government had enough of news reporting by *Al-Jazeera*, so the Iraqi government withdrew the license to operate the *Al-Jazeera* bureau in Baghdad. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#). My comment is that politicians everywhere are typically loathsome weasels. The main thing that keeps politicians honest and functional is a robust freedom of journalists to expose corruption, back-room deals, delay, and stupidity.

On 28 April — in an indication of the seriousness of the debacle in the Iraqi parliament — the U.S. vice-president, Joe Biden, flew into Baghdad on a U.S. Air Force airplane, and then Biden met with Abadi and the speaker of the Iraqi parliament, Salim al-Jabouri.

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

The Associated Press reported Joe Biden's remarks at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad:

"Think of all the places we are today trying to keep the peace, all the places we've sent you guys and women," Biden said. "They're places where because of history, we've drawn artificial lines, creating artificial states, made up of totally distinct ethnic, religious cultural groups and said, 'Have at it. Live together.'"

Biden, as a U.S. senator in 2006, proposed dividing Iraq into semi-autonomous regions for Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis. Though that plan wasn't adopted, the persistent strains among the groups that have flared recently in Iraq's government illustrate the difficulty in holding the country together.

Josh Lederman, "Biden presses Iraq to not let political chaos upend gains," [Associated Press](#), 28 April 2016.

My comment is that no one listened to Joe Biden in 2006, and in 2016 no one takes Joe Biden seriously. Obama should apologize to the Iraqis for sending Joe Biden to visit. Nonetheless, it is probably true that the Sykes-Picot (U.K.-French) agreement in 1916 to create Iraq and Syria was responsible for much sectarian strife during the past 100 years. But

having religiously homogeneous nations creates the problem of a nation invading their neighboring infidel nation. And nations with one large ethnic majority find it easier to oppress minorities who are different in some way.

The Iraqi parliament apparently did nothing on 27-29 April. A session of parliament scheduled for 30 April was cancelled owing to lack of a quorum. Then on the afternoon of 30 April, there was some excitement when protesters broke into the Iraqi parliament building, attacked some legislators, broke windows of cars belonging to legislators, and vandalized the interior of the parliament building. [Washington Post](#); [Rudaw](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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## 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.

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.

On 21 March 2016, the [Washington Post](#) published an article with the headline: "The U.S. military has a lot more people in Iraq than it has been saying". Obama's official upper limit is 3870 personnel, but there are now approximately 5000 personnel in Iraq.

On 18 April 2016, it was announced that the number of U.S. troops in Iraq would be increased by 217, and also that 8 Apache helicopters operated by the U.S. Army would be available to support the Iraqi army. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Reuters reported: "The increase raises the authorized troop level in Iraq to 4,087, not including special operations personnel, some logistics workers and troops on temporary rotations."

On 19 April, the Associated Press had a headline: "Sending more US troops to Iraq fits a 2-year pattern". Part of this article says:

President Barack Obama's decision to send still more American troops to Iraq, and to put military advisers closer to the front lines against the Islamic State, fits a pattern of ever-deepening involvement in a country whose war Obama exited with supposed finality in December 2011.

From the initial contingent of 170 U.S. soldiers who entered Baghdad as advisers in June 2014, after the Islamic State overran much of northern and western Iraq and seemed poised to threaten Baghdad, the troop total jumped to 1,550 six months later. It topped 3,000 in April 2015 and then edged higher. The latest increase announced Monday by Defense Secretary Ash Carter pushes the authorized total above 4,000. More increases seem likely.

....

One of the most vocal critics of Obama's Iraq policy, Republican Sen. John McCain, dismissed Carter's announcement that the U.S. would send another 217 troops to Iraq in support of the Iraqi security forces' preparation for an assault on the Islamic State stronghold of Mosul. "Grudging incrementalism," McCain called it.

Robert Burns, "Sending more US troops to Iraq fits a 2-year pattern," [Associated Press](#) 14:07 EDT, 19 April 2016.

**My comment:** When Obama first sent U.S. troops to Iraq in 2014, Obama made it very clear that the war against ISIL would be fought by *Iraqis*. The USA remembers well that approximately 4400 U.S. military personnel died in Iraq during the 2003-2011 invasion and occupation of Iraq. The USA wasted more than one trillion dollars in this eight-year war in Iraq. Liberating Iraq from Saddam Hussein was the easy part — the Iraqi army fled, the Iraqi government disappeared, and anarchy occurred. Then Shiite militia and Al-Qaeda began killing U.S. troops in Iraq.

In 2014, Obama said the U.S. would *help* the Iraqis by providing airstrikes, training, and equipment. But the Iraqi army repeatedly proved itself too small and incompetent. Moreover, many of Iraqi army officers were corrupt (e.g., the [ghost soldiers](#) problem, and selling munitions for personal profit). The Iraqi army abandoned huge amounts of supplies when the Iraqi army fled from Mosul and Ramadi, which was a gift to ISIL. U.S. airstrikes were then needed to destroy some of the equipment which the U.S. had given to the Iraqi army, but was now in the hands of ISIL.

It is becoming more clear that if the U.S. Government wants to defeat ISIL, then the U.S. will need to do some of the fighting in Iraq, because the Iraqi army is simply inadequate and the Iraqi army is *not* going to significantly improve in the foreseeable future.



Obama apparently believes that if the Iraqis fight to liberate Iraq from ISIL, then the Iraqis will learn to maintain an adequate army. But, as I point out [above](#), Iraq is now a failed nation, with a corrupt and dysfunctional government. The current government in Iraq is unable to implement decisions that it makes, and is *not* behaving in a rational, intelligent way.

Given that Obama supports both the continuation of George W. Bush's war on terror and the defeat of ISIL, Obama has *no* choice — Obama must commit more U.S. Military personnel to Iraq, because the Iraqis are inadequate to do the job.

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## **Iraqi Army Intends to Liberate Anbar Province**

### **Ramadi**

On 17 May 2015 the Iraqi army fled from Ramadi, and allowed ISIL to control the entire city of Ramadi. Worse, the fleeing Iraqi 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.

Finally, 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 2015. But the liberation of Ramadi from ISIL seems to have been finished sometime around 12 March 2016.

My previous essays — see my monthly essays for [December 2015](#) to [March 2016](#) — list a series of *10 promises* by Iraqi politicians or senior army officers from 25 May 2015 to 8 December 2015 that Ramadi would be liberated within the next few days. All of those promises were 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 seven-month delay in liberating Ramadi 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. It is now clear that the Iraqi government can *not* afford to remove all of the ISIL explosives and then rebuild Ramadi.

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### **April 2016: Ramadi**



On 4 April, [Reuters](#) reported that a U.S. civilian company has a contract with the Iraqi government to remove ISIL explosives from Ramadi. The Iraqi government will use donations from foreign nations to pay the U.S. company for services.

On 24 April, after dozens of returning Iraqis had been killed by ISIL explosives in Ramadi, the Iraqi army told civilians *not* to return to their homes in Ramadi. [Reuters](#).

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### 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.

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### April 2016: Fallujah

So what's happening in Fallujah? The Iraqi army and Shiite militias have surrounded and besieged Fallujah, starving ISIL (and innocent civilians) in Fallujah. [Reuters](#)(2 Feb 2016); [Voice of America](#)(Reuters 8 Mar); [Human Rights Watch](#)(7 Apr); [Reuters](#)(7 Apr); [Reuters](#)(11 Apr); [Associated Press](#)(29 April).

My comment: when Assad besieges a city, he is accused of a war crime. But, when the Iraqi government — aided by U.S. airstrikes — besieges a city, Obama does the three-monkey

routine (i.e., see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil).

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### **Hit, Iraq**

After the liberation of Ramadi, Iraqi forces turned their attention to several small cities in Anbar province that had been captured by ISIL.

On 1 April, the Iraqi security forces "are now nearing the outskirts of Hit." [Pentagon](#).

On 8 April, the Iraq army reached the center of Hit, although Hit was *not* yet liberated from ISIL. [Reuters](#).

During a 20 April press briefing, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve in Baghdad said that Hit had been liberated by the Iraqis.

Last week in the Euphrates River Valley, Iraqi Security Forces tore Hit from ISIL's grasp and gave it back to the Iraqi people. Hit is liberated.

During Operation Desert Lynx, thousands of fleeing citizens sought safety behind CTS forces, highlighting the effectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces and the trust they've earned from the Iraqi people.

Hit was a linchpin for ISIL; clearing Hit hampers their ability to move foreign fighters and supplies into the Euphrates River Valley, and sets the stage for future offensive operations.

The liberation of Hit will serve to further fragment ISIL's operations in the Anbar corridor.

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

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## **Future liberation of Mosul**

### **More Empty Promises**

Above, I mentioned a series of 10 false promises during May-December 2015 to liberate Ramadi in the next few days. A similar series of false promises is appearing in connection with the future liberation of Mosul.

1. On 1 June 2015, 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.

2. 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.

3. On 24 September 2015, [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.
4. On 25 December 2015, Abadi gave a speech in which he declared that Mosul would be liberated soon after Ramadi was liberated. [Reuters](#).
5. On 28 December 2015, 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 completely 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.
6. On 24 March 2016, the Iraqi military announced the operation to liberate Mosul had officially begun. (See my essay for [March 2016](#) and [Wall Street Journal](#).)

### **April 2016: Mosul**

The operation to liberate Mosul officially began on 24 March 2016. About two weeks later, on 6 April, the operation stalled at the village of al-Nasr, near Makhmour, on the road to Mosul. Reuters reports that "The faltering start has cast renewed doubt on the capabilities of the Iraqi army, ...." [Reuters](#); [Wall Street Journal](#).

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## **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.

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## 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.

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### **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](#).)

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## 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. See my essay for [March 2016](#).

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

As of March 31, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$7 billion and the average daily cost is \$11.6 million for 602 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

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

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## **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.

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Since U.S. airstrikes began in Iraq on 9 August 2014, I have copied the CENTCOM or Pentagon press releases into my monthly essays, to chronicle these airstrikes. On 1 April 2016, I contemplated abandoning this project, because of the large amount of my unpaid time consumed in tedious formatting of text copied from the U.S. Military. During 1-6 April 2016, it took me 29 minutes to find, copy, and format the text from CENTCOM, then find URLs of the corresponding Pentagon press releases. Five minutes per day may not seem like a big chore, but it is 30 hours/year.

### **1 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On March 31, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack and ground-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 rocket artillery and fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

#### **Syria**

- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed two ISIL bulldozers.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED,

two ISIL VBIED factories, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL anti-air artillery staging area, and nine ISIL tunnel entrances and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas and five ISIL vehicles.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL mortar firing position and suppressed two separate ISIL mortar firing positions.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL VBIEDs.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed three ISIL tunnel systems and three ISIL assembly areas.

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

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

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

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## 2 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 1, 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 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL bunkers, an ISIL mortar position, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

### Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED, two ISIL fuel tankers, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL-used bridge, an ISIL barge, eight ISIL boats, and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL command and control node, four ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Qayyarah, seven strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL weapons cache and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL command and control node, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL-used unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL mortar firing position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL rocket rails and an ISIL supply cache.

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

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

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

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### 3 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 2, 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 22 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, two strikes destroyed an ISIL rocket rail system and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

#### Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL used-bridge, an ISIL VBIED factory, 22 ISIL boats, and an ISIL bed down location and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL VBIED, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL machine gun, and two ISIL vehicles.

- Near Qayyarah, six strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL weapons storage facility and destroyed four ISIL mortar firing positions, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL VBIED production facility, and 13 ISIL staging areas.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

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

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

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

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## 4 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 3, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Al Hasakah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Al Hawl, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, three ISIL vehicles, and two ISIL tactical vehicles, and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL workover rig, an ISIL front-end loader, and four ISIL pump jacks.
- Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL VBIEDs.
- Near Idlib, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL buildings.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL recoilless rifle, and an ISIL staging area and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL



assembly areas and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two strikes destroyed an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL command and control node, and an ISIL tactical vehicle and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons storage facility and an ISIL staging facility.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, 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](#), 4 April 2016.

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

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## 5 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 4, 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 19 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 Ar Raqqa, one strike disabled two ISIL pump jacks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL rocket systems, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL front end loader, seven ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL mortar position, and suppressed two ISIL rocket positions.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and five ISIL defensive fighting positions.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL fighting position, and seven ISIL boats.
- Near Kisik, four strikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL



staging area, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL VBIED, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL rocket system, an ISIL trench, and suppressed an ISIL sniper position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## 6 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 5, 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 19 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Idlib, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.

### Iraq

- Near Hit, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL boats, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL medium machine gun, and three ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL bed down location, three ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL VBIED, and an ISIL machine gun.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL financial storage center, and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed two ISIL supply caches, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL command and control node, and three ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL supply

cache and three ISIL assembly areas.

- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL VBIED, two ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL mortar systems, and an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## 7 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 6, 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 19 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 Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL front-end loader, disabled seven ISIL well-heads and neutralized an ISIL pump-jack.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL rocket system, four ISIL vehicles, three ISIL excavators, and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL home-made explosives (HME) cache.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed two ISIL-used bridges.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL front end loader, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL supply cache, three ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL tunnel system, an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL fighting position, and an

ISIL vehicle.

- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas.

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

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

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

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## 8 April 2016: airstrikes

On 8 April 2016, CENTCOM unveiled their new website design. The links to news stories on their homepage failed to work, even on 12 April. After looking at the source code for their homepage, I was able to learn the correct URLs and see their news articles. This cosmetic "improvement" in the CENTCOM website increased the average time it takes me to find, copy and paste, and format the press releases from 5 to 8 minutes/day.

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

On April 7, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, seven strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL command and control node, and two ISIL vehicles.

### Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL boat, two ISIL vehicles, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL bunker, two ISIL vehicles, seven ISIL rocket systems, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL VBIED manufacturing facility and destroyed an ISIL tunnel system, four ISIL

- assembly areas, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed two ISIL assembly areas and two ISIL supply caches.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL assembly area and an ISIL supply cache and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

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

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

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## 9 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 8, 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 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil separator.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail, seven ISIL rockets, and an ISIL mortar system.

### Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed two ISIL rocket rails and 22 rockets.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL mortar system and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Hit, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 10 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, 30 ISIL boats, and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed an ISIL command and control node and an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL financial storage center and destroyed three ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes struck an ISIL weapons storage facility and destroyed two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.

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

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

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

The U.S. Air Force moved some B-52 bombers to Qatar, in preparation for dropping large numbers of bombs on ISIL in Iraq and Syria. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

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## 10 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 9, 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 24 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil pump jacks.

### Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL mortar system and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL fighting position, five ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and five ISIL communication facilities and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL boat.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes destroyed two ISIL boats and an ISIL vehicle and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.

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

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

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

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## **11 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

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

### **Syria**

- Near Manbij, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, seven ISIL vehicles, two ISIL tactical vehicles, and an ISIL house borne improvised explosive device (HBIED).

### **Iraq**

- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike destroyed an ISIL bed down location.
- Near Hit, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, six ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed three ISIL bed down locations, two ISIL supply caches, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL staging areas, and an ISIL vehicle borne IED.

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

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

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

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## **12 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On April 11, 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 nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery

and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Manbij, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL tunnel entrance, two ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED).

### **Iraq**

- Near Hit, two strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed 20 ISIL fighting positions, 16 ISIL heavy machine guns, four ISIL rocket propelled grenade systems, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, two ISIL staging areas, and denied ISL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and two separate ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed three ISIL machine guns and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL staging area and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

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## **13 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On April 12, 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 seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, ground-attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

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

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six

- ISIL machine gun positions and four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas and an ISIL fighting position.
  - Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
  - Near Tal Afar, one strike produced inconclusive results.

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

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

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

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## 14 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, ground-attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Al Hawl, two strikes produced inconclusive results.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil pump jack.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

### Iraq

- Near Hit, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL machine gun positions, an ISIL boat, an ISIL boat dock, seven ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL command and control node, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and an ISIL storage facility.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL headquarters, and an ISIL financial headquarters and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed seven ISIL boats and an ISIL mortar position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.



Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.  
[Central Command](#), 14 April 2016.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 14 April 2016.

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### **15 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On April 14, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack and ground-attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 30 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, ground-attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

#### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and four ISIL vehicles.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Hit, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 18 ISIL boats, an ISIL command and control node, and an ISIL weapons cache and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Mosul, 21 strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, 18 ISIL modular oil refineries, and two ISIL crude oil stills and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed 33 ISIL boats.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL mortar cache, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.  
[Central Command](#), 15 April 2016.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 15 April 2016.

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### **16 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On April 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack and fighter

aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 15 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 Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, two strikes destroyed an ISIL mortar system, 14 ISIL boats, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, 14 ISIL modular oil refineries, and two ISIL crude oil stills and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and 10 ISIL boats.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 24 ISIL boats, two ISIL rocket rails, and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## **17 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On April 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Al Hawl, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL pump jack and an ISIL oil separator.

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

### **Iraq**

- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Haditha, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Hit, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL excavator, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Irbil, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, four ISIL assembly areas, and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

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

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

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

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## **18 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

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

### **Syria**

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed two ISIL anti-air artillery pieces.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes struck an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL communications facility, and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL assembly areas and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL rocket team.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL mortar positions, two ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL boat and suppressed an ISIL rocket team.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL safe house.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## 19 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted one strike using 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 bomber, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed 10 ISIL rocket rails and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL tunnels and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL supply caches, an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), an ISIL VBIED factory, an ISIL bed down location, and an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.

- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed three ISIL rocket rails.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 19 April 2016.

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

The B-52 bombers that arrived in Qatar on 9 April were first used on 18 April to bomb Qayyarah, Iraq. [Pentagon](#).

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## 20 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 19, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Coalition military forces also conducted one strike in Syria in support of Coalition operations using attack aircraft. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and damaged a third ISIL fighting position.

Coalition military forces conducted one strike in Syria in support of Coalition operations using attack aircraft:

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

### Iraq

- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL cache and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bulldozer and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Kisik, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL assembly area, 24 ISIL rocket rails, and an ISIL fighting position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, nine strikes struck an ISIL staging area, an ISIL-used power plant, and four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas,

three ISIL supply caches, an ISIL mortar system, and two ISIL vehicles and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL supply cache and five ISIL asphalt steamrollers.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

[Central Command](#), 20 April 2016. [Text rearranged by Standler to keep together all of the airstrikes in Syria.]

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

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## 21 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 20, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL oil well head.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL rocket system.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and two ISIL main battle tanks.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, five strikes struck three separate ISIL staging facilities and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and damaged an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bed down location.
- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 27 ISIL boats and three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL machine gun, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL assembly area.

- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL assembly area, and an ISIL rocket rail.

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

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

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

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## 22 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 21, 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 22 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes struck an ISIL bed down location and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL vehicle, and two ISIL fighting positions.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL bunker complex and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed three ISIL bunkers.
- Near Fallujah, eight strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, three ISIL vehicles, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL VBIED storage facility.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL assembly area, and three ISIL supply caches and suppressed two separate ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL VBIED and two ISIL asphalt steamrollers.

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

Central Command, 22 April 2016.

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

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## 23 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 22, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, fighter, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL weapons factory.
- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL staging area.
- Near Washiyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, eight strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, two ISIL weapons storage facilities, and three ISIL bed down locations and destroyed three ISIL bunkers and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL-used bridge, an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike destroyed an ISIL command and control node and an ISIL-used bridge.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL check point, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL mortar systems.



- Near Tal Afar, one strike produced inconclusive results.

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

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

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

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## 24 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 23, 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 24 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL anti-air artillery system.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL VBIED factory, and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel system and an ISIL generator.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL bunker, and three ISIL trench systems.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL trench system.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Kisik, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, four ISIL improvised explosive devices, an ISIL observation camera and suppressed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL modular refinery and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and two ISIL vehicles and damaged an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL VBIED and weapons facility and destroyed six ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL mortar system, and an ISIL supply cache.

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

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

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

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## 25 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack and ground-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, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL staging area.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel system.
- Near Fallujah, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL staging area and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL bulldozer, an ISIL front end loader, an ISIL recoilless rifle, and three ISIL bed down locations.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL anti-air artillery pieces and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Waleed, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## 26 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 25, 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 18 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

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

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, six strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL-used bridges, an ISIL bunker, and two ISIL heavy machine guns and damaged a separate ISIL fighting position.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL assembly area, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL weapons storage facility and destroyed an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

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## **27 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On April 26, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq. In Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 23 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

## Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL tunnel systems, an ISIL tunnel entrance, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL recoilless rifle, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL mortar systems and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL machine gun and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Kirkuk, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Tal Afar, three strikes destroyed two ISIL tunnel systems and an ISIL front end loader and denied ISIL access to terrain.

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

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

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

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## 28 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack and ground-attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, ground-attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

## Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting position and four ISIL vehicles.
- Near Washiyah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL command and control node and five ISIL vehicles.

## Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL bunker, and two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED).
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike struck an ISIL logistics facility.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL rocket rails, four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL staging area, and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Hit, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL-used bridge, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an improvised weapons facility.
- Near Qayyarah, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL mortar positions, four ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL VBIEDs, and denied ISIL access to terrain and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

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## 29 April 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 28, 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 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, ground-attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL mortar positions, and an ISIL vehicle.

### Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns and an ISIL bunker and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Fallujah, four strikes struck two separate large ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and two ISIL-used bridges and suppressed a separate ISIL tactical unit and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting

positions and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Kisik, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and two ISIL tunnel entrances and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL fuel and service station and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket position.

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

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

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

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### **30 April 2016: airstrikes**

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

On April 29, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

#### **Syria**

- Near AL Hawl, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL vehicle and damaged ISIL equipment.

#### **Iraq**

- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Fallujah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL-used bridge, and an ISIL tank.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kirkuk, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL VBIEDs, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL supply cache, four ISIL weapons caches, four ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL tunnel systems, an ISIL front end

loader, an ISIL excavator, four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL-used bridges, an ISIL bed down location, and an ISIL tactical vehicle.

- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL bed down locations, two ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL rocket rails, five ISIL rockets, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Waleed, one strike produced inconclusive results.

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

[Central Command](#), 30 April 2016.

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

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## 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.
- My essay for [March 2016](#) describes ISIL terror attacks on the airport and subway in

Brussels that killed 32 people on 22 March 2016.

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.

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## **Islamic Migration into Europe numbers**

One of the major news stories during September 2015 was the flood of approximately 100,000 migrants into Europe, mostly from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

During the migration crisis in September 2015, accurate numbers were sparse. Instead, politicians and journalists spoke of "thousands" per day, "tens of thousands" per week, and at least a hundred thousand per month. On 7 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "An Austrian Interior Ministry official says nearly 200,000 migrants transited Austria" during September 2015. The actual number was higher, because some migrants boarded trains outside of Austria and then traveled through Austria. Also the [Associated Press](#) reported: "German authorities say 164,000" migrants arrived in Germany during September 2015.

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

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

### **disenchantment & failure of assimilation**

This increase in Muslim population in Europe will likely lead to an increase in Islamic terrorism in Europe for two reasons:

1. Muslim migrants do *not* speak the local language of their host nation, and the migrants have different religious values from the prevailing local Christian majority values, so the migrants will feel out of place in European society. (What Tej Parikh called a "failure in assimilation", [Reuters](#), 27 Nov 2015.) The migrants will become disenchanting with their new home, and some will become radicalized. The radicalization will most likely occur via the Internet, but could also occur from personal contact with Islamic radicals in Europe.
2. It is possible that some Islamic terrorists will enter Europe along with migrants. These could be terrorists sent to recruit more fighters for ISIL or Al-Qaeda. Or they could be Europeans returning from battle in Syria, but using a new name to avoid criminal prosecution for fighting in Syria.

This is a subject that humanitarians avoid considering, as the humanitarians welcome migrants to Europe.



In mid-September 2015, I wrote that some "migrants will become disenchanting with their new home". This has already happened. On 19 October 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.

On 14 April 2016, Germany demanded that immigrants learn the German language *and* seek employment, or the immigrants would lose welfare benefits. [Reuters](#). Learning the German language is difficult for native speakers of English, and must be harder for native speakers of Arabic that has a different alphabet.

### **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.

France and Belgium admitted millions of Muslim immigrants, mostly from Algeria and Morocco. Many of these immigrants failed to assimilate into European culture, and now live in ghettos. The biographies of Islamic terrorists arrested in Europe since 2014 show this common pattern of living in a ghetto and sometimes being arrested for ordinary crimes.

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## 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.

My essay for [March 2016](#) chronicles the details of these attacks.

On 2 April, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Islamic terrorists are able to evade security at airports, and continue to fly to/from Europe. "When Ibrahim El Bakraoui blew himself up in the Brussels Airport check-in area, ... it was at least the third time he had passed unimpeded through an airport terminal in recent months [since June 2015]. .... The ease with which he did so raises questions about how much governments know about the movements of returnees among the 5,000 home-grown jihadis [from Europe] who have trained and fought in places like Syria or Iraq."

On Sunday, 3 April, the Brussels airport reopened, with a total of 3 departures and 3 return flights. The airport normally has 600 flights/day. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 9 April, law enforcement finally identified the one suicide bomber who fled from the Brussels airport on 22 March: he was Mohamed Abrini, who was also involved in the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015. Abrini was arrested in Brussels on 8 April. Abrini confessed to being one of the Islamic terrorists at the Brussels airport. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). Reuters says: "The main identified suspects in Islamic State attacks on Paris and Brussels are now dead or in custody ...."

On 12 April, [Reuters](#) published brief biographies of the suspects in the Islamic terrorist attacks on Paris and Brussels. Several of them were known criminals in Belgium, for example:

- Khalid El Bakraoui, who exploded at the Brussels tram station, had repeatedly violated parole "for car-jacking in February 2011".
- Brahim El Bakraoui, who exploded at the Brussels airport, "was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2010 for shooting at police during a robbery" and then violated his parole on 19 May 2015. Bakraoui was arrested in Turkey in June 2015 for attempting to enter Syria, but Belgian authorities declined to extradite El Bakraoui to Belgium. Bakraoui was deported from Turkey to The Netherlands in July 2015.
- "Abdelhamid Abaaoud ... was killed by French police in a shootout in the Paris suburb of St. Denis on Nov. 18. .... Abaaoud was sentenced to 20 years in prison in absentia in July [2015] ...."

On 12 April, a labor union that represents air traffic controllers at the Brussels airport began a strike. On 13 April, 50 flights were cancelled from a total of 400 scheduled flights. [Reuters](#).

On 13 April, the [Associated Press](#) reported the Islamic terrorists in Brussels "honed their skills through combat in Syria". ISIL's English-language online magazine, *Dabiq*, boasted of the Brussels terrorists. See also [NY Times](#).

On 14 April, [Reuters](#) again published brief biographies of 17 Islamic terrorists involved in the

attacks on Paris and Brussels. At least 4 of them spent time in Syria.

On 15 April, the transportation minister of Belgium resigned after it was disclosed that the European Commission had warned her about security problems at the Brussels airport one year before the Islamic terrorist attack. [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 22 April, it was announced that Najim Laachraoui — who exploded in the Brussels airport on 22 March — was one of the jailors of four French journalists in Syria for 10 months in 2013-2014. The four journalists were released in April 2014. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 27 April, Salah Abdeslam was moved from Belgium to France, to begin prosecution for his role in the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015. What caught my attention was the lawyer in Belgium who represented Salah Abdeslam made a public statement full of pejorative remarks about Salah Abdeslam. Sven Mary, Abdeslam's attorney in Belgium, told the French newspaper *Liberation*: "He's a little jerk from Molenbeek, from a world of petty criminals — more of the follower than a leader, with the brains of an empty ash-tray." [Reuters](#). Because Abdeslam is the only surviving member of the Islamic terrorist gang who attacked Paris, there may now be a desire to exaggerate Abdeslam's importance. By saying Abdeslam had the brains of an empty ashtray, the attorney indicated that Abdeslam was *neither* the mastermind *nor* the organizer of the attacks in Paris. [Associated Press](#). The alleged mastermind of the Paris attacks was Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who died in a police raid in Paris on 18 Nov 2015.

Sven Mary also made some irrelevant pejorative remarks about Abdeslam. The [Jerusalem Post](#) reports Mary said: "I asked him if he read the Koran, and he said he had read interpretations on the Internet." The [Associated Press](#) reported: "Mary said Abdeslam had admitted that he had read an interpretation of the Muslim holy book on the internet — not the text itself." My reaction is that Mary has violated attorney-client confidentiality in making irrelevant remarks about Abdeslam's religious devotion. The remarks are *not* relevant to foreseeable criminal prosecution of Abdeslam for murder, attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, etc. Abdeslam will *not* be criminally charged with failing to read the Koran.

The [Washington Post](#) published an insightful article on Mary's remarks about Abdeslam, confirming opinions that antisocial, low-grade criminals from Muslim ghettos in Europe were now performing acts of terrorism.

Back on 21 March 2016, the [BBC](#) reported that Sven Mary has the nickname "avocat des crapules" ("scumbag's lawyer"), because Mary defends notorious criminals (e.g., Abdeslam). A more formal translation of "crapules" is "villain". The [Liberation](#) article on 27 April called Mary "avocat du diable" (devil's lawyer). For the criminal justice system to function properly, an attorney needs to represent each defendant, in order to assure a fair trial — find and present exculpatory evidence, object to improper procedure, present all plausible defense(s), make certain that prosecutor proves *all* of the elements of the alleged crime(s), etc. Mary was courageously representing Abdeslam, when Mary made unprofessional remarks to a journalist from *Liberation*.

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## 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 planed to train-and-equip the so-called "moderate rebels" in Syria, an effort that *planned* to train 15,000 rebels by January 2018. Meanwhile, effective troops on the ground were needed in Syria in January 2014 to prevent ISIL from capturing cities and infrastructure, and were needed in Syria beginning in September 2014 to complement the U.S. airstrikes. By 26 Sep 2015, fewer than 130 rebels have completed their training, and both batches of U.S.-trained rebels have performed poorly in Syria. On 9 October 2015, the U.S. finally ended the training of moderate rebels to fight against ISIL in Syria. 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 — also known as the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) — 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.

In mid-March 2016, I saw a glimmer of hope in the Geneva negotiations. But on 15 April 2016, I again concluded that the negotiations were "futile", because of the refusal of the parties to meet face-to-face, and the opposition's intransigent demand that Assad relinquish power. Then on 18 April 2016, the HNC walked out of negotiations and vowed *not* to return until all four of their demands were met by Assad.

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## 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 278,000 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.

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## 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.

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### **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.

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This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria32.pdf>  
begun 2 April 2016, revised 1 May 2016.

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

[my homepage](#)