

Syria & Iraq: May 2016

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 30 essays on Syria. That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

When I was a full-time student in universities during 1967-77, I learned not to write documents full of facts, without also explaining the significance of those facts and drawing conclusions from those facts. So, I include my opinions in this essay, to show the reader omissions, inconsistencies, propaganda, and other defects in the conventional wisdom or in journalists' reports. In science and engineering, we keep our opinions separate from facts, and in that spirit I label most of my opinions and my comments.

Copyright law allows an author to make brief quotations for purposes of scholarship, news reporting, or comment, but *not* to copy an entire article. (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I do not quote most of an article by a news agency or newspaper. However, there is no copyright on works of the U.S. Government (17 U.S.C. §105), so an author is free to copy as much of a Government's work as the author wishes.

I am [aware](#) of "link rot" — the failure of links owing to a webmaster who either (1) moved old webpages to a new location, or (2) deleted old webpages. Such actions by webmasters frustrate users of the Internet, who depend on stable links. In writing this essay, I often cite multiple news sources, in the hope that at least one of those links will still function in the future. Link rot is a problem created by webmasters, and the solution to this problem lies with those webmasters.

I use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) for events in Europe and Syria. Eastern Standard Time in Boston is -5 hours from GMT. Beginning 13 March, the USA was on Daylight Savings Time, which makes Boston -4 hours from GMT. The U.K. went on summer time on

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

Every day, I checked the websites of

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

for news to summarize in this essay. When I found significant news, I attempted to find and cite the original source.

Beginning 23 Sep 2015, *All Iraq News* suddenly reduced the number of new news stories each day at its English-language website. This website *was* the best source of information about the dysfunctional Iraqi parliament, so it is a serious loss of information.

Terse Summary of Syria Fighters

It is helpful to understanding the Syrian civil war to divide the opposition fighters into three groups of people:

1. The so-called "rebels" are moderates, many of whom are part of the Free Syrian Army. In 2011, these moderates wanted to continue a secular government in Syria, but without Assad.
2. The "jihadists" want to impose an Islamic government (i.e., Sharia law) on Syria. The Islamic Front is a large group of jihadists, formed on 22 November 2013. Ahrar al-Sham is one of the major organizations in the Islamic Front.
3. And two Al-Qaeda affiliated groups fighting in Syria:
 - a. the Nusra Front, which wants to establish an Islamic emirate in Syria.
 - b. the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) — also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). On 3 Feb 2014, Al-Qaeda repudiated ISIL, but ISIL remains Al-Qaeda inspired. ISIL's goal since June 2014 is to establish a caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

[Stanford Univ.](#) has a website with descriptions of ten terrorist organizations in Syria (e.g., Nusra, ISIL, etc.). The U.S. Government National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has a history of many international terrorist [groups](#).

On 29 June 2014, ISIL changed its name to "Islamic State" (IS), when it declared a caliphate. I continue to use the old name, ISIL, for consistency with my previous essays. Moreover, using the term "Islamic State" appears to give legitimacy to their so-called "State", which is only a few tens of thousands of terrorists. On 3 Dec 2014, John Kerry followed the lead of

the French Foreign Minister in calling ISIL "Daesh".

The USA and Western Europe would prefer that the rebels win, although military aid to the rebels has been withheld because of fears that donated weapons and munitions would eventually be acquired by either the jihadists or Al-Qaeda. The rebels are frequently described by two words: "fragmented" and "disorganized". Beginning in September 2013, the rebels are also frequently characterized as "disillusioned". Since October 2013, many smaller rebel groups have been leaving the Free Syrian Army and joining the jihadists.

While I use the words rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda to indicate three different opposition groups, journalists routinely use the word "rebels" to refer to the entire opposition, or any part of the opposition. Thus, there is different word usage between my text and quotations from journalists. Worse, journalists commonly refer to the opposition as "rebels", "militants", or "extremists", without mentioning the name of the group. With the exception of the Free Syrian Army, *all* of the insurgents in Syria are some kind of radical Islamic extremist, so labels like "extremist" lack precision.

It is critically important to understand that the jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL want to overthrow the existing secular government of Assad and establish a new government based on their interpretation of Islam. These jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL are *not* part of a pro-democracy revolt in Syria. Presumably, these jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL will fight against *any* secular government in Syria, so removal of Assad will *not* end their battle to establish their religious government in Syria.

Government

The Arab nations, Western Europe, and the USA recognize the Syrian National Coalition, an exile group in Turkey, as the *only* legitimate government of Syria. However, there are hundreds of rebel or jihadist groups operating in Syria, and the Coalition represents only some of the rebel groups and none of the jihadists. As explained in detail in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria, the Coalition is unable to make decisions, and — in my opinion — has no credibility as a future government of Syria. However, the Coalition is the least objectionable alternative government for Syria. Since October 2013, several commentators have noted that Assad is preferable to having Al-Qaeda control Syria. The topic of a future government for Syria is discussed in my separate [review](#).

Chemical Weapons

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

Chemical Weapons in Syria History

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

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

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

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

OPCW Fact-Finding Missions in Syria

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

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](#).

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

On 9 July 2015, the U.S. asked the United Nations Security Council to form a committee to determine *who* used chemical weapons in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [New York Times](#)(AP).

On 7 August 2015, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2235 that requests the U.N. Secretary General form a committee to determine *who* released toxic chemicals (including chlorine) in Syria. U.N. Secretary General Ban waited until the deadline (27 Aug) specified in Resolution 2235 to suggest a three-man committee. For details, see my essay for [August 2015](#).

On 10 September 2015, the U.N. Security Council approved the Secretary General's recommendations for a Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) composed of three diplomats plus experts, with the supposed freedom to travel anywhere in Syria. On 15 September, the

United Nations announced the names of the three members of the JIM. For details, see my essay for [September 2015](#).

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

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

On 11 December 2015, the Status of Mission Agreement was signed in New York City. The three leaders of the JIM were in Damascus on 17 December. [U.N. Press](#); [U.N. Geneva](#). The JIM has no website and the United Nations is being miserly with information on the JIM.

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

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

The JIM may also investigate two other cases:

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

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

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

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

I comment that when the USA proposed the JIM in July 2015, apparently no one realized that reports from the JIM would arrive during delicate peace negotiations with Assad's government. If the reports anger Assad, then Assad could delay negotiations, and the Syrian civil war would continue. A continuation of the civil war for just one month would kill more than 4000 people, *many* times the total number of people who were allegedly killed in *all* of the alleged uses of toxic gases in Syria. That is why peace negotiations are more important than investigation of use of chemical weapons.

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

by the United Nations reduces the credibility of the findings by the JIM.

ISIL Releases Chemical Weapons in Iraq

My essay for [November 2014](#) mentions two different instances of ISIL releasing chlorine gas in Iraq.

My essay for [July 2015](#) cited six news reports about ISIL releasing chlorine gas during fights with Kurds in Iraq.

Introduction: ISIL used mustard in Iraq on 11 August 2015

On 11 August 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.

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.

Diversions

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

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

Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was negotiated.

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

2015, Houthi (Shiite) rebels surrounded the home of the president (a Sunni) who is supported by the U.S.-government. On 22 Jan 2015, the president and cabinet resigned, plunging Yemen deeper into anarchy. On 10 Feb 2015, the U.S. [State Department](#) closed the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, because of rapidly deteriorating security. On 20 March, ISIL attacked two Shiite mosques in Yemen during Friday prayers, killing at least 137 people. [AP](#). On 26 March 2015, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

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

Deaths in Syria

On 28 May 2016, the the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a cumulative death toll.

The daily blood shedding continue on the Syrian soil, and killing the Syrian people also continue in most of the Syrian provinces, in 63 months since the start of the Syrian revolution, amid continued slumber by the international community, covering its ears to the cries of pain caused by the constant killing, where the Syrian Observatory for human rights was able to document 282,283 human losses since the fall of the first casualty in Daraa at the 18th of March 2011, until the dawn of the 26th of May 2016, and they were as follows:

- 81436 civilian casualties, including
 - at least 14,040 persons under the age of 18, and
 - 9106 females over the age of eighteen.
- Number of fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions and The Syrian Democratic Forces: 45986
- Defected from the regime forces 2582
- Regime soldiers and officers: 56609
- Members from Popular Committees, NDF, al-Baath battalions, Jaysh al-Tahrir al-Filastini, Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the National Arab Guard, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Iskenderun, Shabiha and regime's informers: 39221
- Militiamen from Hezbollah: 1247
- Shiite fighters loyal to the regime of Iranian and Afghan and other Asian and Arab nationalities and al-Quds al-Filastini Brigade and gunmen of Arab nationalities loyal to the regime forces: 4585
- Casualties from fighters of Lebanese, Iraqi, Palestinian, Jordanian, Arab Gulf, North African, Egyptian, Yemeni, Sudanese and other Arab nationalities, in addition to fighters of Russian, Chinese, European, Indian, Afghan, Chechen, Caucasian, American, Australian and Turkestan nationalities; who are fighting in the ranks the "Islamic State", Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic Turkestan Party, Jund al-Aqsa organization, Jund al-Sham, al-Khadra'a battalion, Junud al-Sham al-

Shishan and Islamic movements: 47095

- Unidentified casualties documented by pictures and videos: 3522

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights received confirmed information from reliable sources within the regime's security branches, most importantly the Air Force Intelligence and State Security, in addition to reliable sources in Sednaya military prison, they reported that at least 60 thousand prisoners died within these branches and Sednaya prison during the five past years, either due to direct physical torture, or by privation of food and medicine, where the Syrian Observatory for human rights documented the death of 14464 detainees, including 110 teenagers under the age of eighteen, and 53 citizen women over the age of eighteen years, since the start of the Syrian revolution in the 18th of March 2011, until the dawn of the 26th of May 2016.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights points out that these statistics do not include, the fate of more than 5,000 abducted civilians and fighters in the prisons of the "Islamic State" organization.

Also these statistics do not include the fate of more than 6000 prisoners and missing persons from the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them, and about 2,000 abducted persons by the rebel and Islamic factions, the "Islamic State" and Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant), on charges of being loyal to the regime forces.

It also doesn't include hundreds of non-Syrian Kurdish fighters, who were killed fighting along with YPG in Syria.

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of those who were killed by the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them from Syria, Arab and Asian nationalities, and fighters of the rebel and Islamic Factions, the "Islamic state" organization and the organizations of Jund al-Sham, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Jund al-Aqsa, al-Umma Brigade, al-Battar battalion, Jaysh al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar, the Islamic Turkestan Party and Junud al-Sham al-Shishan to be about 75 thousand more from the numbers that the Syrian Observatory for human rights was able to document, because of the extreme secrecy about casualties by all parties, and because there is information about civilians casualties the Observatory was not able to authenticate, because of the difficulty to get to some remote areas in Syria.

Also, there are about two million Syrians who had different injuries and permanent disabilities, and more than 11 million others of them were displaced both internally and externally, and the infrastructure, hospitals, schools and private and public property are greatly destroyed.

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.

"More than 400000 were killed in 63 months of the Syrian revolution," [SOHR](#), 28 May 2016. [Formatting as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

There are a total of 282,283 dead in the above-quoted indented list that was documented by SOHR. Adding:

- 60,000 dead in Assad's prisons,
- 5000 abducted by ISIL,
- 6000 missing from Assad's military and allies,
- 2000 abducted by rebels, jihadists, ISIL, and Nusra "on charges of being loyal to the regime forces", and
- 75,000 additional dead ("the real number of those who were killed")

gives a real total of approximately 430,000 dead, which agrees with the "more than 400,000 killed" in the title of the SOHR webpage.

On 1 June 2016, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 4927 people were documented as dead in Syria during May 2016.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 4927 persons in the month of May 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 917 civilians, including[:]
 - 185 boys and girls under the age of eighteen, and
 - 148 female citizens over the age of 18, they were killed as follows:
 - 334 citizens including 85 children and 53 citizen women killed in raids by Russian and Syrian warplanes' bombing and helicopters' barrel bombs,
 - 101 people including 28 children and 9 citizen women were killed in the shelling and sniper fire of the regime forces,
 - [1] man executed by Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant) in the countryside of Idlib,
 - 37 persons were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons and dungeons of its intelligence branches,
 - 39 including 3 citizen women and 15 children were killed in the bombing by warplanes of the international coalition,
 - 134 persons including 27 children and 39 citizen women killed by the mortar shells and targeting by the rebel and Islamic Factions and the "Islamic State" organization,
 - 31 persons including a child were executed by the "Islamic State" organization,
 - 11 persons including a child were killed by gunshots of the Turkish and Jordanian border guards,
 - 3 persons (2 of them are children) died due to poor health conditions and the bad living conditions and the lack of medication,
 - 3 persons were killed in the shelling and the gunshots of the Syrian

- Democratic Forces in Aleppo province,
- 178 people including 8 children and 19 citizen women were killed in a booby trapped vehicles detonation in several areas in Syria, and
 - 45 including 17 children 23 citizen woman killed in different circumstances like unidentified gunmen, explosions, landmines and other unknown circumstances.
- Rebel and Islamic fighters and The Syrian Democratic Forces of Syrian nationalities who were killed in clashes against the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them and in clashes among factions: 1150
 - Defected soldiers and officers: 3
 - Regime soldiers and officers: 584
 - Members from Popular Committees, NDF and militiamen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationalities: 499
 - Militiamen from the Lebanese Hezbollah: 25
 - Non-Syrian Pro-regime mostly Shia militiamen: 210
 - Fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions, the “Islamic State”, Jabhat Al-Nusra (al-Qaeda in Levant) and Jaish al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar and the Islamic Turkistan Party of non-Syrian nationalities: 1516
 - Unidentified casualties: 23

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

"About 5000 killed in May 2016, and the international community go on with its carelessness towards the Syrian blood," [SOHR](#), 1 June 2016. [Indented lists added by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of death tolls announced by SOHR, beginning 31 Aug 2013. The total number of people who have died during the Syria civil war that began in March 2011 is now *more than* 283,200.

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 June 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 11 months to choose a leader for the Free Syrian Army, during an existential war.

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 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.

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.

After Turkey shot down the Russian airplane on 24 Nov 2015, Russia put anti-aircraft missiles in Syria to blast any Turkish airplane that invaded Syria. Those anti-aircraft missiles made it impossible for Turkey to do airstrikes in Syria after November 2015. But Turkey's track record of only four airstrikes against ISIL in three months shows that Turkey was *not* interested in attacking ISIL in Syria.

On 4 March 2016, the Turkish government seized control of *Today's Zaman* newspaper in Turkey. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Anadolu](#) in Turkey. This blatant attack on freedom of the press by the Turkish government appalled European governments. But the EU must have the cooperation of Turkey in ending the flow of migrants to Europe, so Europe must be delicate in criticizing Turkey. My essay for [July 2015](#) cited reports by *Zaman* and others that the Turkish government had sent munitions to ISIL in Syria.

Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

Introduction

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

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

Impending collapse of Syrian money system?

On 10 May 2016, a new problem appeared for Assad: the possible collapse of the Syrian money system. I looked at previous news reports during the past months to get a perspective on how the crisis occurred.

On 18 March 2016, when Russian began withdrawing some of its aircraft from Syria, Reuters reported:

Battered by war which has inflicted incalculable damage on industry, infrastructure and economy, Syria's currency hit new lows this week after Russia said it was reducing its military support to President Bashar al-Assad.

The Syrian pound has fallen to 475 to the dollar on the black market, a 90 percent drop since March 18, 2011, when security forces fired on protesters in the city of Deraa, sparking an uprising which descended into civil war.

Backed by financial and trade support from Iran, Syria's government succeeded in stabilising the pound early in the conflict.

But the slide accelerated as it lost control of territory and border crossings, trade collapsed, Western sanctions bit, Gulf Arab investment dried up, major cities were devastated and half the population was displaced.

The collapse of the currency has driven up inflation and aggravated wartime hardship, as Syrians struggle to afford basics such as food and power. Government budget spending in pounds has more than doubled, but in dollar terms has crashed.

....

At the start of the uprising [in March 2011], the pound was around 47 to the dollar.

"Today the (official central bank) intervention rate is around 406 but it reached 475 pounds in the black market," Hani al-Khoury, a financial consultant based in Damascus, said late on Thursday [17 March].

Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Syria's war-battered pound hit by Russian withdrawal," [Reuters](#), 15:11 GMT, 18 March 2016.

On 12 May, Reuters reported:

Damascus has announced measures to halt the fall of Syria's currency, but traders expressed doubt it would work after the unravelling of a ceasefire and the collapse of peace talks brought one of the fastest falls of the five year civil war.

The [Syrian] pound has lost more than 90 percent of its value over the course of five years of fighting, and the fall accelerated in recent weeks since peace talks broke up in Geneva and fighting resumed in Aleppo between rebels and government forces.

The currency, worth 47 to the dollar on the eve of the civil war, now trades at around 635 to the dollar in Damascus and even higher rates in other cities, having fallen by 20 percent in less than a month, according to dealers reached by telephone.

....

As fighting worsens in Aleppo and no signs of a political settlement emerge, Syrians are less hopeful the economy will improve. The crumbling of the currency has driven up inflation and aggravated wartime hardship as Syrians struggle to afford basics such as food and power. Government budget spending in pounds has more than doubled, but in dollar terms has crashed.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Damascus struggles to halt currency collapse as peace hopes erode," [Reuters](#), 11:58 GMT, 12 May 2016.

On 12 May, Reuters repeated from the March 2016 news article that the Syrian pound had lost "90% of its value" since the beginning of the civil war in March 2011. The 90% number is from the 18 March report, a fall from 47 Pounds/US\$ on March 2011 to 475 Pounds/US\$. The actual exchange rate on 12 May 2016 was 635 Pounds/US\$, which is a loss of 92.5% of the value on March 2011. The difference of 90% to 92.5%, represents 1/4 of the remaining value of the Syrian pound.

My opinion: One can argue about politics, but when the money system collapses, a government is finished. Therefore, the collapse of the Syrian pound might be the issue that eventually forces Assad to resign the presidency. Unfortunately, the people who might replace Assad have no source of funds to rebuild Syria (e.g., replace damaged buildings) and to restore the Syrian economy. Syria will be a beggar nation for the foreseeable future, thanks to five-years of civil war, including attacks on civilian buildings by *all* parties to the war. Homes of millions of Syrian citizens have been destroyed. The places where adult citizens were employed have been destroyed. Syria will need to create factories to manufacture bricks and cement, and train people to construct buildings.

On 10 May, the Associated Press reported that the Syrian government had moved from a fixed exchange rate to a variable exchange rate that would be adjusted daily.

Syria's Central Bank ordered money changers to exchange currency at an unprecedented 620 Syrian pounds to the dollar and announced it would reevaluate the rate on a daily basis, in a move that economists say amounts to jettisoning the fixed exchange rate that was once the bedrock of the Syrian economy.

....

"Ultimately, it's the government finances," said [Johns Hopkins economist Steve] Hanke about the Central Bank decision. The government has little choice but to print more money — effectively exhausting the currency's worth — to pay for its expenditures at a time when it is thought to be out of foreign currency reserves.

....

"[Syria] used to export a lot of oil, but Daesh has been doing it on their behalf," said [American University of Beirut economist Simon Neaime], referring to the militant Islamic State group by its Arabic acronym.

Philip Issa, "Syria moves to flexible exchange rate as pound hits new low," [Associated Press](#), 20:09 GMT, 10 May 2016.

On 12 April 2016, *Al-Monitor* published an insightful article on why the Syrian economy and currency was collapsing:

The country's trade deficit of \$3.5 billion, the almost complete lack of imports and exports, and the Islamic State's (IS) control over most of the oil fields have created a dilemma for the Central Bank regarding the pound devaluation problem, given the constant need to pump hard currencies into the market. However, in light of war-related consumption and the trade deficit, the Central Bank has failed to meet that need.

"Under normal circumstances in any country, the economic situation depends on the trade balance and stability, as well as the revenues from agriculture, trade, tourism, taxes and customs, which achieve the bulk of the trade balance," said Mohammed Bakour, an economist living in the opposition-controlled Saif al-Dawla neighborhood in Aleppo. "However, with the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, most revenue sources were halted while disbursements increased, which was the cost of the ongoing war, in the regime's view. It is only normal for the local currency to collapse gradually at that point. However, given the support provided to the regime by Iran, Russia and Iraq, among other allies, there had been some sort of balance in the Syrian pound price up to a certain stage."

....

[Bakour said:] "Moreover, factors necessary for an economic revival are not available in areas that the regime seized recently. The natural resources are under IS control, the land crossings are under Syrian armed opposition control, and Aleppo, which is of major importance for the Syrian economy, is becoming empty of the majority of its people, including traders and industrialists, whose factories were transferred to Turkey. The economic life will not be recovered unless the war ends."

Tamer Osman (pseudonym), "Currency crash adds to Syrians' woes," [Al-Monitor](#), 12 April 2016.

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 12 May 2016, Dr. Philip Gordon — a former U.S. National Security Council adviser to Obama, and now a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations — publicly called for the U.S. Government to stop demanding that Assad resign as president of Syria. [McClatchy](#); [The Hill](#).

Here I notice a little detail. The Vienna Communiqué of 30 Oct 2015 (at ¶2, item 7) calls for elections in Syria "with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate." This inclusion of the diaspora was copied into the ISSG Statement of 14 Nov 2015 at ¶10. This inclusion of the diaspora was copied into United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §4. The little detail was included by John Kerry, in an attempt to influence the result of the election — assuming that the majority of the diaspora would vote against Assad. (See [NY Times](#): "... Mr. Kerry, who is betting that if Syrians around the world can participate in the vote, Mr. Assad will not be able to win.") I agree with Kerry — but for different reasons — that Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey should be able to vote in Syrian elections, because those refugees are only temporarily outside of Syria. However, some of the Syrian refugees in Europe will apply for citizenship in an European nation, which effectively renounces their Syrian citizenship. Other Syrian refugees in Europe may lack a Syrian document that conclusively proves they are Syrian citizens.

Kerry's Plan B

On 3 May 2016, John Kerry returned to Washington, DC after two days in Geneva. Kerry held a press conference at the U.S. State Department, where Kerry erupted into belligerent demands and threats:

.... And of course we continue to remain committed to working towards a political

transition away from Assad because only if you transition away can you actually end this war.

....

.... And very, very clearly, unequivocally, if Assad does not adhere to this [proposed ceasefire in Aleppo], there will clearly be repercussions, and one of them may be the total destruction of the ceasefire and they go back to war. I don't think that Russia wants that, I don't think that Assad is going to benefit from that, but there may be even other repercussions that are being discussed, but that is for the future to determine. Right now, we are working hard to try to get this in place in a way that protects the integrity of Aleppo and it doesn't allow one person — now, let me be clear about something else.

If Assad's strategy is to somehow think he's going to just carve out Aleppo and carve out a section of the country, I got news for you and for him: This war doesn't end. It is simply physically impossible for Assad to just carve out an area and pretend that he's somehow going to make it safe while the underlying issues are unresolved in this war. And as long as Assad is there, the opposition is not going to stop fighting him, one way or the other.

And so it will continue and there will be no long-term security and peace for Syria. It's just not going to happen. And we have said that clearly to the Russians, clearly to the Iranians, and others have said it — not just us. The Saudis have said it, the Qataris have said it, the Turks have said it, the other participants in this endeavor, all of them — France, Germany, Britain, everybody at the table has said you can't end this as long as Assad continues, because Assad cannot reunite the country. It's that simple. Having gassed his people, barrel-bombed his people, dropped bombs on hospitals, driven 12 million people out of their homes, tortured people, starved people — what kind of legitimacy should somebody who's committed these kinds of atrocities suddenly claim to run the country? It's pretty hard for anybody to understand how you make peace out of that record of chaos and depravity.

So that's the choice, and Russia and Iran are going to have to recognize — as they have, I think, in the political process they've adopted — that they have embraced a transition, a transitional governing body. That is clearly what Geneva says, that is clearly what the 2254 resolution says, and if they're not prepared to follow up on it, and quickly, this will not hold.

....

I've said that before, I have said it to President Putin, I've said it to others: It will not hold unless there is a bona fide effort to put in place a transition. And we are getting into the period, folks — Minister Lavrov and I stood up in Moscow, and we said that the target date for the transition to — is the 1st of August. So we're now coming up to May. So either something happens in these next few months or they are asking for a very different track.

John Kerry, "Press Availability by Secretary Kerry," [State Dept.](#), 3 May 2016.

My comment is that this kind of belligerent outburst diminishes Kerry's reputation as a diplomat. And it is *not* for arrogant foreign meddlers to demand that Assad must relinquish the presidency of Syria. When the Russians agreed to a 1 August target date for the transition, the Russians did *not* agree that Assad would relinquish the presidency. It seems that Kerry is now a cheerleader for Riad Hijab, the leader of the HNC, which has obstructed the Geneva negotiations with preconditions and demands.

On 3 May 2016, the Associated Press reported the bellicose remarks by John Kerry: Secretary of State John Kerry warned Syria's government and its backers in Moscow and Tehran on Tuesday [3 May] that they face an August deadline for starting a political transition to move President Bashar Assad out, or they risk the consequences of a new U.S. approach toward ending the 5-year-old civil war.

But given the various, unfulfilled U.S. threats throughout the Arab country's conflict — from declaring Assad's days "numbered" five years ago to promising military action if chemical weapons were used — it was unclear what effect Kerry's ultimatum might have.

And it's unlikely that the Obama administration, so long opposed to an active American combat role in Syria, would significantly boost its presence beyond the 300 special forces it has authorized thus far in the heart of a U.S. presidential election season. More feasible might be U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia giving the rebels new weapons to fight Assad, such as portable surface-to-air missiles.

"The target date for the transition is 1st of August," Kerry told reporters at the State Department. "So we're now coming up to May. So either something happens in these next few months, or they are asking for a very different track."

....

On its face, the threat of continued fighting doesn't seem to carry much weight. Assad has aggressively sought to crush any and all opposition groups in a war that emerged from the government's violent repression of largely peaceful, Arab Spring-inspired protests in 2011. Despite a death toll that numbers in the hundreds of thousands, Russian planes and Iranian troops continue to fight alongside the Syrian military.

Bradley Klapper, "Kerry warns Assad to start transition by Aug. 1 — or else," [Associated Press](#), 20:08 GMT, 3 May 2016.

The New York Times and *The Washington Post* both reprinted the Associated Press news article, without adding any commentary.

On 3 May, Reuters reported:

In pointed remarks in Washington on Tuesday, Kerry warned Assad of "repercussions" if he did not stick to the ceasefire and move forward with a political transition aimed at ending the war in Syria.

....

It was not clear what Kerry meant by repercussions. Obama administration officials have previously warned of consequences for Assad's actions in Syria's civil war, but critics have said the United States has failed to follow through with a more aggressive response.

Lisa Barrington & Denis Dyomkin, "Rebels launch assault in Syria's Aleppo, diplomats try to revive truce," [Reuters](#), 23:14 GMT, 3 May 2016.

See also the news article by Lesley Wroughton, at [Reuters](#).

It seems that Kerry views two different scenarios for Syria, Plan A and Plan B:

- A. De Mistura continues negotiations with the HNC. A transitional governing body (TGB) according to the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 is implemented no later than 1 August 2016. Assad must resign as president at the beginning of the TGB.
- B. The USA and Western Europe supply significantly more munitions to the rebels and jihadists, to enable the insurgents to pursue a military victory over Assad's government. (See, e.g., [Wall Street Journal](#) for 12 April 2016.)

My opinion is that it is incredibly dangerous for Kerry to publicly mention a Plan B that involves increased military support for rebels in Syria. Since peace negotiations were first proposed in May 2013 — three years ago — the opposition in Syria has resisted negotiations, as chronicled in my previous essays. The opposition believes they can win a military victory over Assad, despite more than five years of failure. Telling the opposition that, *if* the negotiations fail, then military support to the opposition will increase can only encourage the opposition to obstruct the negotiations, so that the negotiations fail. Indeed, the HNC most recently obstructed the negotiations by refusing to negotiate in early February and by walking out on 18 April.

On 10 May 2016, Kerry had a press conference at which he retreated slightly from the firm 1 August deadline:

QUESTION: Okay. Just can we go back to Syria, which you talked about yesterday? You said last week that if the Syrians didn't meet an August 1st deadline for a political transition, they'd be asking for, quote, "a very different track." So what did you mean by that and —

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, first of all, I said also that is a target date. August 1st is not a drop-dead, end-of-process date. It is a date that we — Russia and the United States — arrived at as an agreement that we needed to try to have the political transition in process by August 1st. Now, it's a good yardstick, it's a measurement. If by August 1st nothing is happening, it would be exceedingly difficult to look anybody in the eye — the opposition and others — and say that we're making progress or something's happening that is encouraging. And that in itself will be dangerous, because then those people may well decide they're just going to up the ante militarily. "Roundtable Discussion," [U.S. State Dept](#), 10 May 2016.

At his press conference on 17 May, after the ISSG meeting in Vienna, Kerry reiterated: "Now, the August date is not a drop[-dead] date; it's a target date and we all recognize that if we're making significant progress and we're moving, we will respect that process." The whole quotation and citation is given later in this essay, in the section on the ISSG meeting.

On 16 May 2016, Reuters published a news article about European diplomats being frustrated with the inability of the Obama administration to convince the Russians that Assad must resign as president of Syria. The end of the article says:

"If we recall how (U.S. Secretary of State John) Kerry committed himself on this ... it was with the hope and conviction that the Russians would relatively quickly get some commitments from the regime to engage in a political process. This never happened," said a senior Western diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the political differences.

As a result, prospects remain bleak for an early end to a conflict that began in 2011 and now has claimed more than 250,000 lives.

One of the main problems, diplomats say, is the U.S. administration's inability — or unwillingness — to confront an increasingly aggressive Russia. Some have suggested Washington lost whatever leverage on Moscow it might have had by failing to follow through on Obama's 2013 threat to punish Syria for its alleged use of chemical weapons.

"I'm realistic. I see Americans who aren't especially combative or ready to put much on the table that would convince the opposition to return to negotiations," said a senior European diplomat in Vienna.

Some Syrian opposition representatives, Arab and U.N. officials have complained that the United States often has put more pressure on the rebels to compromise instead of pushing Russia to sway the Syrian government.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir signaled that Riyadh is not pinning its hopes on the United States convincing Russia to remove Assad and suggested a push to make sure opposition fighters were better armed might be needed.

"The choice is Bashar al-Assad's," he told reporters in Paris last week. "He will be removed, either through a political process or through military force."

Michelle Nichols & John Irish, "U.S., Russia stalemate on Syria frustrates European powers," [Reuters](#), 21:40 GMT, 16 May 2016.

Final version at [Reuters](#), 02:20 GMT, 17 May 2016.

Later on 17 May, Reuters published a short news article that said:

"We believe we should have moved to a 'Plan B' a long time ago," [Saudi Arabia's foreign minister] Adel al-Jubeir told reporters after a meeting of foreign governments in Vienna.

"Saudi Arabia says time may be coming for 'Plan B' on Syria," [Reuters](#) 17:38 GMT, 17 May 2016.

My opinion: The issue of whether Assad resigns could be solved simply by allowing the Syrian people to vote on the issue. Who is president of Syria is *not* something that foreign meddlers (e.g., USA, Russia, Europe, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Iran, ..., etc.) should decide.

More ominous is Kerry's Plan B, which is now endorsed by the Saudi Arabian foreign minister. If the USA, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar send more munitions to the insurgents, Russia and Iran will surely also send more munitions to Assad. Kerry's Plan B is *not* a solution — it is a recipe for greater disaster: more deaths in Syria, more refugees from Syria, and more destruction of buildings and infrastructure in Syria that will paralyze Syria long after the civil war ends.

One could easily get sucked into an argument over the questions:

1. Are Obama, European leaders, and the leaders of the Gulf nations correct that Assad must resign? *or*
2. Are Assad, Russia, and Iran correct that Assad should stay?

These are the *wrong* questions. The issue of Assad's future should be settled by a vote of the citizens of Syria. Personally, I still believe that Assad — despite his many bad decisions and possible war crimes — is a better leader than anyone who appears on the HNC opposition team at the negotiations in Geneva. And there should be *no* quibble that Assad is preferable to anyone from ISIL or Nusra Front, who are excluded from the negotiations in Geneva.

The two questions at the beginning of the previous paragraph are also the wrong questions for another reason. Suppose Assad is forced to resign and then Syria is plunged into anarchy, then it would be easy to say Assad should have continued as president. But then we will never know what would have happened if Assad would have continued as president — maybe Assad would have returned to being a benevolent president, or maybe Assad would continue to torture opponents in prison and starve towns who oppose him. That is the problem with answering a hypothetical question: we do *not* have the necessary facts to make a convincing answer.

Planning for Peace Conference in Geneva

My essays for [December 2015](#) and [January 2016](#) chronicled the creation and history of High Negotiations Committee (HNC), the opposition delegation that was supposed to negotiate in Geneva. (The HNC is also translated as the "Supreme Commission", which translation I used in my earlier essays.) But the HNC refused to negotiate until all of the following pre-conditions (i.e., demands) had been satisfied:

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

The HNC 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. My essay for [April 2016](#) chronicled the departure of the HNC on 18 April, leaving the negotiations limping along with alternative Syrian opposition delegations.

On 4 May, Riad Hijab, the head of the HNC, declared the negotiations in Geneva were dead. Attempts at a dialogue with the Syrian government have reached an impasse and no progress in ending the civil war is possible without the departure of President Bashar al-Assad, the coordinator for the Syrian opposition said on Wednesday [4 May].

....

"We saw at the last three rounds of talks (with the [Syrian] government in Geneva) that we had reached a dead end," Syrian opposition coordinator Riad Hijab told reporters in Berlin before talks with the German and French foreign ministers.

"The regime doesn't want to discuss a transitional government and for us it is impossible to discuss the issue of a transitional government, a unity government. A political solution with Bashar al-Assad still present cannot happen."

Joseph Nasr, "Syria opposition coordinator says peace talks at dead end," [Reuters](#), 18:27 GMT, 4 May 2016.

My essay for [April 2016](#) mentioned *four* demands on 19 April that must be satisfied before the HNC will return to negotiations in Geneva. I concluded that *none* of these four demands would be satisfied by Assad in the foreseeable future. The end of the Assad presidency is a *fifth* demand. Diplomats are deluding themselves if they believe that restoring the ceasefire in Syria — thereby satisfying only *one* of the demands by the HNC — will motivate the HNC to return to negotiations in Syria.

De Mistura kept a low profile during 5-16 May, as he held *no* press conferences and gave *no* interviews.

Lakhdar Brahimi

On 12 May I wondered if Lakhdar Brahimi, the U.N. Envoy for Syria from Sep 2012 until May 2014, had any public comment on the Syrian civil war and peace negotiations. A search of Google News found that Brahimi had given an interview to Al-Jazeera that was broadcast on 11 March 2016. Al-Jazeera had only a few terse sentences and a link to the video:

Brahimi tells Mehdi Hasan, "there were no good guys in the Syrian tragedy", placing blame on all parties involved.

[Brahimi] says the conflict could have been resolved in 2012 had there been a better understanding of the situation, adding that none of the countries involved in the conflict or negotiations "had the interest of the Syrian people as their first priority."
"Has the world betrayed Syria?," [Al-Jazeera](#), 19:40 GMT, 11 March 2016.

Apparently, some journalists watched the Al-Jazeera video and then reported on it. *The Independent* in England published a news article:

The bloody Syrian conflict could have been resolved four years ago had Western powers listened to Russia, former Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi has said.

The Algerian diplomat, who was the United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria, said a Russian offer to force President Bashar al-Assad to step aside in 2012 was a missed opportunity for peace.

He said there were "no good guys in the Syrian tragedy" and, speaking to Al Jazeera English, he condemned Western powers and Muslim nations for their failure to put "the interest of the Syrian people as their first priority".

Ambassador Brahimi, who resigned as the UN envoy in 2014 in frustration at his inability to bring about a coherent international strategy to bring peace to Syria, placed "a lot of blame on the outside forces, the governments and others who were supporting one side or the other".

....

Martti Ahtisaari, the former Finnish president, revealed last year that in 2012 the Russians had offered to force President Assad to step down as part of a peace deal.

The proposal was put to the UN Security Council but, said Mr Ahtisaari, Britain, France and the US were so convinced Assad was about to fall anyway they disregarded the offer.

Ambassador Brahimi has now spoken out to back the Finn's claim that the offer represented a missed opportunity and that the war "could have been solved". Since the deal was offered, tens of thousands of people have been killed in the war and millions more have fled their homes.

"The Russians had a much more realistic analysis of the situation than practically anybody else," he maintained. "Everyone should have listened to the Russians a little bit more than they did."

While blaming everyone connected to the conflict, he added that President Assad was the most culpable: "There's no doubt that the number one man must bear number one responsibility for what has happened."

Lewis Smith, "Syria conflict: West should have listened to Russia, says UN Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi," [Independent](#), 12 March 2016.

My comment is that Brahimi clearly sees that there is a proxy war in Syria, in which foreign meddlers supply munitions to groups that they support. These foreign meddlers either support or reject the continued presidency of Assad. With the focus on Assad, naturally the foreign meddlers do *not* consider the continued suffering of the Syrian people.

9 May 2016: Paris meeting of Friends of Syria group

On 27 April 2016, Hijab called for a meeting of the Friends of Syria group, also known as the Friends of the Syrian People. [Reuters](#); [Guardian](#); [TASS](#). My comment is the Friends of Syria is a long-obsolete group of anti-Assad foreign ministers, created by Hillary Clinton in February 2012. The previous meeting of the Friends of Syria group was during November 2014, 18 months ago.

The foreign ministers of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom met on 4 May in Berlin, along with de Mistura and Hijab (chairman of the HNC). Here is the entire press statement by de Mistura:

Thank you so much for organizing this opportunity. Merci beaucoup pour tre tous ensemble dans le m me message. The message is very clear. I was the other day in Geneva where I met John Kerry and the Minister of Foreign affairs of Saudi Arabia. I was yesterday in Moscow to meet Sergei Lavrov the day before, and today in Berlin. The message is exactly the one we have been saying: there are priorities and the top one of the priority is the one that Syrian people are telling us.

They are telling us we are looking for peace, we are looking for the end of this conflict, we believe in discussion in Geneva but we need to see with our eyes that the cessation of hostilities takes place again. And the test is Aleppo now. That's why I hope through the security council meeting that we are going to have, through the meeting we had in Moscow and through the meeting which are taking place between also John Kerry and Lavrov, who are the co-sponsors of the cessation of hostilities, that we will see it happening. The alternative is truly quite catastrophic because we could see 400,000 people moving through the Turkish border. We could see what, at the moment, what looks like a possibility of a political transition to be actually handicapped by a cessation of hostilities, which is still there, could be collapsing.

Bottom line, Aleppo. Aleppo. And I hope we'll get there with your support and thank you for organizing this, this has been timely and appropriate.

De Mistura, "Joint press stake-out with UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura and the Foreign Ministers of Germany and France," [U.N. Geneva](#), 4 May 2016.

Given that either the Russians or the USA are unwilling to convene the ISSG, de Mistura seems desperate to meet diplomats who might have some influence over warring parties in Syria.

On 22 April, de Mistura publicly declared he needed another ISSG meeting to help solve problems. On 4 May there is still no announcement of when the ISSG will meet. On 4 May, Reuters reported:

France plans to invite ministers from countries that support Syrian opposition groups to a meeting in Paris on May 9 to seek ways to break the political and military deadlock in the country, its foreign minister said on Wednesday [4 May].

Jean-Marc Ayrault told reporters France had decided on such a step because there appeared no immediate prospect of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) convening to try to restore a ceasefire wrecked by an upsurge of fighting.

"We are fighting (to ensure) the ceasefire returns straight away and we would like the ISSG to meet. For now we have not got any agreement from the Americans or Russians who co-preside the group to hold this meeting," he said.

"That's the reason why I am going to invite like-minded countries to meet in Paris on Monday for a strong initiative to end the deadly bombings so that humanitarian aid can arrive effectively and that we can once again open the way to a political solution," Ayrault said.

Ayrault did not specify which countries Paris would invite, though government spokesman Stephane Le Foll earlier mentioned inviting officials from Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

John Irish, "France wants backers of Syrian opposition to meet on May 9," [Reuters](#), 13:33 GMT, 4 May 2016.

A later Reuters article summarized:

Earlier, [French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc] Ayrault said France plans to invite ministers from countries that support Syrian opposition groups to a meeting in Paris on May 9 to seek ways to break the political and military deadlock in the country.

Ayrault said France had decided on such a step because there appeared no immediate prospect of the 17-nation International Syria Support Group (ISSG) convening to try to restore the ceasefire wrecked by the upsurge of fighting.

Joseph Nasr, "Syria opposition coordinator says peace talks at dead end," [Reuters](#), 18:27 GMT, 4 May 2016.

[FRANCE24](#) reported a longer list of possible invitees: "... government spokesman Stephane Le Foll earlier mentioned inviting officials from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates." The same list of four nations is published at [Al-Arabiya](#), in an Agence France-Presse news article that added: "Other top diplomats from 'countries that think negotiations should resume at all costs' may also attend the Monday meeting, Le Foll said, without naming them."

On 6 May, Radio France International reported: "Ayrault said on Wednesday [4 May] that he had organised the Paris meeting because 'for the moment we have not had a response from the Americans or the Russians' on the possibility of a new ISSG meeting." [RFI](#).

On Friday, 6 May, *The Washington Post* published an Associated Press news article: France's foreign affairs ministry said Monday's [9 May] discussions will gather foreign affairs ministers from France, Britain, Germany, Italy, United States, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Jordan, Turkey, plus a representative from the European Union.

Riad Hijab, the head of the Western-backed Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee, will also take part in the meeting.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Mac Ayrault also plans a working dinner with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

Associated Press, "France to host meeting over Syria next week," [Washington Post](#), 6 May 2016. This news story was *not* available at the Associated Press website on 8 May 2016.

On 9 May, [RIA-Novosti](#) actually called the Paris event a meeting of the "Friends of Syria" group. Russia, Iran, and China — each a member of the ISSG — were excluded from the meeting in Paris. And, of course, Assad's government was *not* invited to the meeting in Paris. Back in 2013-2014, Egypt was a member of the London-11 subgroup of the Friends of Syria. At the 9 May 2016 meeting in Paris, Egypt did not attend, but the European Union foreign minister attended.

The participants in the 9 May meeting in Paris included:

1. European Union (Federica Mogherini),
2. France,
3. Germany,
4. Italy,
5. Jordan,
6. Qatar,
7. Saudi Arabia,
8. Turkey,
9. United Arab Emirates,
10. United Kingdom,
11. USA, and the
12. High Negotiations Committee (Riad Hijab).

[Al-Arabiya](#); [RIA-Novosti](#).

At 01:00 on 10 May Paris time — and again at 17:25 Paris time — I looked at the website of the French Foreign Ministry, but there was *no* statement there about the meeting on 9 May. And there was no statement from the Paris meeting posted at the U.S. State Department website. The Paris meeting was *not* amongst the top 15 news articles at the English-language FRANCE24 website. Neither Reuters nor the Associated Press made the Paris meeting the main subject of a news story.

At night on 10 May, I looked at the Saudi Press Agency website, but they only tersely reported meetings of the Saudi Foreign Minister with John Kerry, the French foreign minister, the German foreign minister, the European foreign minister, and the chairman of the

HNC, but there was *no* report of the meeting of 11 nations in Paris.

At 20:00 GMT on 10 May, I looked again at the French Foreign Ministry website and found that Jean-Marc Ayrault had written a [summary](#) of the meeting on 9 May. I posted a copy at [rbs0.com](#). The opinions of the Friends of Syria meeting on 9 May 2016 were predictable:

- **Condemned Assad** (e.g., "truce ... violated many times by the regime", blocking humanitarian aid, "no desire to make any progress [in Geneva] towards the transition: it's made no concrete proposals."). The last point is wrong: Assad did propose a national unity government, which the HNC refused to consider.
- **Ignored violations of the cessation of hostilities by the rebels/jihadists** (e.g., Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam).
- **Praised Hijab's HNC** (which obstructed negotiations in Geneva, then walked out on 18 April): e.g., "I'd like to pay tribute to the courage of Mr Riad Hijab, admittedly it's difficult for the opposition to justify a return to Geneva without there being concrete developments on the ground."

However, the meeting in Paris *might* convince Hijab both to: (1) obey the cessation of hostilities in Syria and (2) return to negotiations in Geneva. More likely, the Paris meeting on 9 May — like all of the previous meetings of the Friends of Syria group — will have *no* effect on the quest for peace in Syria.

ISSG Meetings

Previous ISSG Meetings

On 23 October 2015, the foreign ministers of USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey met in Vienna for a two-hour meeting about political transition in Syria.

On 30 October 2015, there was another meeting in Vienna, this time with foreign ministers of 17 nations, plus the EU and UN: European Union (Federica Mogherini), U.N. Special Envoy to Syria (Staffan de Mistura), China, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom (i.e., Britain), and the USA. See my essay for [October 2015](#).

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

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

On the night of 11 February 2016, there was a fourth meeting of the ISSG in Munich. See my essay for [February 2016](#).

I have collected the full-text of statements issued at ISSG meetings in my document at rbs0.com

17 May 2016: ISSG Meeting

On 5 May, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that the Russian Foreign Ministry announced the next meeting of the ISSG will be in Vienna on 17 May.

On 10 May, John Kerry [admitted](#) the ISSG would meet in Vienna on 17 May. Apparently, de Mistura will convene negotiations in Geneva "some few days" after 17 May. While journalists ignored the Russian announcement on 5 May, the [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) made an entire news article from Kerry's one-sentence remark at the end of a news conference.

On 11 May, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported: "UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura told Sputnik on Wednesday [11 May] that the date of a new round of intra-Syria settlement talks would be announced following the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) meeting on May 17."

I have the impression that journalists are giving *less* coverage to the Geneva negotiations, including the related ISSG meetings, now than in January/February 2014. That may be because optimism has faded and a sense of futility has arrived. No journalist wants to cover an unimportant news event.

On 17 May, Reuters reported "pessimism" amongst participants in the ISSG meeting. Officials and diplomats said the talks, including the United States, Russia, Iran, European and Middle East powers, were unlikely to lead to major decisions that could change the course of the five-year war that has killed more than 250,000 people.

....

"We'll need to see the guarantors of the ceasefire — Russia and the U.S. — putting something down that will really convince the opposition that this process is worthwhile," [an anonymous] senior Western diplomat involved in the talks said. "Sadly, I don't sense that and fear the U.S. will try to impose a text that is excessively optimistic, but for which its implementation will not be possible."

....

A Western official said the meeting, chaired by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, was focusing more on the logistics of expanding and implementing the "cessation of hostilities" and increasing aid deliveries that have been blocked in some areas.

....

The main Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee has said it would not resume talks until there was progress on the ground. HNC chief negotiator Asaad al-Zoubi was doubtful about how much the Vienna talks can achieve: "I don't think there will be results, and if there are any results they will not be sufficient for the Syrian people," he told Reuters.

"We are used to the fact that Russian and U.S. foreign ministers are taking the world into an unknown direction," saying they are working against the people not for them.

The group walked out of the Geneva talks. Asked if the HNC would return to another round of talks, al-Zoubi said: "The HNC has said that if aid does not reach everybody, if the sieges aren't lifted and if a full truce does not happen, there will be no negotiations."

....

However, the U.S. administration's failure to convince Moscow that Assad must go is fuelling European and Arab frustration at being sidelined in efforts to end the country's five-year civil war, diplomats say. [See the earlier [Reuters](#) article.]

John Irish & Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Pessimism pervades Syria talks aimed at salvaging peace process," [Reuters](#), 13:43 GMT (15:43 in Vienna), 17 May 2016. [Link added by Standler.]

I comment that the real problem is that both the insurgents and Assad *want* to continue fighting. Both hope to win a military victory. Further, the foreign meddlers who are suppling munitions to either insurgent groups or Assad *want* to see a military victory by their proxy army. There is very little that the ISSG can do about this desire to continue fighting, because the foreign meddlers who are the problem constitute the majority of the ISSG members. The United Nations might attempt to [stop](#) the flow of munitions to all parties in Syria, but that will *not* happen because of the proxy war by the foreign meddlers who have veto power on the U.N. Security Council (e.g., Russia and the USA).

Note also the propaganda by the HNC: "if there are any results they will not be sufficient for the Syrian people" and Russia/USA "are working against the people not for them". It is the HNC that walked out of negotiations on 18 April, *not* the Syrian people. It is the HNC who declared fighting would resume in Latakia province on 18 April, *not* the Syrian people. It is hypocrisy for the HNC to attempt to justify its belligerent positions by referring to the "Syrian people". As de Mistura has eloquently and repeatedly said, the Syrian people clearly want an end to the fighting that has already destroyed much of Syria and is continuing to destroy the remaining parts of Syria.

The final sentence in the above quotation — the sentence about Assad's fate — is mostly a concern to the foreign meddlers and their proxies, all of whom are focused on Assad. The jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL all want to establish their extremist Islamic government in place of Assad's secular government. Most of Syria's neighbors are Sunni nations, who oppose Assad because Assad is a member of the Alawite religious sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam. Further, Syria's Sunni neighbors oppose Iran's support of Assad, because Iran is ruled by a Shiite theocracy that is supporting terrorism in the Gulf nations. As mentioned [above](#), the fate of

Assad should be a matter for the the Syrian people to decide in an election.

The full-text of the 17 May Statement issued by the ISSG is posted at rbs0.com, which cites the original sources.

My comments on the 17 May ISSG Statement: Paragraph 3 says "Where the co-chairs believe that a party to the cessation of hostilities has engaged in a pattern of persistent non-compliance, the Task Force could refer such behavior to the ISSG Ministers or those designated by the Ministers to determine appropriate action, including the exclusion of such parties from the arrangements of the cessation and the protection it affords them." That was said previously in the:

1. Munich ISSG Statement (11 Feb 2016) at ¶10(d), *and*
2. Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (22 Feb 2016) at ¶4(d).

But there has been *no* punishment for persistent violator(s) of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. So, on 17 May, the ISSG promised to do what it *should* have done in March and April: punish persistent violators of the ceasefire.

On 11 May, the USA and three other nations blocked the Russian proposal to add both Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham to the list of terrorist organizations. Both of these organizations have been a persistent violator of the ceasefire, and they also cooperate with Nusra Front, which is on the terrorist list. Groups that are on the terrorist list are *not* included in the ceasefire agreement, according to U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254 at §8 *and* the 22 February Cessation of Hostilities Agreement at ¶2. I interpret the U.S. failure to support the Russian proposal as a breach of promises that the U.S. made in February 2016 to exclude persistent violators from protections of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Also in paragraph 3 is the inappropriate sentence: "If the commitments of the parties to the cessation are not implemented in good faith, the consequences could include the return of full-scale war, which all the Members of the ISSG agreed would be in no one's interest." This is a veiled reference to Kerry's [Plan B](#), which is supplying more weapons and ammunition to the insurgents, in order to pursue a military solution. This kind of veiled threat is inappropriate because the Statement is supposed to list positive things that the ISSG diplomats will do to encourage the parties to end the Syrian civil war. Apparently, the members of the ISSG are desperate for content to include in this Statement, because they have inappropriately included an obviously *bad* option, and then unanimously rejected that option.

Paragraph 4 says "attacks on civilians, including attacks on medical facilities, by any party, is completely unacceptable." That is obviously correct, as such attacks violate well-established international law. So why not punish those who attack civilians? Why not punish those who attack hospitals? The ISSG does *not* say why it refuses to punish violators of international law. The obvious reason is that Russia is protecting Assad. The USA (and other nations) are protecting rebels and jihadists from punishment for their violations of international law.

Paragraph 5 says "urged that the international community ... [to] dissuade any party to the

cessation from fighting in collaboration with" ISIL or Nusra Front. Such persuasion or influence is *not* likely to be successful, because collaboration strengthens insurgents in their battles against Assad. Maybe a better deterrence would be to agree to Russian or U.S. airstrikes on any armed group that collaborates with either ISIL or Nusra.

Paragraphs 3, 8, and 12 mention that members of the ISSG will use their influence with parties in the Syrian civil war. That influence has failed to convince parties to comply with the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. That influence has failed to convince parties to stop attacking civilian neighborhoods. That influence has failed to convince parties to stop attacking hospitals. That influence has failed to convince parties to allow delivery of humanitarian aid. Is there any reason to expect influence to work in the near future, when it has spectacularly failed in the past?

Paragraph 15 reiterates the 1 August 2016 deadline for forming a "transitional governing body" specified in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. That deadline is rapidly approaching and it appears unlikely to be met, so the deadline should not be reiterated. Missing this deadline gives Saudi Arabia and the USA an excuse to unleash John Kerry's Plan B.

Paragraph 15 pathetically says: "ISSG Members believe that the parties should return to negotiations ... at an appropriate time." Well, *when* is an appropriate time? How about condemning the HNC for walking out on 18 April? How about setting a fixed date for the resumption of negotiations in Geneva?

Paragraph 16 mentions release of "detainees" (political prisoners?). My essay for [April 2016](#) cites *four* United Nations Security Council Resolutions, going back to April 2012, that call for release of "arbitrarily detained persons". All of those four Resolutions have been ignored by Assad and also by other groups that hold prisoners.

Much of this 17 May Statement is inspirational, in that the Statement optimistically says what should happen, or what members of the ISSG have pledged to make happen. But the Statement is weak on details of *how* the desired result will occur, except for ¶9 about delivering humanitarian aid by air drops.

There were foreign ministers from 22 nations and 4 groups (i.e., the Arab League, the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and de Mistura from the United Nations) attending this ISSG meeting in Vienna on 17 May. If they met from 09:00 until 16:00, with one hour for lunch, that is only 6 hours, or less than 14 minutes per participant. (It is likely that Russia, the USA, and de Mistura would do most of the talking, so there would be *much less* than 14 minutes for each of the other participants.) That is *not* enough time to discuss and resolve the five main problems: (1) violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, (2) attacks on civilians and hospitals, (3) jihadists who agreed to the Cessation of Hostilities but who also collaborate with Nusra Front, (4) delivery of humanitarian aid, *and* (5) release of "arbitrarily detained persons". I think the meeting in Vienna should have been scheduled for at least three days.

After the ISSG meeting ended, Kerry, Lavrov, and de Mistura held a press conference.

SECRETARY KERRY: The broad range of countries represented — and by the way, it has grown since the last meeting, there were additional countries here — Japan, Australia and France and Canada — excuse me, and Spain and Canada — it underscores the scope of those countries that have a stake in this, those countries that are engaged in helping the fight against Daesh as well as those countries that understand the importance of bringing an end to the conflict in Syria.

And in order to do that, a variety of competing interests are going to have to be reconciled, and those involved in this conflict with competing agendas are going to have to be willing to prioritize peace. So we've already shown that it's possible to get all of the major international partners to agree on a set of common objectives. In fact, all of the international parties — some that are not partners — have agreed on the objectives. And it's possible, we've proven, to reduce the level of violence. It is possible to expand humanitarian assistance. And it's possible to design a framework and set a timeline for the kind of viable and inclusive negotiating process that we need in order to bring about a political transition and to put an end to this terrible conflict.

Now, let me underscore to everybody, all of the parties — some through their representatives, like the regime — but all of the parties, most importantly Russia, Iran, that have been supportive of Assad and key countries in the region who have been opposed to him, have agreed on a basic framework, which is a united Syria, nonsectarian, that is able to choose its future through a transitional governing body which is, in effect, the implementation of the Geneva process.

The challenge that we face now is to transform these possibilities into a reality of an agreement at some point. And because of the gains that we've made in recent months, yet because of their fragility — and we acknowledge they're fragile — and increasingly threatened by irresponsible and dangerous actions taken by those who would rather have this effort fail, who want to create problems, because rather than solutions, they seek a different outcome. And there are, frankly, actors on both sides who we think make that choice. And the stakes are too high and this conflict has gone on too long in order to succumb and in order to allow all of those nations at that table to be sucked down into a veto of one or two individual actors who want a different outcome. So we can't give vetoes to bad actors or avoid consequences for any side's actions who have an agenda that is different from that of reaching an agreement and trying to make peace.

....

Finally, we underscored the need for substantive discussions on the objective of meeting the target date established by ... the UN Council Resolution 2254 of August 1st to reach agreement on a framework for a genuine political transition to a transitional governing body. Those talks should address the structure, membership, operational rules, and the roles and responsibilities of a broad, inclusive, nonsectarian transitional governing body with full executive powers, and we agreed to work on that. Now, the August date is not a drop[-dead] date; it's a target date and we all recognize that if we're making significant progress and we're moving, we will respect that

process.

So, folks, obviously, there's nothing self-executing about the list I just shared with you. None of us — no one — can be remotely satisfied with the situation in Syria. It's deeply disturbing and we are all concerned about the levels of violence that broke out in recent days challenging the cessation. Russia has worked closely with the United States to upgrade our ability, which now has a 24-hour basis in Geneva with high-level people working consistently, but even then, it's difficult. And in the end, in order to make all of this more than words on a page, some very clear and determined actions are going to be needed in order to implement the steps that we just set out today. And we talked considerably about how that can happen and perhaps even what kind of enforcement mechanisms could be developed in order to achieve this full ceasefire that we are seeking.

So with that, let me turn to Foreign Minister Lavrov and then to Staffan.

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) And we have the problem of Jabhat al-Nusrah. It is changing; it makes alliances with some groups that accede to cessation of hostilities, but when it is comfortable to them, they pull out of these arrangements and then go back.

.....

In his first words, John [Kerry] said that Russia and Iran will support Assad. We don't support Assad. We support fight against terrorism. Today on the ground we don't see any more real and efficient force than the Syrian army, And we are going to continue this work, but we don't protect somebody personally. We protect, we defend a state — a UN member-state at the request of the government of this sovereign state whose sovereignty and political independence we have to protect, as it comes from the UN Security Council resolution.

"Joint Press Availability With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura," [U.S. State Dept](#), 17 May 2016.

The United Nations in Geneva posted a transcript of de Mistura's remarks:

Just to add to what you just heard. You probably will want to know where we are on the next Intra-Syrian talks. The issue is [that we are] still waiting for some type of concrete outcome of this meeting, but we cannot wait too long. We want to keep the momentum. The exact date I am not at the moment revealing it because it will depend also on other facts.

What we mean by that? We mean that of course we are having Ramadan starting soon. We need to keep that in perspective. And we need to bear in mind that credible Intra-Syrian talks will become credible when, as you heard, there is a credible development on the cessation of hostilities and a credible improvement on the humanitarian side. So on all three elements, we had discussions and it has been a useful discussion for me, for the UN mandate.

On the cessation of hostilities side, you heard it, the main real difference is that what we used to have at 80 percent has come down to 50. But we need to bring it back [up] and there has been a strong effort and a common line on that. The main, and the very new element, apart from the willingness to address it, is the upgrading in Geneva of this operations center between Russian and American military experience. That's been extremely useful and we will test it now.

The second element is humanitarian aid. And on the humanitarian aid we are still not reaching those we want to reach. Out of 18 besieged locations — and by the way besieged areas is the closest to a medieval type of siege that we have seen in recent history — only [inaudible], not only, but 12 of them have been reached. So the concept and the idea has been approved that if we cannot reach them by land, as we have been doing together with the World Food Programme in Deir ez-Zor successfully, having a joint operation between the Russian Federation, US and other countries in dropping aid to 110,000 people. We need to start working hard in order to be able to look at the options within security limits. That's what we all have to work on to do actually the same thing everywhere else where we cannot get by land, unless we are allowed to go by land. That goes from Darayya, which has been so close to Damascus that there is no reason to stop baby food, to Kafraya and Foua, to every other locations.

That is I think a novelty and a new element which came out from this meeting. We would never have thought about it just a month ago.

Next point, and last, detainees and abductees because there are people who have been abducted by the opposition and detainees, which have been taken in large numbers by the government. We need and we will be addressing this aspect because the families are asking for it and the ISSG did take note of that with serious concern. So that is the next challenge.

Thank you.

"Joint press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura with US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov," [U.N. Geneva](#), 17 May 2016. [Brackets are in the original.]

The Associated Press reported their dim view of the ISSG meeting:

But underscoring the difficulties in ending the five-year war that has left hundreds of thousands dead and fueled the rise of Islamic extremists, the more than 20 nations were not able to outline specific penalties for non-compliance with the truce and the U.N. special envoy for Syria was unable to announce a date for the resumption of negotiations on a political transition.

....

The [ISSG] also broadly agreed that "persistent non-compliance" with the truce could result in rebel forces being excluded from the agreement.

But beyond such pledges, the meeting did not devise any concrete ways to resolve the

main problem standing in the way of peace — factional divisions. Without that, progress in ending the violence and reducing Syria's human misery can only be marginal and temporary.

....

The Geneva talks foundered [on 18 April] after the Western- and Saudi-backed opposition suspended formal participation in the indirect talks with Assad's envoys to protest alleged government cease-fire violations, a drop in humanitarian aid deliveries and no progress in winning the release of detainees in Syria.

Reflecting the lack of substantive progress in Vienna, de Mistura did not say when the Geneva talks would reconvene but warned of further delay in trying to end a war that has claimed about 300,000 deaths, left about 12 million people homeless and made refugees of 5 million Syrians. "We cannot wait too long," he said. "We want to maintain momentum."

George Jahn & Matthew Lee, "Modest goals set in bid to save Syria truce, peace talks," [Associated Press](#), 16:12 GMT, 17 May 2016.

Reuters reported on the "pessimistic atmosphere" at the ISSG meeting:

A pessimistic atmosphere pervaded the meeting in Vienna between countries that support President Bashar al-Assad and his enemies, all of which have committed to reviving a ceasefire and peace process that have been unravelling since last month.

....

The main opposition High Negotiations Committee said it was not willing to return to negotiations without a full ceasefire and access for humanitarian aid. "I don't think there will be results, and if there are any results they will not be sufficient for the Syrian people," HNC chief negotiator Asaad al-Zoubi told Reuters ahead of Tuesday's [17 May] Vienna meeting. "The HNC has said that if aid does not reach everybody, if the sieges aren't lifted and if a full truce does not happen, there will be no negotiations."

Lesley Wroughton & Lisa Barrington, "Major powers fail to agree new date for Syria peace talks," [Reuters](#), 22:28 GMT, 17 May 2016.

On 18 May, the day after the ISSG meeting, de Mistura held a press conference in Vienna. Here is the transcript of de Mistura's remarks on the Geneva negotiations:

Having a ceasefire, 50 percent today, used to be zero. We want to bring it up to 80 percent, of course 90 percent, although ceasefires in a war of five years is not (inaudible). And humanitarian aid, which used to be zero to besieged places last year, now is close to 250,000 people — not enough but moving. But above all, all these are ingredients to make people in Syria and us believe that the political process can be launched, and should be launched.

So the next step is testing what happened yesterday, which was quite a strong decision, to reinforce the ceasefire and to re-launch the humanitarian aid. So, I can feel sufficient

comfort to explain to the Syrian people and to the international community that we can re-launch the talks on the Intra-Syrian discussions because it is clear there is no military solution. We said it, it is confirmed, and it is confirmed again.

Now the more — and I know how much you are all concerned — the more we give hope to the Syrian people, the less they will be tempted to do what is so desperate of them — to leave Syria and to move towards Europe and risk their lives.

So, already with the cessation of hostilities, I was getting reports from my own colleagues that people were postponing, delaying or not even deciding to leave anymore, because there is a hope. Syrian people love their country. So we have a common interest, morally and politically, to push ahead. And the meeting yesterday in Vienna (inaudible).

Thank you very much.

Question: Do you have a date for a meeting in Geneva, for the peace process?

UN Special Envoy: I have a period but not a date because I want to make sure that the date is decided, first of all, in consultation with everyone. Secondly, I have to see what has been the progress on the two issues, the humanitarian and the cessation of hostilities. We have Ramadan as you know taking place in that part of the world and elsewhere, and that is a date we are keeping in mind too, before and after.

Question: So will it start mid of June?

UN Special Envoy: I won't tell you the date yet because I am considering various options. But we need to do it soon, not late, otherwise we lose the momentum. But it should not be done without having verified what are the positive consequences, we hope, of the two initiatives which took place yesterday.

Question: Could you, Mr. de Mistura, get in touch with representatives of the opposition after the meeting yesterday and are they satisfied with the outcome? Do you think they will be satisfied?

UN Special Envoy: Well, you must know that in a conflict like this one, no one either opposition, frankly even the government, will be or can be satisfied because the situation is still not as they will like to have, either side frankly. Secondly, I did not yet discuss it with the opposition because I am still in Vienna but I will do that from tomorrow in Geneva, when I am back to my headquarters. I will certainly try to explain to them what was achieved but also what they need to, both sides, contribute to make sure that what we decided yesterday becomes concrete. After all, all this is a Syrian led process.

Staffan de Mistura, "Joint stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura and Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz," [U.N. Geneva](#), 18 May 2016.

No Geneva Negotiations in May

If negotiations had resumed in Geneva on Monday, 23 May, that would have been the 27th day of negotiations on the 144th day of the year 2016. In other words, there were negotiations on fewer than 19% of the available days (i.e., 27/144). Negotiations in Geneva have mostly been suspended, waiting for the HNC's demands to be met. With the month of Ramadan beginning on 6 June, there is now very little time to meet the 1 August 2016 deadline for forming the transitional governing body.

De Mistura is waiting to see some improvement in both the ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, before scheduling another round of negotiations in Geneva. I hate to be pessimistic, but I do not see any improvement in the ceasefire as a result of either the 9 May Reaffirmation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement or the 17 May ISSG meeting. On 20 May, Russia threatened to begin unilateral airstrikes after 25 May against jihadists who collaborate with Nusra, and also begin unilateral airstrikes on weapons shipments from Turkey — actions that will exacerbate the delicate ceasefire environment in Syria.

In my opinion, de Mistura should have scheduled a resumption of the negotiations in Geneva on 11 May, two weeks after the previous round ended on 27 April. Such a prompt resumption would, as de Mistura said on 17-18 May, preserve "momentum". Further, previous negotiating sessions have achieved little, so we need more meetings and less delay. Waiting for the approval of the HNC gives the HNC veto power over the negotiations, and further delays the negotiations. If the HNC fails to appear in Geneva, then de Mistura can rely on alternative Syrian groups that participated in the negotiations in April. My essay for [April 2016](#), in the section titled "My suggestions for ending futility of talks in Geneva", suggested banning the HNC and creating a new opposition delegation that would negotiate in good-faith, without demands and preconditions.

De Mistura has a problem similar to "Which came first: the chicken or the egg?" De Mistura and the HNC want to wait for progress on the ground in Syria *before* resuming negotiations. But progress on the ground in Syria could come from successful negotiations.

There appears to be *no* reasonable expectation of satisfying the HNC's four demands in the foreseeable future.

- Assad's military, and also two major jihadist groups (Ahrar al-Sham & Jaysh al-Islam), continue to frequently violate the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.
- The parties to the Syrian civil war continue to attack civilians and hospitals, in blatant and repeated violations of international law.
- There are continuing problems with the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in Syria, and also continued besieging of towns and cities in Syria — which are more violations of international law.
- There is no publicly disclosed progress on releasing political prisoners.

The United Nations Secretary General's monthly report on Syria, Security Council S/2016/460 (19 May 2016) describes these problems. In a press briefing on 26 May (quoted below), Jan Egeland said humanitarian aid in May 2016 had reached only 16% of the people in Syria who needed it. As mentioned [below](#), the United Nations Secretary General continues to call for the U.N. Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court, which I argue is *not* a solution for the current problems in Syria.

On the morning of 26 May, the Voice of America published an article that explained the stalemate in Syria:

Syrian rebel commanders and opposition politicians concede their armed revolution against President Bashar al-Assad can't win, thanks to the military intervention by Russia and Iran. But, they insist, neither can the regime wipe them out and end the rebellion.

The violent standoff has in effect led to a de facto partition of the war-wracked country with no signs of a political solution on the horizon to stitch Syria together.

Behind the scenes, U.S. diplomats are pressuring rebel negotiators to agree to form a transitional government with President Bashar al-Assad. Rebels dismiss the suggestion out of hand.

"That is just not going to happen — it is wasted breath," a member of the rebels' High Negotiations Committee, or HNC, told VOA. "Assad is our red line — and unlike President Obama when it came to his red line on the regime's chemical weapons use, we won't cross it," he added.

....

The United Nations has set a deadline in August for a transitional government to be formed, but Western diplomats concede this is just not realistic.

"Everybody is holding their breath, hoping that something will be conjured out of the Geneva hat," a European diplomat told VOA. "But the process has utterly stalled and the opposition is just not going to agree to join Assad in a transition government. Rightly they're asking transition to what?" he added.

....

"The armed revolution can't win," said General Salim Idris, the former chief of staff of the mainstream rebel military alliance, the Free Syrian Army. "But neither can the regime, unless the Russians mounted a ground intervention and throw in more than just their Special Forces," he added. Even then, he said, the rebels would maintain an underground war. He said the Americans have been pressuring opposition negotiators to accept that Assad should stay in a transition government.

Jamie Dettmer, "Syrian Rebels: Peace Process Is a 'Waste of Breath'," [Voice of America](#), 06:50 [EDT?], 26 May 2016.

As I have said in my previous essays, diplomats treat the Transitional Governing Body

(TGB) in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 as holy dogma, without realizing that the TGB was from a time when the conventional wisdom predicted that Assad's government would soon collapse, so Syria would *need* a new government. Now, with Assad firmly in control, all that is needed are changes in the Syrian constitution and new elections. There are also other problems with the TGB, as explained in my [review](#).

During 20-25 May, de Mistura held no press conferences. On 26 May, de Mistura held a press conference before he briefed the United Nations Security Council. I have omitted most of the discussion about delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria.

de Mistura: Now the talks, I am going to report to the Security Council this afternoon what is my own assessment, on behalf of the Secretary-General, on the current situation. So, I am going to discuss, and ask and consult the Security Council regarding what would be the best option for the resumption of the talks. So, I am not in a position now to tell you when they will be announced, but I am going to be in a position of doing so after I briefed and consulted, as it should be, the Security Council this afternoon. The floor is yours, Jan and then there will be questions, obviously.

Jan Egeland: Thank you Staffan. The month of May continues to be much more difficult than we have hoped. May was supposed to be a good month. We were supposed to have procedures with the government and with armed opposition groups that would make it possible for us to reach a million people by land in addition to the 110,000 people by air in Deir-ez Zor. Of the one million people that we have planned and tried to reach by land in May, we have only so far reached 160,000. So we need to reach a lot of places in the remaining days of May and before the 1st of June for this to be anywhere near what we had hoped. Even in areas where we had full approval from the government, there has been infinite problems in actually reaching the places. And in others where we had conditional approvals like Darayya and Duma, we haven't been able to reach the people at all. We are still failing the people of Darayya, as we are failing the people of Moadamyia and Al-Waer. Those are indeed three places, I would say that the situation is still horrendously critical. Children are so malnourished in these places that they will be dying if we are not able to reach them — Darayya, Moadamyia and Al-Waer. There are however a lot of important humanitarian activities happening, and it is happening in a more difficult security climate as well. There is more fighting, there is more bombing, there is more infighting in many areas and that has made it much more difficult to be an aid worker.

The UN colleagues in Aleppo have to move from place to place to be able to survive in [and] being present in Aleppo. The UN hub has been repeatedly hit. And we have in some places been denied going there because the access route was not cleared or was not safe or there was fighting in these places. We need an end to hostilities to be able to reach many of these places.

....

Questions and Answers:

Question: Question for Mr. de Mistura about the Security Council. Will you be asking for extension, my understanding is that your deadline for an agreement is 1 August, we

have the month of Ramadan and time is running out for talks now, what is the range of possibilities? You say you will announce when talks will happen, can you give us the range of ideas? Also about air drops, you said that the Syrian government will need to give you an agreement, they didn't agree to trucks, why would they agree to air drops?

Special Envoy de Mistura: Well, let me start with the second point then the first one. It is WFP clearly indicated that as a standard procedure, in order to get the air drops by commercial planes to move forward and be insured, there is as a standard procedure, the need of a clearance, the permission of the government in question, whatever the government and the location is. From that point of view it is a standard procedure. Now, that doesn't mean at all that if the government decides to say no, both to air drops, air lifts and land convoys as it had done often, there will not be an opportunity which we intended to raise, and I personally will raise with the Co-Chairs, to actually ensure that they find a way to maintain what was a decision by the Co-Chairs — Russia and the US — in Vienna, proposed by every country around, to ensure that either way the food needs to start reaching everyone.

I mentioned today that in my knowledge of many years of professional involvement, 45, as you know, 46, I never met one single fighter or one single soldier starving, never, anywhere in the world. But there are plenty of civilians at the moment in danger of starving and they happen to be all Syrian civilians — in Deir ez-Zor, in Darayya, in Kafraya, in Foua, in Moadameyah. And the time has come, and I think that was the main news of Vienna. It was not that the talks have been postponed, but it was actually that the international community was feeling the guilt, the pressure to actually make sure that just listing a number of cities to be reached through humanitarian aid is not any more enough.

Regarding the first point, I (inaudible) that I am going to ask for the Security Council to guide me, because number 1 there is a sense of urgency in having the talks resumed, because we need to keep the momentum. But those talks in order to be credible, based again on the Vienna decision, need to have a credible ground, based on humanitarian improvement and on cessation of hostilities improvement and stabilization.

The date of August is there and remains there. Does it mean that we need be in hurry, the answer is yes, but August [deadline] is there.

Last point, Ramadan. With great respect that we all have and we should have for the holy month of Ramadan, the message is: if people in the region are capable and willing to fight during Ramadan, which unfortunately has been often the case in the past, I don't think we should not expect them to talk at least about peace, or give a chance to talk about peace in Ramadan. So Ramadan will not be a factor.

Question:

"Joint press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura and UN Senior Adviser, Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 26 May 2016.

On 26 May, after de Mistura briefed the Security Council, he issued the following statement,

which I quote in its entirety:

Following the joint press stake-out earlier today in Geneva between the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Senior Advisor, Jan Egeland, the Special Envoy briefed the Security Council on the current situation in Syria. This was his first briefing to the Council since the conclusion of the latest round of talks in Geneva and since the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) met in Vienna on 17 May.

Mr. de Mistura re-iterated the need to see progress on the ground — particularly in reference to the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access. He briefed on his intention to start the next round of Talks as soon as feasible but certainly not within the next two/three weeks.

Meanwhile, the Special Envoy will maintain close and continuous contact with the Syrian parties as well as the members of the ISSG before determining the "appropriate time" to reconvene the parties to Geneva.

Staffan de Mistura, "Media statement by the UN Special Envoy for Syria following the question on resumption of Intra-Syrian Talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 26 May 2016.

In the last sentence of de Mistura's statement, "appropriate time" is in quotation marks because it is a phrase used in the 17 May ISSG Statement.

De Mistura says the earliest the negotiations can resume is "three weeks" from 26 May, which will be 16 June. The previous negotiations ended on 27 April. That means there will be *at least 50 consecutive days* without any negotiations in Geneva. In my opinion, the delay is solely the fault of the HNC, who walked out of negotiations on 18 April and then issued four pre-conditions (i.e., demands) before the HNC will return to negotiations.

If negotiations resume in Geneva on Thursday, 16 June, that would be the 27th day of negotiations on the 168th day of the year 2016. In other words, there were negotiations on 16% of the available days (i.e., 27/168) in the first half of 2016. My comment is that this is a colossal waste of time, when negotiations should be held to end the Syrian civil war. Obviously, the so-called "political solution" — negotiations — to end the Syrian civil war is in grave condition, and could expire.

In my essay for December 2015, I wrote:

My essay for [November 2015](#) called John Kerry delusional for saying on 17 Nov: "We're weeks away, conceivably, from the possibility of a big transition for Syria". On 3 December, Kerry was in dreamland again when he said: "Just imagine how quickly this scourge [i.e., ISIL] could be eliminated — in a matter of literally months —" after a ceasefire between the Syrian government and the moderate rebels enables both the government and rebels to concentrate on fighting against ISIL. [State Dept](#); [Associated Press](#) (ISIL "eliminated in a matter of months").

....

I predict that in February 2016 people will realize the operative principle is the German saying "von nichts, kommt nichts" (out of nothing, nothing comes). Note also that the start date for the negotiations has already slipped more than three weeks from the 1 Jan

target date in the 14 Nov Vienna statement.

Ronald B. Standler, "Syria & Iraq: December 2015," www.rbs0.com/syria28.pdf, 4 Jan 2016.

Back in December, I was concerned about a three week delay. On 26 May, the negotiations have been suspended or postponed for a total of 142 days (i.e., until at least 16 June), which is 20 weeks, while negotiations occurred on only 26 days.

Given the demands of the HNC, the failure of *all* parties to the Syrian civil war to obey United Nations Security Council Resolutions, the proxy war in Syria that is fed by foreign meddlers, and the unrealistic and antagonistic opinions of diplomats in the ISSG, the failure of the negotiations in Geneva was easy to predict.

At noon and again at 19:30 EDT on 27 May, I searched Google News for the following queries:

Mistura "within the next two/three weeks"
and

Mistura Geneva weeks

I was surprised to find only approximately 80 articles. On 26 May, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* both published an [Associated Press](#) article on the topic. In my opinion, the suspension of negotiations in Geneva for at least 50 days is a major development in the Syrian civil war that indicates that the ISSG both failed to deliver a real ceasefire, and also failed to enable deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria. I found *no* published commentary on the significance of these failures.

Alloush quits HNC

On 29 May 2016, Reuters tersely reported:

The chief peace negotiator of Syria's mainstream opposition said on Sunday [29 May] he was resigning over the failure of the U.N.- backed Geneva peace talks to bring a political settlement and to ease the plight of Syrians living in besieged rebel-held areas.

Mohammad Alloush, who is also the representative of the powerful Jaish al Islam rebel faction in the Saudi-based High Negotiations Committee, said in a statement sent to Reuters that the peace talks had also failed to secure the release of thousands of detainees or to push Syria towards a political transition without President Bashar al Assad.

The U.N.-backed parties have not set a date for the resumption of the peace talks after the High Negotiations Committee suspended their participation until the situation on the ground has radically changed.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Western-backed Syrian opposition's chief peace negotiator quits over failure of peace talks," [Reuters](#), 21:17 GMT, 29 May 2016.

The later version of this same news article at 00:50 GMT on 30 May adds:

Alloush also said that without any of the opposition demands met, peace talks were a "waste of time", adding that he did not expect peace talks to resume so long as the Syrian government remained intransigent and not ready to enter "serious negotiations".

....

The resignation was accepted in a meeting in the Saudi-capital Riyadh headed by HNC's chief coordinator Riad Hijab that sought to assess the peace negotiations. *Ibid.*, at 00:50 GMT on 30 May 2016.

Al-Arabiya summarized the Reuters and Agence France-Presse news articles. [Al-Arabiya](#), 21:31 GMT, 29 May 2016.

The Guardian newspaper in England wrote:

The prospects of a negotiated peace settlement in the Syrian civil war were dealt a serious blow when the opposition's chief negotiator in UN-brokered talks in Geneva resigned, describing them as a waste of time on security and humanitarian fronts.

Mohammed Alloush, a member of the Saudi-backed rebel group Jaysh al-Islam (army of Islam), condemned the international community's "inability to enforce resolutions, in particular regarding humanitarian issues, [such as] the lifting of sieges, access to aid, the release of prisoners and adherence to the ceasefire".

....

Asaad al-Zoubi, the head of the main Syrian opposition delegation, also said he wanted to be relieved of his post in the HNC but did not confirm he had taken a similar step. The HNC said Alloush's decision will lead to a wider restructuring of its leadership. The move also reflects tensions about whether it should pull out of the talks altogether and in effect disband.

Alloush's importance to the HNC stemmed from his closer links to Syrian fighters. Some members of the committee — an unwieldy group assembled in Riyadh — were regarded as exiles who have less direct contact to those fighting Assad's forces. The danger for those trying to keep the peace process alive is that the HNC will lose legitimacy if it does not have sufficient links with rebel fighters.

Meanwhile, the Syrian government's chief negotiator in Geneva, Bashar Jaafari, had described Alloush as a terrorist, refusing to talk to him unless he "shaves off his beard". Forces linked to Alloush have been accused of atrocities in Damascus suburbs. Patrick Wintour, "Syrian peace talks in peril after opposition's chief negotiator quits," [Guardian](#), 09:48 GMT, 30 May 2016.

CNN reported the resignation of Alloush:

Alloush, who represents the influential Jaish al-Islam rebel group, made his resignation public via Twitter, tweeting that his decision was a result of the failure of the international community to stop the atrocities of Bashar al-Assad's regime against the Syrian people.

....

Alloush said the three stages of the Geneva negotiations were not successful because of obstinacy from the Assad regime and the continuation of attacks and aggression against the people of Syria.

The international community failed to apply the humanitarian resolutions, including lifting the siege, accessing aid to besieged areas, releasing detainees and applying the truce, he said.

Tiffany Ap & Roba Alhenawi, "Chief negotiator of Syrian peace truce quits over failed talks," [CNN](#), updated 12:58 GMT, 30 May 2016.

In the CNN report, "humanitarian resolutions" should be "U.N. Security Council resolutions". Alloush is correct: the Security Council has issued thousands of resolutions with demands that the U.N. is unable to enforce. These resolutions are basically meaningless pieces of paper, which are routinely ignored by everyone.

On 30 May, the Associated Press reported more details about Alloush's resignation:

A day earlier [29 May], the opposition's chief negotiator in the Geneva peace talks with the government announced he had resigned from his post, saying the international community was not "serious" about reaching a solution to the country's five-year civil war.

Mohammed Alloush, in a statement released late Sunday [29 May], said that Syrian government forces continue attacking the opposition and besieging rebel-held areas, despite the three rounds of negotiations in Geneva.

....

As evidence of the talks' failure, Alloush said the U.N. has not been able to set up a transitional governing body for Syria or find a political solution to the crisis.

....

Alloush said he handed in his resignation to the opposition's High Negotiations Committee and described his move as a "protest against the international community," which he hoped would come to realize "the importance of the Syrian blood that is being shed by the (Damascus) regime and its allies."

Bassem Mroue, "Air strikes pummel rebel-held city of Idlib," [Associated Press](#), 24:56 GMT, 30 May 2016.

My comments: The HNC scuttled the negotiations in Geneva with a series of at least four pre-conditions (i.e., demands) beginning when the HNC was created in December 2015, and reiterated on 19 April 2016:

1. end siege on rebel-held areas,
2. allow deliveries of humanitarian aid everywhere in Syria,
3. end airstrikes on civilians, and
4. release political prisoners.

Note that the insurgents are also violating these same items, especially: (1) insurgents besiege towns (e.g., Foah and Kafraya in Idlib province), and (3) insurgents attack civilians with mortar shells and rifle fire. Note also that Mohammed Alloush, the chief negotiator for HNC in Geneva, is also a leader of Jaysh al-Islam, which is a frequent violator of the Cessation of Hostilities agreement in Syria. It is hypocritical for the HNC to complain of Assad's misconduct, when the insurgents are engaging in the same misconduct.

Further, HNC *twice* refused to negotiate (3 Feb and 18 April). In April, the HNC refused to consider Assad's proposal for a national unity government that would include the opposition. History clearly shows that *both* parties — HNC and Assad — are intransigent.

In the news reports, Mohammad Alloush is angry because the international community (i.e., United Nations) failed to satisfy the demands of the HNC. This is a fundamental error by Alloush and his cronies in the HNC. The purpose of negotiations is for the parties themselves to reach an agreement, *not* for the mediator to impose a solution. The current suspension of negotiations in Geneva is *not* the fault of de Mistura, it is the fault of the HNC, who refused to negotiate.

Although it is the duty of the parties to negotiate and reach an agreement, Russia and the USA did establish a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for Syria, which the Syrians — both Assad and jihadists — repeatedly violated. De Mistura's team has been *trying* to increase deliveries of humanitarian aid, but is frustrated mostly by Assad's government.

Note also that the insurgents have tried unsuccessfully for five years to win the Syrian civil war. Peace negotiations are *not* the place for insurgents to demand what the insurgents failed to achieve in war.

The HNC does *not* need to replace its resigned chief negotiator, because the HNC will not be negotiating in the foreseeable future. In fact, negotiations on the transitional governing body were supposed to begin on Monday, 18 April 2016, but the HNC walked out of negotiations on that day. Also, the HNC and Assad's delegation never met face-to-face.

Note the terse suggestion in *The Guardian*, quoted above, about the HNC may "pull out of the talks altogether and in effect disband." I hope this suggestion is correct. The Geneva negotiations need an opposition delegation that will negotiate in good faith, without pre-conditions, and without walking out.

May 2016 Cessation of Hostilities

Full-text of agreements on a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria is posted at rbs0.com

Only a few 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.

My essay for [April 2016](#) chronicled the daily reports of violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement, including alarmist reports by journalists about the alleged "unraveling" of the agreement. The facts are that the cessation of hostilities was holding in *most* of Syria, but there were violations near the city of Aleppo, and attacks by jihadist groups in Latakia and Damascus provinces.

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. 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 for the daily reports elsewhere in this essay 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 that phrase is too long for a heading.

The daily reports from the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic are divided into four sections:

1. Total number of towns where leaders had signed reconciliation agreements, and total number of leaders of armed groupings who have agreed to the cessation of hostilities. I ignored this section.
2. **Results of ceasefire monitoring** I quoted *all* of this section, except the standard sentence: "Russian Aerospace Forces and Syrian Air Force did not make strikes on opposition armed formations, which follow ceasefire regime and informed the Russian or American Centres for reconciliation about their location."
3. I ignored the section on delivery of humanitarian aid to people in Syria.
4. **Additional information** I sometimes quoted part of this section, about fighting by Nusra or ISIL, which are excluded from the cessation of hostilities agreement.

The ellipses in my quotations separate the second and fourth sections of the original.

Each Russian daily bulletin is issued at approximately 23:00 Moscow time, which is 20:00 GMT.

To see the effect of the reaffirmation on 9 May, and the ISSG meeting on 17 May, I computed the average numbers of daily violations of the cessation of hostilities in Syria, as reported by the Russians. See the [table](#) at the end of the section on daily reports.

1 May 2016: 65th day of ceasefire

On Sunday, 1 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:
Ceasefire regime has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic.
Within last 24 hours, 5 ceasefire violations have been registered in Aleppo.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham carried out mortar shelling against al-Muhafaza and al-Zagra city sectors. Militants of Jaysh al-Islam performed 3 shellings with multiple launch rocket systems against al-Khalidiyah city sector.

....

“Silence regime” established in Eastern Ghuta and northern regions of the Latakia province on April 30 has been observed.

“Silence regime” has been extended by 24 hours (until 12 a.m. May 1) under agreement with Syrian government and American partners.

Active work on establishing ceasefire regime in the Aleppo province is continued.
"Report of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (May 1, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 1 May 2016.

On 1 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported the deaths of 253 civilians in Aleppo in the nine days "since the dawn of the 22nd of April until the afternoon of the 30th of the same month". Airstrikes on areas controlled by insurgents killed 153 people. "Shelling by the rebel and Islamic factions on regime forces' controlled areas in the western neighborhoods of Aleppo" killed 100 civilians. The insurgents used "tens of shells, homemade rockets and explosive cylinders". [SOHR](#).

The Associated Press reported:

Syria's military extended a unilateral cease-fire around the capital for another 24 hours on Sunday, as relative calm set in across much of the country after days of heavy fighting concentrated in the northern city of Aleppo.

Aleppo, the country's largest city and a key battleground in the civil war, was not covered by the cease-fire but saw less fighting on Sunday. More than 250 people have died in shelling and airstrikes in the northern city over the last nine days, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The government declared its own cease-fire around Damascus and the coastal Latakia region Friday following two weeks of escalating unrest. But more than three dozen rebel factions said Saturday they would not respect the truce unless the government agreed to extend it over the whole country.

"Calm returns to much of Syria as government extends truce," [Associated Press](#), 15:39 GMT, 1 May 2016.

On 30 April, the U.S. [State Department](#) announced that Kerry will be in Geneva on 1-2 May for discussions with de Mistura, Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir. Kerry anticipates discussing the "reaffirmation of the cessation of hostilities nationwide in Syria", as well as delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. Unfortunately, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov remained in Moscow. And, of course, both the insurgents and Assad's government — the parties who need to comply with the cessation of hostilities agreement and who need to comply with United Nations Security Council Resolutions — were absent from Geneva.

2 May 2016: 66th day of ceasefire

On Monday, 2 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

In general, the ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 10 ceasefire violations have been registered (Latakia 7, Aleppo — 3).

In Aleppo, militants of Ahrar al-Sham militants carried out mortar shelling against Sheikh Maqsood, al-Halidiyah, and al-Suleimonia).

In northern regions of the Latakia province, Ahrar al-Sham formations carried out 7 mortar shellings against Qalaz Tahtani.

....

"Silence regime" in Eastern Ghuta has been extended until 12 a.m. May 3 by Russian and American parties under agreement with the Syrian government and moderate opposition.

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

At 13:09 GMT on 2 May, the Associated Press reported:

Syria's military extended a unilateral cease-fire around Damascus and opposition strongholds in the eastern suburbs of the capital for another 48 hours on Monday [2 May], as a humanitarian convoy delivered aid to 12,000 families trapped in a government-besieged area in central Syria.

In Geneva, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Monday said that "several proposals" were being discussed aimed at finding a way to restore at least a partial truce in the war-torn country.

The latest partial truce in Syria does not cover Aleppo, the country's largest city and the scene of its worst violence in recent weeks.

....

Rebels on Monday [2 May] lobbed rockets into government-held areas in the western part of the city while government helicopters dropped crude and unguided "barrel

bombs" on opposition-held areas in the city and surrounding villages, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Separately, a car bomb detonated in the rebel-held Salhin neighborhood of Aleppo, appearing to target an Islamic judiciary council. The explosion wounded a lawyer and several other people, according to the Local Coordination Committees, an activist network.

The Syrian Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets, which organizes rescue operations in opposition-held areas of Aleppo, said several civilians were killed and wounded, including a judge for the hard-line jihadist faction Ahrar al-Sham.

Still, Aleppo was safer Monday and Sunday [1-2 May] than it had been in over a week. Fierce violence took the lives of more than 250 civilians over the previous nine days, according to the Observatory, while only six died in violence Sunday.

Philip Issa, "Syrian army extends Damascus cease-fire by 48 hours," [Associated Press](#), 13:09 GMT, 2 May 2016.

The ceasefire in Ghouta (a suburb in eastern Damascus) was initially for only one day (Saturday, 30 April), then extended for one day (Sunday, 1 May), and now extended for two days (until midnight Tuesday, 3 May). These repeated small extensions will be confusing to insurgents who have poor communications and control with their leaders. The three-day ceasefire in Latakia province for Saturday, Sunday, and Monday was *not* extended, perhaps because of the 7 violations by Ahrar al-Sham on Monday.

On 2 May, John Kerry spoke to journalists in Geneva. Here is part of what Kerry said:

.... But it is a fact that in the last weeks, the cessation of hostilities has been put to test, and it has frayed in certain areas and it has fallen completely in a few areas. And so we are engaged in an effort with all of the members of the International Syria Support Group and with Russia particularly in an effort to restore that cessation of hostilities in those places where it has been most at risk or most shredded.

In particular, in the last hours of Saturday morning [30 April], we were able to restore a brief period of the cessation going back into effect in East Ghouta and in Latakia. And now we are very much working and focused on the question of restoring the cessation of hostilities to the remaining areas where it's been disturbed, but particularly to Aleppo. And Aleppo is particularly disturbing to everyone for what has happened there. There are three health clinics now, one major hospital, that have been attacked from the air by bombs. There are only two air forces flying in that particular area, and the Russians are clear that they were not engaged or flying at that time. The regime has clearly indicated the willingness, over a period of time now, to attack first responders, to attack health care workers and rescue workers. And the attack on this hospital is on unconscionable, under any standard anywhere. It has to stop.

The last pediatrician who was serving people in the Aleppo area was killed the other day in this hospital, not to mention probably some 250 civilians, some of whom were killed by the other side. So both sides — the opposition and the regime — have

contributed to this chaos. And we are working over these next hours intensely in order to try to restore the cessation of hostilities, and at the same time to raise the level of accountability that will accompany the day-to-day process of implementing the ceasefire. To that effect Russia and the United States have agreed that there will be additional personnel who will work from here in Geneva on a daily basis, 24/7, in order to — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — in order to try to make sure that there is a better job and a better ability to be able to enforce the cessation of hostilities day to day.

John Kerry, "Remarks With UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura after Their Meeting," [State Dept.](#), 2 May 2016.

This State Department document also contains a transcript of de Mistura's remarks, but they are garbled by inaudible portions. The following paragraph quotes the U.N. version.

On 2 May, de Mistura announced he would travel to Moscow for a meeting with Lavrov on 3 May. De Mistura also called for an international consensus:

I hope really that the message that I gave to the Security Council the other day, appealing to both the US and Russia and the special team that we have — which is called the International Support Group for Syria — will be reinvigorating what has been a major achievement. So in the next few days we will hope to do so. The Syrians are asking for that every day, by the way, every day.

....

Let me add one point, we are re-invigorating together between the Russians and the Americans in the UN building the Operations Centre. In other words, we are preparing the mechanism, but the mechanism needs a political will, otherwise, we will have only a mechanism. But that actually [is] being started today, preparing for a much better mechanism for monitoring and controlling a new ceasefire, but we need political will.

Staffan de Mistura, "Near-verbatim transcript of press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura after his meeting with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry," [U.N. Geneva](#), 2 May 2016.

Later on 2 May, the U.N. Office in Geneva issued a statement:

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, today [2 May] met U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in Geneva to discuss ongoing efforts to reaffirm and re-implement the cessation of hostilities throughout Syria, following increased fighting in many parts of the country.

The Special Envoy expressed deep concern about the deteriorating situation and the continued violence, in particular Aleppo, affecting innocent civilians. He warned "it is putting the cessation of hostilities at a high risk." He re-emphasized his appeal to the U.S. and Russian Federation to renew their efforts to protect and restore the cessation of hostilities nationwide. "There can be no progress in the political process unless we urgently see tangible benefits on the ground for the Syrian people," said the Special Envoy.

Mr. de Mistura also met with the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, Ahmed Mohammed al-Jubeir, and underlined the importance of ISSG members to assist with

the re-implementation of the cessation of hostilities.

Mr. de Mistura is scheduled to travel to Moscow tonight where he will meet with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, on the same issues.

Staffan de Mistura, "Statement by the Office of the Special Envoy for Syria following meetings with the US Secretary of State and the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia," [U.N. Geneva](#), 2 May 2016.

3 May 2016: 67th day of ceasefire

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

In general, the ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 10 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Kara Jagez and Shmaisa. Mortar fire was opened for three times against Kermel and Akch Baer and for two times against Ard al-Wata.

“Silence regime” in Eastern Ghuta has not been violated.

....

Formations of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping took efforts to violate the ceasefire regime in Aleppo by continuing shelling against the government troops and living city sectors.

Terrorists carried out shelling with improvised Hellfire-type multiple launch rocket systems against Sheikh Maqsood, Meidan, and al-Suryan.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists also performed shelling with multiple launch rocket systems against a maternity [hospital] in al-Muhafaza city sector. According to civilians and militia, 6 citizens were killed and 39 ones were wounded.

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

On 3 May, the Associated Press reported:

A maternity hospital in a government-held section of Aleppo was struck by rocket fire Tuesday as battles killed 20 people and dragged the contested city in northern Syria deeper into chaos for a 12th straight day.

....

Aleppo has been at the center of the conflict for the past two weeks, shattering a limited cease-fire that began in late February. Tuesday's [3 May] attack on the Dubeet hospital in the government-held central Muhafaza neighborhood that killed four people

echoed an airstrike on a hospital on the rebel-held side of the city that killed about 50 civilians nearly a week ago.

About 280 civilians have died in [Aleppo] city in the last 12 days, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group of local activists.

....

Maj. Jamil Saleh, leader of Tajammu Al-Ezzah army, said his group was fighting in Aleppo. The rebel group, which falls under the Free Syrian Army and has been vetted and receives support by the U.S., ordinarily wages battles in the central province of Hama and in rural Latakia.

"Most of the FSA factions are taking part in the battle in the heart of Aleppo," he said. "The city is important for all Syrians. It is important economically, militarily and is the commercial capital of Syria. Letting go of Aleppo is a treason to the revolution."

He said the rebels have repelled the military's persistent attempts to advance on the city, citing unrelenting government airstrikes in preparation for a large offensive. Philip Issa & Bassem Mroue, "Northern Syrian city of Aleppo dragged deeper into violence," [Associated Press](#), 18:03 GMT, 3 May 2016.

On 3 May, Reuters reported:

Rebel fighters launched an assault in Syria's divided northern city of Aleppo on Tuesday and fired rockets on a hospital in the latest violence to hit civilians as diplomats struggled to restore an unravelling ceasefire and resurrect peace talks.

....

The Syrian state-run Ikhbariya news channel said three women were killed at the hospital and 17 people wounded. A Damascus Information Ministry statement called it a crime against humanity.

Lisa Barrington & Denis Dyomkin, "Rebels launch assault in Syria's Aleppo, diplomats try to revive truce," [Reuters](#), 23:14 GMT, 3 May 2016.

Notice that when Assad bombs a hospital, there is — quite properly — a chorus of criticism of Assad. But when the rebels or jihadists attack a hospital, there is silence from the USA and Western Europe. This is hypocrisy. Deliberately attacking a hospital violates international law regulating warfare and is a serious crime, regardless of who is the perpetrator. An attack on a hospital is *not* acceptable because anti-Assad insurgents perpetrated the attack.

Note that both Assad and insurgents are attacking civilians, including hospitals. The monthly reports by the Secretary General of the United Nations indicate that both insurgents and Assad have besieged cities, although Assad besieges more cities than the insurgents. That means the insurgents are *not* better than Assad, as all of the parties in Syria are behaving in

the same way.

On 4 May, Reuters reported that the Russians blamed Nusra Front for scuttling a planned local ceasefire in Aleppo that could have begun on 3 May.

The Russian Defence Ministry on Wednesday [4 May] said an upsurge in violence by Nusra Front militants had thwarted plans to extend a truce to the Syrian city of Aleppo the previous day, Russian news agencies reported.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suggested on Tuesday [3 May] after meeting U.N. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura that a deal covering Aleppo was close, saying Russian and U.S. military personnel might announce a decision "in the coming hours".

But such a local truce, also known as "a regime of calm," never materialized.

"As a result of attacks by the Nusra Front on the Az Zagra quarters, and heavy shelling by Hellfire rocket systems of other residential areas which caused numerous deaths among civilians, the introduction of a 'regime of calm' in Aleppo was disrupted," Russian news agencies quoted Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov as saying on Wednesday.

....

Rebel fighters launched an assault in Aleppo on Tuesday [3 May], firing rockets on a hospital. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based group that monitors the conflict, said rebel rockets had killed 19 people in government-held territory, including an unspecified number at the al-Dabit hospital.

"Russia blames Nusra Front for wrecking planned truce in Syria's Aleppo," [Reuters](#), 12:47 GMT, 4 May 2016.

On 3 May, John Kerry stated that the cessation of hostilities had been holding in *most* of Syria.

.... Now, much of the nation remained quiet and has remained quiet even as these outbreaks [e.g., in Aleppo city, Latakia province, Eastern Ghouta] have taken place.

....

....

Now, we know from the relative calm that was established after the cessation began in late February — and remember, the cessation which many people didn't think could take hold at all has held from February — through February, late March, through March, into April, end of April, now into May. And it's only in the last couple of weeks that it has become as frayed as it has, and hopefully it can be restored. And if you take the rate at which civilians have been killed when there is no violence [before the cessation], maybe 200 a day, work out the math. Over 60 days therefore literally thousands of lives have been saved and many people have received [humanitarian] assistance who hadn't previously.

John Kerry, "Press Availability by Secretary Kerry," [State Dept.](#), 3 May 2016.

I quote Kerry here to reject the hysterical remarks by the HNC and journalists about the cessation of hostilities "unraveling" or "collapsed". My essay for [April 2016](#) cites facts that, before the ceasefire, there was an average of 166 deaths/day in February 2016. After the ceasefire began, the death rate declined to 86/day in March, the first full month of the ceasefire. During April, the death rate was an average of 104/day. So, I do what Kerry suggests and "work out the math":

$$166 \square (31 + 30) = 10,126 \text{ would die without the ceasefire in March \& April}$$

$$2658 + 3116 = 5774 \text{ actually died during the ceasefire in March \& April}$$

Therefore, the ceasefire has saved approximately 4352 lives during March and April 2016.

(Here is one snippet that could be inserted at several different places in this essay. I do not want to break this one quotation into several pieces, so I am inserting all of it here.) On 3 May, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department, John Kirby, said at his daily press briefing:

QUESTION: So the FSA [Free Syrian Army] put out a statement saying,

“We, the armed groups from across Syria, will form a single bloc. Any offensive that takes place in an area where our units are present will be regarded as an attack against all the units throughout the Syrian territory and we reserve the right to respond to it.”

Thirty-seven military units endorsed this statement. Given the fact that some of these units are in Aleppo and they are known to be difficult to separate from al-Nusrah, what do you think about their position that if any one of them is attacked in Aleppo, that the whole cessation of hostilities across Syria is out the window?

MR KIRBY: Well, I haven't seen the comments, but let me just — ... we want all parties — and that means all parties — to abide by the cessation of hostilities and to not look for opportunity to escalate the violence either there or elsewhere throughout the country.

.....

QUESTION: Just one more. The FSA said that they support the decision of the High Negotiations Committee to withdraw from the Geneva talks. What is the U.S. communicating to the FSA with regard to this?

MR KIRBY: Well, we obviously want the talks to continue, and our message has been consistent and the same — that we want to see the UN-led peace talks resume and to achieve some success here. As the Secretary said when we were in Moscow, we agreed with the Russian Government that we would set 1 August as the timeframe to do that. So we obviously want to see that succeed. Our message has been the same to the opposition, the HNC, and all opposition groups: We want to see them back at the table.

We also recognize their frustration. We recognize the concerns that they expressed

during this last round, and why, out of frustration, they stopped talking — because the regime had been violating the cessation so blatantly, so overtly, in particular in Aleppo. So there's obviously more work to be done here, but our message is exactly the same. Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 3 May 2016.

4 May 2016: 68th day of ceasefire

On Wednesday, 4 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:
The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to belong to opposition, carried out mortar shelling against Akch Baer, Haddada, Shmaisa, and Kermel. Ard al-Wata and Hakur Tahtani suffered two shellings each.

....

Leadership of the Russian Centre for reconciliation and the American Centre in Amman (Jordan) had a telephone conversation. The American party welcomed the proposal initiated by the Russian side concerning reestablishing the "Silence regime" in Eastern Ghuta and Northern Latakia by 24 hours (until 12 a.m. May 5) and in Aleppo by 48 hours (until 12 a.m. May 6).

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

On 4 May, the deputy spokesman for the U.S. State Department issued a press statement:
As part of our urgent efforts to de-escalate violence in Syria and reaffirm the Cessation of Hostilities nationwide, the United States and Russia concluded arrangements late yesterday to extend this effort to Aleppo province, including Aleppo city and its surrounding areas. Since this went into effect today at 00:01 in Damascus, we have seen an overall decrease in violence in these areas, even though there have been reports of continued fighting in some locations.

To ensure this continues in a sustainable way, we are coordinating closely with Russia to finalize enhanced monitoring efforts of this renewed cessation. We expect all parties to the Cessation of Hostilities to abide fully by the renewed cessation in Aleppo and throughout the entire country, pursuant to the terms of the arrangements established in Munich in February 2016. Attacks directed against Syria's civilian population can never be justified, and these must stop immediately.

We look to Russia as a co-chair of the International Syria Support Group to press for the Assad regime's compliance with this effort, and the United States will do its part with the opposition. Following the regime's overnight airstrikes against Eastern Ghouta, we welcome today's reaffirmation of the cessation in Eastern Ghouta for the next 48 hours. It is critical that Russia redouble its efforts to influence the regime to abide fully by the cessation.

Our objective remains, and has always been, a single nationwide cessation of hostilities covering all of Syria — not a series of local truces. We are determined to reaffirm the Cessation of Hostilities across Syria and will continue expanding this effort so we can de-escalate the violence, alleviate the suffering, and help create the conditions that enable the parties to resume negotiations focused on a political transition, as called for in UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

Mark Toner, "Reaffirming the Cessation of Hostilities in Aleppo, Syria," [State Dept.](#), 4 May 2016.

On 4 May, the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) published a three-sentence news article:

Damascus, SANA-General Command of the Army and armed forces announced on Wednesday that a truce will be applied in Aleppo for 48 hours.

“A truce will be applied in Aleppo for 48 hours as of 1 a.m. on Thursday May 5th, 2016,” the army’s general command said in a statement.

Terrorists of Jabhat al-Nusra and the affiliated groups have targeted residential neighborhoods in Aleppo with hundreds of rocket and mortar shells during the last ten days, claiming the lives of tens of citizens, the majority of them are children and women.

"Army’s general command: Truce of 48 hours to be applied in Aleppo as of 1 a.m. on Thursday," [SANA](#), [time *not* specified], 4 May 2016.

At night on Wednesday, 4 May, the Associated Press reported that Russia and the USA had reached agreement on a temporary ceasefire in Aleppo.

At 19:45 Damascus time (16:45 GMT), Matthew Lee and Bradley Klapper of the Associated Press news blog "The Latest:" reported:

U.S. officials say an agreement has been reached with Russia to extend Syria's fragile cease-fire to the northern city of Aleppo, where violence has escalated in recent days.

The officials say a formal announcement of the deal is expected later Wednesday. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, say the agreement was reached late Tuesday and took effect at 12:01 a.m. Wednesday Damascus time.

The officials say they have seen a decrease in violence since then but acknowledge that violations persist in some areas. The agreement on Aleppo follows an earlier deal to reaffirm the truce in the Damascus suburbs and coastal Latakia province.

At 22:00 Damascus time (19:00 GMT), the Associated Press news blog "The Latest:" reported:

Syria's military has confirmed a 48-hour cease-fire in the northern city of Aleppo after U.S. officials announced an agreement had been reached with Russia.

A statement by the Syrian Armed Forces aired on Ikhbariya TV says the cease-fire will

begin at 01:00 a.m. Thursday (2200 GMT Wednesday). It did not elaborate.

The announcement was slightly different than the one that came from U.S. officials, who said that the United States and Russia have persuaded Syria's government and moderate rebels to extend a fragile truce to Aleppo.

They said the agreement was reached late Tuesday and took effect at 12:01 a.m. Wednesday (2101 GMT Tuesday).

"THE LATEST: [on Syria's civil war]," [Associated Press](#), 4 May 2016.

Notice the confusion over whether the ceasefire in Aleppo began on Wednesday or Thursday. Given that the ceasefire was first publicly reported on Wednesday night in Syria, it is more reasonable that the ceasefire began on Thursday (i.e., began at midnight on Wednesday). But the Russian Ministry of Defense press release and the U.S. State Department press release — both quoted above — agree that the ceasefire in Aleppo began on Wednesday. The Russian press release says the 48-hour ceasefire in Aleppo ends at 00:00 on 6 May, which means it began at 00:00 on 4 May, Wednesday. So it seems that the ceasefire in Aleppo technically began *before* it was publicly announced.

My comment is that Nusra Front is the main insurgent group in Aleppo, but Nusra is excluded from the cessation of hostilities agreement. So it would appear to be very difficult to have a ceasefire in Aleppo, because of the exclusion of Nusra from that ceasefire.

The Associated Press reported "sporadic violence" in Aleppo on Wednesday, the day before the Syrian army said the new ceasefire would begin:

Sporadic violence persisted in Aleppo on Wednesday as U.S. officials announced an agreement had been reached with Russia to extend Syria's fragile cease-fire to the deeply contested northern city. The Syrian military said the truce would last only 48 hours.

Restoration of a partial truce would bring relief to residents on both sides of Syria's largest city after two weeks of relentless violence that has killed nearly 300 people, destroyed hospitals and brought it to the brink of humanitarian disaster.

Albert Aji & Mathew Lee, "US declares Aleppo cease-fire, Syria says only for 48 hours," [Associated Press](#), 21:16 GMT, 4 May 2016.

5 May 2016: 69th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 14 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo province — 10, Latakia province — 4).

In Aleppo, opposition formations carried out shelling with multiple launch rocket systems against al-Khalidiyah, al-Sabil, Sheikh Maqsood, and al-Nairab airport.

In the Latakia province, militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping, which had claimed to

belong to opposition, performed mortar shelling against Ard al-Wata. Al-Islam al-Turkestani grouping carried out two shellings against positions of the government troops near Abu Ali mountain.

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

The Associated Press reported the recent death toll in Aleppo:

In Aleppo, Syrian state media reported some violations of the truce, saying militants fired more than 20 shells into government-held parts of the city, where 280 civilians have been killed over the past two weeks, according to the Observatory. The activist group said Thursday's shelling killed one person and wounded others.

Albert Aji & Bassem Mroue, "Blasts in Syria kill 10 but Aleppo mostly calm amid truce," [Associated Press](#), 13:22 GMT, 5 May 2016.

A total of 280 dead in 14 days is an average of 20/day, which should be compared with 166/day in February before the ceasefire began. (Most of the recent deaths in Syria have been in Aleppo, making a fair comparison of deaths in Aleppo with deaths in entire Syria.) So the recent violence in Aleppo is a huge improvement over the Syrian civil war before the cessation of hostilities.

Agence France-Presse reported an airstrike on a refugee camp in Idlib province:

At least 28 civilians, including women and children, were killed Thursday in air strikes on a displaced camp in northern Syria near the Turkish border, a monitor said.

Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the strikes which also left 50 civilians wounded targeted the camp near Sarmada in Idlib province, which is controlled by Syria's Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Nusra Front and rebel allies.

Mamun al-Khatib, director of the Aleppo-based pro-rebel Shahba Press news agency, accused the regime of carrying out the attacks. "Two regime aircraft fired four missiles on the camp in the village of Al-Kammouna," he said.

"Airstrikes on Syria camp near Turkey kill 28," [Al-Arabiya](#), 19:4 GMT, 5 May 2016.

At 19:10 Beirut time (same as Damascus time), the Associated Press news blog "The Latest:" reported insurgents attacked a village south of the city of Aleppo.

A Lebanese TV station embedded with the Syrian army says Syrian rebels are waging an offensive on a government-held village south of the city of Aleppo.

Al Mayadeen TV, broadcasting live from near the fighting, says armed groups launched their assault for Khan Touman earlier in the afternoon on Thursday [5 May].

The TV says government jets are bombing rebel positions outside the village. Bomb blasts are seen in the station's feed from the hilly countryside.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict, says the clashes are fierce.

Khan Touman is located 4 miles (6 kilometers) from the outskirts of Aleppo, Syria's largest city and key recent battleground in the running conflict.

At 20:45 Beirut time, the Associated Press news blog "The Latest:" reported an airstrike on a refugee camp in Idlib province, near the border with Turkey.

An activist monitoring group says at least 28 people have been killed in an airstrike on a refugee camp in northwestern Syria, near the Turkish border.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights says there are women and children among the casualties from the strike that hit the camp for the internally displaced in rebel-held territory near Sarmada, in Syria's northwestern Idlib province.

"The Latest: UN says Aleppo attack could be war crime," [Associated Press](#), 21:20 GMT, 5 May 2016.

Reuters reported on the airstrikes on the refugee camp:

Air strikes on a camp housing Syrians uprooted by war killed at least 28 people near the Turkish border on Thursday, [the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights] said, and fighting raged in parts of northern Syria despite a deal to cease hostilities in the city of Aleppo.

....

"There were two aerial strikes that hit this makeshift camp for refugees who have taken refuge from fighting in southern Aleppo and Palmyra," said Abu Ibrahim al-Sarmadi, an activist from the nearby town of Atmeh who spoke to people near the camp.

Nidal Abdul Qader, an opposition civilian aid official who lives about 1 km (half a mile) from the camp, said around 50 tents and a school had burned down.

....

Sarmada lies about 30 km (20 miles) west of Aleppo, where a cessation of hostilities brokered by Russia and the United States had brought a measure of relief on Thursday. Suleiman Al-Khalidi & Lisa Barrington, "Air strikes hit camp in Syria, U.S. condemns Assad statement," [Reuters](#), 01:57 GMT, 6 May 2016.

An atrocity in Syria is not official until the White House has condemned it *<sarcastic smirk>*, so here is what the White House Press Secretary said:

QUESTION: Josh, at the top of the briefing you said something about the ceasefire in Syria, and a reduction has been noted in terms of the frequency and intensity of the violence. There's been an airstrike in a refugee camp in Syria near the Turkish border that has reportedly killed dozens. There are images all over social media right now. Were you aware of that when you said that you had seen this reduction in violence?

MR. EARNEST: Yes, the reduction in violence is specifically around Aleppo, and that is a reduction in violence that we have seen. Yes, I was also notified of this specific report shortly before walking out here.

There is no justifiable excuse for carrying out an airstrike against innocent civilians who have already once fled their homes to escape violence. These individuals are in the most desperate situation imaginable. And there is no justification for carrying military action that's targeting them.

The other thing that you should confirm with the Department of Defense, but I believe this to be true, there were no U.S. or coalition aircraft that were operating in the region primarily because our efforts are focused on ISIL. And there's little intelligence to substantiate the presence of significant ISIL forces in that region of the country. But obviously reports like this are heartbreaking and indefensible.

QUESTION: Well, given that Russia has an air force, and the Assad regime has some aircraft, though not a full air force, is it safe to assume that that's who you believe carried out this strike?

MR. EARNEST: I wouldn't hazard a guess at this point about who carried out this particular strike. We have seen a willingness on the part of the Assad regime to use what military aircraft they have to carry out attacks against innocent civilians. The dropping of barrel bombs is the best example of that.

Again, I don't know enough about the details of this particular situation to say whether or not the tactics that were used in this particular strike are the same as the tactics that the Assad regime has used in other parts of the country. But if it does turn out that the Assad regime is responsible for this particular strike it would not at all be the first time that the Assad regime has used its military force against innocent civilians in a desperate situation.

"Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 5/5/2016," [White House](#), 5 May 2016.

6 May 2016: 70th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 6 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Latakia province.

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham and al-Islam al-Turkestani, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and small arms against positions of the government troops near Ain al-Kantara for three times and near Rasha for two times. Barza Tahtani suffered shelling with multiple launch rocket systems.

....

In general, "Silence regime", which had been established by Syrian government troops and opposition armed groupings with mediation of the Russian Centre for reconciliation and US analytics military and political Centre in Amman, has been observed by the government troops and opposition groupings in northern regions of the Latakia and Eastern Ghuta.

Formations of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping continue performing provocations aimed at breaking the “Silence regime” in Aleppo.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists carried out non-selective shelling with improvised multiple launch rocket systems against Sheikh Maqsood, Salakh al-Din and Amriyah in Aleppo from Bennizit and Ashrafiyah as well as mortar shellings against Handrat and Hailan from Muheim Handrat.

Moreover, within last 24 hours, Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists took efforts to block Aleppo from the south. Having taken advantage of the “Silence regime”, terrorists launched offensive on Han Tuman, al-Halidiyah and al-Hamra[.]

In northern regions of the Latakia province, terrorists of this grouping performed mortar and artillery shelling against positions of the government troops near Iqo, Ain al-Kantara and Kbana.

“Silence regime” in northern regions of the Latakia province and Aleppo has been prolonged since 12 a.m. May 7 by 72 hours by the initiative of the Russian party in order to prevent further escalation.

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

Note the three-day extension of the "silence regime" ceasefire in northern Latakia province and Aleppo, but *not* in Ghouta. The ceasefire now expires at midnight on Monday (9 May) in Syria, which is 21:00 GMT. The "silence regime" was first announced on 29 April, and extensions for one or two days were announced on 1, 2, and 4 May.

On 6 May, the Associated Press reported the insurgent assault on village of Khan Touman, south of Aleppo city:

A coalition of Syrian rebels and jihadists seized a strategic village from pro-government forces outside the contested city of Aleppo on Friday [6 May], signaling the reemergence of a powerful, ultraconservative insurgent coalition on the opposition's side in the Syria conflict.

Renewed fighting erupted around the village of Khan Touman hours after opposition fighters took the position from pro-government forces, the Britain-based monitoring group The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, reported. Fighter jets, presumed to belong to the Syrian Air Force or the air force of its powerful ally, Russia, were launching strikes on opposition positions.

At least 43 insurgents and 30 fighters on the government side have been killed in the fighting since Thursday afternoon [5 May], according to the Observatory.

The offensive was commanded by the Jaish al-Fatah, or Army of Conquest, coalition, an ultraconservative group led by al-Qaida's Syria affiliate, the Nusra Front, and the jihadist militias Jund al-Aqsa and Ahrar al-Sham. The Observatory said other non-

jihadist rebels fought for Khan Touman on the side of the coalition, as well.

Khan Touman is just 4 miles (6 kilometers) from Aleppo, Syria's largest city and onetime commercial capital.

Aleppo-area opposition media activist Bahaa al-Halaby said the insurgents took control of Khan Touman around 7 a.m Friday morning.

Philip Issa, "Activists: Insurgents seize village south of Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 10:02 GMT, 6 May 2016.

My comment is that the battle for Khan Touman appears to be a violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement that began on 27 February. I say "appears", because the Nusra Front is excluded from that cessation of hostilities agreement. But Ahrar al-Sham — and perhaps also unnamed insurgent groups — are included in the cessation of hostilities agreement. The deliberate assault on the village of Khan Touman is an example of continued fighting by insurgents, despite the cessation of hostilities agreement. Russia has cited Ahrar al-Sham for violating the cessation agreement *every day* beginning 1 May, as well as *many* days during April 2016.

Note also the total of 73 dead (43 + 30) in Khan Touman from Thursday afternoon through Friday morning.

[Reuters](#) reported: "Groups fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army, which have mostly supported diplomatic efforts in Syria, were not taking part in the attack [on Khan Touman], a fighter from one Aleppo-based FSA group told Reuters."

On 6 May, the Associated Press reported condemnation of the attack on a refugee camp in Idlib province on 5 May.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon says there should be serious consequences for whoever is responsible for a "seemingly calculated attack" on a refugee camp in Syria.

....

[Meghan Garrity, deputy director of program for Turkey's International Rescue Committee,] stressed that "it's not the first such attack," and that the IRC is aware of seven other displacement camps that have been hit by airstrikes or indirect fire since March [2016].

....

[Russian] Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said on Friday [6 May] in remarks carried by Russian news agencies that the Russian military had closely studied data from an air space monitoring system and determined that no aircraft had flown over the Sarmada camp on Wednesday or Thursday.

Konashenkov says the destruction seen on photographs and videos suggested that the camp could have been shelled, whether intentionally or by mistake, from multiple

rocket launchers that the Nusra Front, al-Qaida's Syria affiliate, has been using in the area.

"The Latest: UN chief calls for consequences for Syria strike," [Associated Press](#), 6 May 2016. (also mentions the insurgent attack on Khan Touman)

The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported the Russian claim that Nusra attacked the refugee camp:

Russian Defense Ministry announced on Friday [6 May] that the nature of the damage caused in the aftermath of a recent attack against a camp for the displaced in Idlib countryside indicates that the camp was been shelled with rocket launchers which are often used by Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist organization in the area.

In a press conference, the Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said that photos published on social media sites show that "there are no shell craters from aircraft ammunition and other traces of airstrikes."

"Judging by the nature of destruction seen on photos and videos, the camp in Idlib could have been either intentionally or by mistake struck from multiple rocket launchers, which are now often used by al-Nusra Front terrorists in the area," Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said.

He pointed out that no flights were carried out by aircrafts, Russian or other, over the camp. "We have carefully analyzed the information from the flight control area in that region on May 4 and May 5 2016. There were no flights by Russian or any other aircraft over the area," he added.

"Russian Defense Ministry: Camp for displaced in Idlib targeted by rocket launchers used by al-Nusra," [SANA](#), 6 May 2016.

Maybe the Russians are correct. Who knows? I am relieved that I was spared reading propaganda about a Martian spaceship flying over Sarmada. A courageous Syrian pilot shot down the Martian spaceship that was violating the sovereignty of Syrian airspace. Unfortunately, the flaming Martian spaceship crashed into a refugee camp.

If anyone cares, the United Nations issued an official statement on the bombing of the refugee camp in Idlib province. Here is the entire three-paragraph statement:

The Secretary-General is outraged by yesterday's attack on a makeshift camp for displaced persons near the Syrian village of Sarmada in Idlib province. The United Nations, along with humanitarian partners on the ground, are assessing the needs and mobilising a response for the families who fled the camp out of fear of further attacks.

The Secretary-General reiterates his call on the Security Council to send a strong message to all warring parties that there will be serious consequences for grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Those responsible for yesterday's seemingly calculated attack against civilians in the camp in Idlib, which could constitute a war crime, must be held accountable. He again urges the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The Secretary-General calls upon all Member States to take immediate collective and decisive action to bring the tragedy unfolding in Syria to an end. Members of the Security Council should build on resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016) and follow through on the commitments they made in these resolutions to press the Syrian parties to stop their indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on strike on camp in Syria," [U.N.](#), 6 May 2016. Copy at [U.N. Press Release](#).

The U.N. has issued many dozens of these condemnations of war crimes or violations of international humanitarian law in Syria. *All* of these condemnations by the United Nations have been ignored. My essay for [March 2016](#) collects quotations from four recent monthly reports by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in which he called for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. All of his calls were ignored by the United Nations Security Council. The last time the Security Council attempted to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court was in May 2014 — two years ago — when Russia and China both vetoed the referral.

7 May 2016: 71th day of ceasefire

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

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

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out three mortar shellings against al-Zagra sector of Aleppo.

In the Latakia province, militants of this grouping have carried out mortar shelling against positions of the Syrian army units near Sandran and Akch Baer.

....

Militants of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping have continued conducting warfare near Aleppo. Within last 24 hours, they have performed 2 shellings with multiple launch rocket systems against Sheikh Maqsood and al-Nairab airfield. Terrorists took efforts to launch offensive on Sheikh Maqsood from Ashrafiyah. Having suffered losses, terrorists retreated to the positions, which they had kept before.

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

On 7 May, PressTV in Iran reported that 13 Iranian soldiers had been killed in the battle for Khan Touman in Syria.

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says 13 of its military advisers have been killed and 21 others wounded in Syria in recent days.

....

It added that they were killed and injured in the town of Khan Tuman, located in the southwest of the Syrian province of Aleppo.

....

[The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights] further claimed that the Takfiri militants had managed to retake Khan Tuman and its surrounding villages from the army troops.

The Syrian military is yet to confirm reports about Khan Tuman's fall into the hands of the terrorists. The Syrian armed forces had driven the terrorists out of Khan Tuman in December.

"Iran says 13 IRGC forces killed in Syria," [PressTV](#), 7 May 2016.

I checked three other English-language news websites in Iran (IRNA, FARS, Tasnim) at 20:00 GMT on 7 May, but none reported this story. However, both [Reuters](#) and the [Associated Press](#) confirmed the report of the 13 Iranian deaths.

On Saturday, 7 May, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported violations of the cessation of hostilities, except at Khan Touman.

8 May 2016: 72th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 6 ceasefire violations have been registered (Damascus province — 4, Aleppo province — 2).

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops in al-Sahiyah, Harasta al-Basal city sectors of Damascus and its suburbs Jaubar and Arbil. In Aleppo, al-Zagra and Hai al-Halidiyah city sectors have suffered shelling with multiple launch rocket systems.

....

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists continue warfare near Aleppo. Al-Nairab airport, Sheikh Maqsood and Amriyah city sectors have suffered two shellings with multiple launch rocket systems.

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

On Sunday, 8 May, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported violations of the cessation of hostilities in Syria. At midnight on 8 May, the most recent news at the English-language website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is dated 5 May.

Agence France-Press says "residents trickled back into eastern areas of Aleppo", after being

encouraged by the recent calm in the city of Aleppo. [Al-Arabiya](#).

9 May 2016: 73th day of ceasefire

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

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

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam grouping, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out shelling with mortars and small arms against positions of the government troops in al-Sahiyah, Harasta al-Basal city sectors of Damascus and Arbil.

In the Hama province, Ahrar al-Sham opposition grouping carried out mortar shelling against positions of the Syrian army near Latmin and Zakah.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist grouping continue warfare aimed at setting the "Silence regime" off in Aleppo. Within last 24 hours, al-Nairab airport, Sheikh Maqsood and Amriyah city sectors have suffered shellings with multiple launch rocket systems. Mortar shelling has been performed against Handrat from Muheim Handrat.

According to citizens of the Aleppo province, more than 70 militants and 3 trucks with munitions have arrived in Anadan from Turkish territory in order to reinforce Jabhat al-Nusra formations.

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

On 9 May 2016, Russia and the USA released a [Joint Statement](#) that reaffirms the Cessation of Hostilities agreement in Syria. (Copy at [rbs0.com](#)) There are several important features of this reaffirmation:

- Russia said it would encourage Assad "to minimize aviation operations over areas that are predominantly inhabited by civilians or parties to the cessation."
- Parties who continue to attack civilians will be reported to the United Nations Security Council.
- Russia and the USA also declared that humanitarian aid would be delivered everywhere it was needed in Syria.
- Although not explicitly mentioned in the reaffirmation, this Joint Statement replaces the local "silence regime" that has a duration of a few days, with a nationwide cessation of hostilities agreement that has an indefinite duration. (That is the interpretation of the U.S. State Department given in their Daily Press Briefings for [9 May](#) and [10 May](#) 2016.)

If this Joint Statement is implemented, it should satisfy three of the four demands of the HNC

for resuming negotiations in Geneva. (The release of political prisoners will remain unsatisfied.)

On 9 May, Syria ignored the Joint Statement about a reaffirmation of nationwide cessation of hostilities. Instead, the Syrian Army extended the local ceasefire in Aleppo city for two days. The Syrian Arab News Agency issued a terse, one-sentence announcement:

Damascus, SANA-General command of the army and armed forces announced on Monday [9 May] extending the truce in Aleppo and its countryside for 48 hours as of 1.00 a.m. on Tuesday until 24 p.m. Wednesday [11 May].

"Army General Command: Truce in Aleppo extended for 48 hours," [SANA](#), 9 May 2016.

On 10 May, the Syrian Army announcement was revised to also include Latakia province.

The U.S. Statement Daily Press Briefing for [10 May](#) referred to this two-day extension in Aleppo city as "confidence-building measures".

Note that the previous "silence regime" in Aleppo, which was announced on 6 May, expired at 00:00 Tuesday. The new extension announced on 9 May begins at 01:00 Tuesday. There is an inconsistency here that provides *no* ceasefire for one hour from 00:00 until 01:00 on Tuesday. [Associated Press](#).

On 9 May, the Associated Press reported:

The United States tried Monday [9 May] to move past localized, short-term cease-fires in Syria by announcing that an enduring, nationwide truce would be restored. Yet that new approach was immediately called into doubt as Syria's military extended only a local cease-fire, in the hard-hit area of Aleppo, by 48 hours.

The chaos surrounding the latest bout of diplomacy, with the U.S. and Syria offering what seemed like conflicting versions of events, underscored the profound difficulty in getting the warring parties to even agree on what they've agreed on, much less lay down arms for good. The announcements came as world leaders meeting in Paris struggled to get faltering Syria peace talks back on track.

....

In Damascus, Syria's military said a five-day cease-fire in Aleppo and its rural areas, set to expire for midnight [on Monday, 9 May], would instead be extended two more days, raising the prospect that additional, piecemeal cease-fires would continue to be announced. Brutal violence in Aleppo has killed nearly 300 civilians in recent days, and airstrikes hit several areas there Monday even as Kerry was discussing the cease-fire in Paris.

....

Yet enforcing any cease-fire has been made nearly impossible by an exception built into the original cease-fire: Attacks are still allowed against the Islamic State and the al-Qaida-linked Nusra Front. Those groups are common enemies of the U.S., many of the opposition groups and Assad, but they are fighting in the same areas, making it

difficult to distinguish which strikes violate the cease-fire and which ones don't. The confusion has fueled accusations that Syrian and Russian forces are using the Nusra Front as an excuse to ignore the cease-fire and bomb opposition-held areas.

Josh Lederman, "US says nationwide Syria truce to replace piecemeal approach," [Associated Press](#), 20:39 GMT, 9 May 2016.

The Associated Press said "world leaders" met in Paris on 9 May "to get faltering Syria peace talks back on track". However, note that this meeting in Paris was *not* a meeting of the ISSG. Because only anti-Assad nations were invited to Paris, the meeting in Paris is best described as a meeting of the long-obsolete Friends of the Syrian People group. (See [above](#).)

Reuters reported:

Syrian government forces and their allies fought insurgents near Aleppo on Monday and jets conducted raids around a nearby town seized by Islamist rebels, a monitoring group said, as Syria's military said a ceasefire in Aleppo would be extended by 48 hours starting on Tuesday.

....

Warplanes struck the town of Khan Touman, southwest of Aleppo, the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Rebels also fought government forces east of Damascus, and jets hit the rebel-held towns of Maarat al-Numan and Idlib.

John Davison & David Brunnstrom, "Aleppo fighting rages as U.S., Russia try to revive Syria truce," [Reuters](#), 21:48 GMT, 9 May 2016.

10 May 2016: 74th day of ceasefire

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

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

Militants of Ahrar al-Sham grouping carried out mortar shelling against units of the Syrian army near Barisha in the Latakia province.

In Aleppo, units of Jaysh al-Islam grouping performed mortar shelling against al-Zagra section.

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

On 10 May, Reuters reported:

Air strikes on a town in Idlib province [Binnish, 6 km (4 miles) from the provincial capital Idlib] in Syria's northwest killed at least 10 people on Tuesday, monitoring group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

Low-level fighting also appeared to continue inside the city of Aleppo, 50 km (30 miles) from Idlib city, and there were heavier clashes around Aleppo, the British-based

group said.

John Davison, "Air strikes kill 10 in Syria's Idlib province - monitoring group," [Reuters](#), 09:48 GMT, 10 May 2016.

On 10 May, the Associated Press reported:

Two airstrikes struck a northwestern Syrian town [Binnish] Tuesday [10 May], killing at least 10 people, wounding many others and knocking out the dome of a mosque, opposition activists said.

....

"Most of the 10 people killed were passersby," said Muayad Zurayk, an opposition activist based in the nearby Jabal al-Zawiya region. "The situation is appalling in this region because of daily massacres."

The [Local Coordination Committees] said the warplanes were Syrian while the Observatory said it wasn't clear if they were Syrian or Russian.

The Observatory said those killed included a local rebel commander of a faction linked to the ultraconservative Ahrar al-Sham militia. The militia is part of the Jaish al-Fatah coalition, made up of several groups including al-Qaida's branch in Syria known as the Nusra Front, and other jihadi militias.

Bassem Mroue, "Activists: New airstrikes in northern Syria kill at least 10," [Associated Press](#), 13:52 GMT, 10 May 2016.

On 10 May, the Syrian Arab News Agency updated yesterday's news article to say that Latakia province would also be included in extension of the ceasefire:

"The truce in Aleppo and its countryside and the countryside of Latakia will be extended for 48 hours starting from 01:00 on Tuesday 10 [May] 2016 till 24:00 on Wednesday 11 [May] 2016," the General Command said in two separate statements.

"Updated- Army General Command: Truce in Aleppo and its countryside and Latakia countryside extended for 48 hours," [SANA](#), 10 May 2016.

11 May 2016: 75th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 9 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo province — 5, Latakia province — 3, Damascus province — 1).

In Aleppo, Sultan Murad Brigade, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, opened fire for 3 times with multiple launch rocket systems against Sheikh Maqsood from Sakyan al-Shababi. 8 civilians were killed. Jaysh al-Islam carried out 2 mortar shellings against al-Zagra sector.

Militants of Ahrar al-Islam performed 3 mortar shellings against units of the Syrian army near Barisha (Latakia province).

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam fired with mortars and small arms against positions of the government troops near Harasta al-Basal.

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

On 11 May, Agence France-Presse reported:

Two people were wounded early Wednesday [11 May] when regime aircraft strafed rebel positions in two eastern neighborhoods of the divided city [of Aleppo] with heavy machinegun fire, an AFP correspondent reported.

Late Tuesday [10 May], government warplanes struck two other rebel-held neighborhoods, the correspondent added.

Rebel rocket fire hit two government-controlled neighborhoods in the west of the city, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"Syria army and rebels trade fire in Aleppo," [Al-Arabiya](#), 11:18 GMT, 11 May 2016.

Back on 27 April 2016, Russia proposed that the United Nations Security Council add Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham to a sanctions list of terrorist groups. On 11 May, Reuters reported:

Britain, the United States, France and Ukraine blocked a Russian proposal at the United Nations to blacklist Syrian rebel groups Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham for links to Islamic State and al Qaeda militants, diplomats said on Wednesday [11 May].

....

Jaish al-Islam (Islam Army) is a major armed rebel group in Syria and part of the High Negotiation Committee, which was set up in Riyadh last December to negotiate on behalf of opposition groups at U.N.-brokered peace talks with the government.

The High Negotiation Committee is backed by Western nations and key Arab states.

Ahrar al-Sham withdrew from the Riyadh meeting, saying "revolutionary groups" were sidelined. But the group did attend the last round of peace talks in Geneva.

Michelle Nichols, "U.S., Britain, France block Russia bid to blacklist Syria rebels," [Reuters](#), 19:25 GMT, 11 May 2016.

The partisanship of the proxy war in Syria is obvious. Russia protects Assad from prosecution for war crimes, while the USA and Western Europe protect jihadists from being held responsible for violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement. The rule of law, including basic notions of accountability for criminal acts, is the casualty of foreign meddlers protecting the proxy armies that they support. With *no* punishment for violation(s) of the cessation of hostilities agreement, it is amazing that the cessation has functioned in most of Syria.

At the Daily Press on 11 May, the spokeswoman for the U.S. State Department argued that,

because Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham had accepted the cessation of hostilities agreement, they could *not* be terrorists. She said:

.... Russia is publicly attempting to designate groups that are parties to the cessation of hostilities. Such actions, we continue to believe, would have damaging consequences to the cessation just as we are trying to de-escalate the situation on the ground.

....

We continue to reach out to these opposition groups to ensure that they are adhering to the cessation and continuing to create the environment for a political transition.

....

QUESTION: Can we just follow up on this issue? Both Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam — I mean, they have exactly the same bylaw, almost the same bylaws. They don't have a constitution. They have what they call internal document. They espouse the same dogma, they believe the same thing, they practice the same practices as Jabhat al-Nusrah and as al-Qaida. Why shouldn't they be designated as a terrorist organization?

MS TRUDEAU: So we constantly review information. We are constantly assessing these groups. At this stage our position is that these groups are members of the cessation of hostilities. We continue to have dialogue with them. If our position changes, we'll make that assessment then. But we are in constant review of this.

....

QUESTION: And I promise, my last question on this. I mean, you always say that you want to support the secular opposition. There is — according to their statement, there is nothing secular about these groups. In fact, they want a very strict Islamic caliphate in Syria, both —

MS TRUDEAU: At this stage, they are parties to the cessation. We'll leave it there. Elizabeth Trudeau, Daily Press Briefing, [U.S. State Dept](#), 11 May 2016.

In my opinion, Trudeau's argument is specious. It is like saying a criminal can not be arrested and punished for any crime committed after he promises a judge that he will be good in the future.

On 11 May, the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights issued a press release from its Independent International Commission of Inquiry:

The United Nations mandated Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms recent attacks on civilians and civilians infrastructure, notably on hospitals and clinics in Aleppo city, and on an internally displaced persons' camp in Idlib. Aerial bombardments, ground shelling, and rocket fire have consistently been used in deliberate, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks on areas where Syrians civilians live and where they struggle

to survive.

Since the attacks against Al-Quds hospital in Aleppo governorate on 27 April, there have been over a half dozen attacks against other medical facilities in the area; all of which are specifically protected sites under international humanitarian law. Scores of civilian victims and medical personnel have been wounded or killed in these attacks. In recent weeks, markets, bakeries, and a water station have also been aurally bombed. With the only one supply route still open to opposition-controlled areas of Aleppo city, the destruction of food, water and medical supplies raises grave concerns for the civilians within.

The 5th of May attack on the Kamounah IDP camp in Sarmada, Idlib reportedly killed and injured dozens of civilians.

“These incidents demonstrate the undeniable fact that this conflict has repeatedly exacted its heaviest toll on civilians,” said Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Commission. “This flagrant disregard for international humanitarian law is not new, but rather is the continuation of an well-established trend of unlawfully attacking medical sites and personnel, places of refuge, and infrastructure necessary for civilian life,” Pinheiro added.

.....

The Commission has repeatedly noted that international humanitarian law’s foundational principle of distinction — which underlies a number of war crimes — requires all parties to a conflict to distinguish between lawful and unlawful targets. The recent unlawful attacks are violations of international humanitarian law; some are war crimes. “Failure to respect the laws of war must have consequences for the perpetrators,” the Chair stressed. “Accountability must be part of the process of returning Syria to peace. Until the culture of impunity is uprooted, civilians will continue to be targeted, victimized and brutally killed.”

"UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria Condemns Unlawful Attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic," [OHCHR](#), 11 May 2016.

Summary at: "Syrian Crisis — UN Response," [U.N. Geneva](#), 11 May 2016.

12 May 2016: 76th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo province — 2, Damascus province — 5).

In Aleppo, units of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out 2 shellings with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against al-Zagra sector from Balirmun and Makanis al-Duvairi.

In the Damascus province, militants of Jaysh al-Islam opened fire with mortars and

small arms against positions of the government troops near Meida, Jaubar, Arbil, and Zibdin as well as near Harasta al-Basal region of Damascus.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the "Silence regime" down.

Within last 24 hours in the Aleppo province, unselective fire has been opened for 4 times with improvised multiple launch rocket systems against Sheikh Maqsood from Ashrafiyah and Bustan al-Basha. Al-Nairab airport has been shelled with mortar for two times.

In the north-west of Aleppo, artillery and mortar fire has been opened from Jandul against Handrat and Hailan. There are killed and wounded military servicemen and civilians.

According to citizens of the Aleppo province, Jabhat al-Nusra detachment (more than 100 men) has arrived in Khan Tuman.

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

On the morning of 12 May, Reuters reported fighting continues north of Aleppo city. Syrian government forces battled rebels north of Aleppo on Thursday [12 May] as a ceasefire expired in the city itself, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and rebels sources said.

The fighting was focused around the rebel-held Handarat area which is important because it is near the last route into opposition-held areas of Aleppo, Syria's biggest city before the conflict and now divided between the government and rebels.

The Observatory said pro-government forces had launched an attack in the area, supported by air strikes targeting Handarat in addition to the only road into rebel-held areas of the city.

Tom Perry, "Fighting erupts north of Aleppo as ceasefire expires," [Reuters](#), 11:20 GMT, 12 May 2016.

The Reuters headline is misleading, because the ceasefire that expired at 01:00 on 12 May was declared by the Syrian army only for the city of Aleppo. But the fighting was north of the city of Aleppo, which is a different location. However, the fighting north of the city of Aleppo is a violation of the nationwide cessation of hostilities agreement that was reaffirmed on 9 May.

On 12 May, early reports said Nusra Front with allied insurgent groups (e.g., Ahrar al-Sham and Faylaq al-Rahman) captured the Alawite village of al-Zara, on the road between Homs and Hama. At 21:25 GMT, the Associated Press reported: "Ahrar al-Sham, an ultraconservative Sunni militant group, led the assault on Zaara, along with the Nusra Front".

The insurgents captured and abducted civilians from al-Zara. Given that Nusra and the allied insurgents are Sunni, and the abducted civilians are Alawite (an offshoot of Shiite Islam), the civilians are in danger of being killed or tortured as infidels. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). The news about what is happening in al-Zara is important, because it shows that Ahrar al-Sham — who the USA defended on 11 May from the terrorist label — engages in sectarian violence and kidnappings, just like ISIL and Nusra front.

13 May 2016: 77th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo province — 3, Damascus province — 5).

In Aleppo, units of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out 3 shellings with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against al-Zagra sector.

In the Damascus province, militants of Jaysh al-Islam opened fire with mortars and small arms against positions of the government troops near al-Sakhiyah, Harasta, and Darayah as well as sectors Basatin al-Jarash and Dahiyat al-Asad.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the “Silence regime” down.

Within last 24 hours, mortar fire was performed against al-Zagra and al-Meiser sectors, and al-Nairab airport in Aleppo.

Sheikh Maqsood has been shelled by multiple launch rocket systems twice.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists took efforts to launch offensive against units of the Syrian army near Handrat after performing mortar shelling. All attacks of terrorists have been repelled.

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

On 13 May, the Associated Press reported that Assad bombed the city of Idlib, killing at least 12 civilians:

Raed Saleh, the head of a first responders group that operates in opposition-held areas, said at least 15 bodies, including those of three children, were pulled from the rubble after two airstrikes in a residential area of Idlib. He said another 38 people were wounded.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on activists inside Syria, put the death toll at 12 and said it was likely to rise as rescue efforts were

still underway.

"Airstrikes kill at least 12 in northern Syria," [Associated Press](#), 18:27 GMT, 13 May 2016.

Reuters reported on civilian deaths in al-Zara, which was captured by Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham on 12 May:

Insurgents killed at least 19 civilians believed to be from families of fighters loyal to the Syrian government after capturing an Alawite village from government control in western Syria on Thursday [12 May], a monitoring group said.

Residents from the village of al-Zara interviewed by state media said rebels had killed women, children and livestock. The rebels said they had abided by the rules of war.

Dozens of people are still missing, believed to have been abducted from the village, which lies close to a main highway linking the western cities of Homs and Hama, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Friday.

The Observatory said the attackers included major Islamist rebel group Ahrar al-Sham and the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front.

....

The 19 dead, who included six women, are believed to have been killed as rebels stormed houses during their attack on al-Zara, said the Observatory, which monitors the war through a network of sources.

Lisa Barrington and Tom Perry, "Insurgents kill 19 seizing Syrian Alawite village — Observatory," [Reuters](#), 15:25 GMT, 13 May 2016.

On 13 May, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department, John Kirby, said at his daily press briefing:

QUESTION: All right. The second issue on Syria is you will have also seen reports from numerous people — Government — Syrian Government as well as opposition groups that I believe yesterday or very recently — Ahrar al-Sham, a rebel group that you guys have fought with the Russians to keep off of the banned list, to keep them included in the ceasefire, along with al-Nusrah fighters, stormed this Alawite village. How is it that — I mean, they look like they are operating as one and the same, a group that you insist is not a terrorist group and a group that you insist is a terrorist group. How do you explain that? And when, if ever, are you going to tell them that they're in danger of being uninvolved in the cessation of hostilities?

MR KIRBY: There's an awful lot there. Let me try to break this down. First of all, we've seen these reports and the initial reports are very, very troubling indeed in terms of the violence that were perpetrated on these families. We don't have a whole lot of specific information about these attacks right now. Obviously, it's reprehensible, unacceptable for any of this kind of violence to occur, particularly if, as early reports indicate, it was — it was based on religious affiliation. So we're looking into this very, very carefully. Can't say with great specificity at this time who we — who was responsible or who we believe was responsible.

Number two, Ahrar al-Sham is not, as you pointed out, not a designated foreign terrorist organization and therefore is a party to the cessation. And our expectation of them is the same expectation we have for everybody else who is a party to the cessation, that they will observe it, that they will abide by it. So we're going to look into this and we're going to see what we know about it. And based on the facts, then we'll deal with it. But we expect all parties to the cessation to abide by it and we have repeatedly said that. That's why we're got the task force stood up. That's why we've plussed up the resources. That's why we've intensified the effort to be able to better monitor the violence in Syria. But this is — obviously, these are very troubling, disturbing reports that we're taking very, very seriously.

The second — the third part which you also were getting to were the potential collusion between a group like al-Nusra and this group. And we've said all along that we've seen some commingling, and we have seen even to some degree some troubling cooperation between certain opposition groups and al-Nusra. Again, I'm not specifically talking about this attack, because I just don't know enough about it to say that that's what happened here. But our message to the armed opposition with respect to al-Nusra and to any perceived or real cooperation or collusion has been, again, consistent. And we've made it clear that our expectation is that they won't do that.

QUESTION: But have you told them that if they don't stop doing this kind of stuff, that they're going to be excluded and they will become legitimate targets?

MR KIRBY: We have not — I don't want to get into —

QUESTION: And if you haven't, why haven't you?

MR KIRBY: I don't want to get into specific conversations or allusions of threats here. We have certainly made clear — and done so consistently — our expectations for the opposition groups. Those that are part of the HNC and the armed opposition, we have made very clear our expectations for their behavior and conduct with respect to the cessation of hostilities. And they have seen with their own eyes what happens when they are near or operating close to al-Nusra, when some of the opposition groups have been — have fallen victim to attacks against al-Nusra because of their close proximity. So I think they're very well aware of the risks inherent in operating in or near a group like that. But we've made very clear what our expectations are in terms of their conduct with respect to the cessation.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 13 May 2016.

The reaffirmation of the cessation of hostilities agreement on 9 May specifically said "We demand that parties cease any indiscriminate attacks on civilians," There is little doubt that Ahrar al-Sham has *repeatedly* violated the cessation of hostilities agreement, and on 12 May Ahrar al-Sham kidnapped civilians after capturing a town from Assad. The real position of the U.S. Government seems to be that Ahrar al-Sham may be war criminals, but they are fighting against Assad and participating in the HNC, so they can *not* be punished. At the 11 May and 13 May Daily Press Briefings at the U.S. State Department — quoted above — journalists persuasively argued that Ahrar al-Sham was just as Evil as Nusra Front. In

rebuttal, the U.S. State Department spewed propaganda, obfuscations, and claimed ignorance of facts. Mr. Kirby says that Ahrar al-Sham has been informed of what the U.S. Government *expects* of their conduct — but the real issue is that Ahrar al-Sham has *repeatedly* violated the cessation of hostilities agreement and attacked civilians.

14 May 2016: 78th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 6 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo province — 2, Damascus province — 4).

In Aleppo, units of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out 2 shellings with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against al-Asad sector.

In the Damascus province, Jaysh al-Islam formations carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Arbil and Duma. Mortar shelling has been performed for 2 two times against positions of the government troops near Jaubar.

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Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the “Silence regime” down.

Within last 24 hours, mortar shelling has been performed against al-Zagra, Salah al-Din, and al-Nairab airport. 7 citizens were killed and 12 ones were killed.

Militants of Jabhat al-Nusra groupings took efforts to launch offensive on positions of the Syrian army near Handrat (to the north from Aleppo). All attacks of terrorists have been repelled.

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

On 14 May, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in Western Syria.

On 14 May, ISIL attacked a Syrian government hospital in Deir al-Zor (also transliterated as Deir el-Zour and Deir Ezzor). At least 35 Syrian government soldiers were killed in the attack, and ISIL took hospital staff hostage. Later in the day, the Syrian government expelled ISIL from the hospital. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). This attack is noteworthy because Assad and/or Russia have been accused of bombing many hospitals in western Syria, but here ISIL attacked a hospital.

15 May 2016: 79th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered (Aleppo province — 2, Damascus province — 5).

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out 2 shellings with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems against Az-Zagra and al-Asad sectors in the city of Aleppo.

In the Damascus province, Jaysh al-Islam formations fired mortars and small arms against positions of the government troops near Kharasta, Jaubar, Zibdin and Kasmia as well as against the Kharasta al-Bassal district of the Damascus city.

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Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

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

Beginning on 29 April and continuing on 14 May, the Russian daily reports of violations of the cessation of hostilities mentioned the "silence regime". Beginning on 15 May, the Russian daily reports returned to reporting violations of the "ceasefire" — apparently in recognition of the 9 May reaffirmation of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

On 16 May at 03:00 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in Syria.

16 May 2016: 80th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 7 ceasefire violations have been registered (Damascus province — 6, Aleppo province — 1).

In the Damascus province, formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Jaubar, Arbil, Haush al-Fara and Duma as well as against Harasta al-Basal sector. Units of the government troops have been shelled with in Huteita al-Jarash.

In Aleppo, militants of Jaysh al-Islam performed mortar shelling against al-Zagra city sector.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

Within last 24 hours, fire with multiple launch rocket systems, mortars and small arms have been performed against Ashrafiyah, al-Muhafaza, al-Khalidiyah, Sheikh Maqsood, Salah al-Din sectors and al-Nairab airport in Aleppo.

Terrorists carried out mortar shelling against Handrat (Aleppo province) from Muheim Handrat.

In the Latakia province, Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist formations performed shelling with ZU-23x2 artillery systems against Ard al-Wata as well as mortar shelling against Salamiyah (Hama province).

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

On 16 May at 22:00 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in Syria.

On 16 May, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department, John Kirby, said at his daily press briefing:

QUESTION: Thank you. Last week you were asked about the attack on an Alawite village, al-Zahraa. You said you didn't have specific information about who was responsible. The Ahrar al-Sham group admitted to participating in the attack. The group's spokesman told Reuters, quote, "Civilians were not targeted. On the contrary, factions made great effort to spare civilians and deal with prisoners humanely," end quote. RT went to the village and the residents there described a massacre where militants killed women and children and abducted dozens of people. Why does the U.S. insist that this group Ahrar al-Sham should not be blacklisted along with al-Nusrah?

MR KIRBY: We're — as I said at the outset, out of Munich, the decision by the International Syria Support Group, of which Russia is a member, and a communique that Russia signed up to agreed — and this was more than 20 nations — agreed that the only groups that would not be party to the cessation of hostilities would be those designated as terrorist organizations by the UN. And of all the groups — no, let me finish before you interrupt me — all the groups — of the groups that are represented in Syria fighting, the two that meet that criteria — a criteria that was agreed to by everybody in the ISSG, not just the United States, ma'am — were al-Nusrah and Daesh.

QUESTION: Why did the U.S. fight their inclusion last week at the UN?

MR KIRBY: This was a decision made by the International Syria Support Group. Everybody agreed that al-Nusrah and Daesh, because they're designated by the UN as foreign terrorist organizations, would not be party to the cessation. And so that's where we are today.

QUESTION: The U.S. fights at the UN not to include this group in the —

MR KIRBY: I'm not going to get into internal deliberations one way or the other.

QUESTION: But why?

MR KIRBY: I'm telling you — look, you're putting — I love how you do this, try to put everything on the United States. The International Syria Support Group is an international — it represents the international community. Iran is a member. Russia is a member. Saudi Arabia — I could go on and on and on. All of them collectively made this decision. And so your question should be posed to all the members of the ISSG. Bottom line is that even Russia agreed that the only groups that would not be party to the cessation are members designated by terrorist organizations of the UN. I've said that now three times in response to your follow-ups.

The only other thing I would say is regardless of who was responsible for this attack, there's no excuse for killing innocent civilians, none whatsoever. The whole reason why we wanted the cessation of hostilities put in place was so that violence against innocent Syrian people would not occur. And sadly, it is still occurring and we're working very hard — the Secretary has been working very hard to try to get it to be held more in place in more places in an enduring fashion. And one of the things I think you can — I can assure you will be a major topic of discussion tomorrow in Vienna is exactly that: How do we get the cessation of hostilities to be observed by everyone?

QUESTION: Do you think this particular group cares much about the cessation of hostilities?

MR KIRBY: What we care about is the cessation of hostilities. And every member of the ISSG cares about the cessation of hostilities. And what we've said all along is we want all those who have influence over groups in Syria to use that influence in an appropriate manner to get them to abide by the cessation. So look —

QUESTION: Does the U.S. have influence over this Ahrar al-Sham group?

MR KIRBY: — nobody's turning a blind eye to what happened and, as I said last week, that those kinds of attacks are inexcusable.

QUESTION: What does the U.S. do to address what happened last week in al-Zahraa?

MR KIRBY: We are working with all the members of the ISSG, which, as I said, includes Russia —

QUESTION: Is the U.S. in touch with this group, Ahrar al-Sham?

MR KIRBY: We are working with all members of the ISSG to use the appropriate amount of influence that they have — some of that influence is influence we have — over groups in Syria to get everybody to abide by the cessation. Attacks against innocent civilians are absolutely inexcusable no matter who they're from.

Daily Press Briefing, [State Dept.](#), 16 May 2016.

The first question refers to a news story by "RT". This citation probably refers to [Russia Today](#) on 13 May. The RT article says: "Villagers [in al-Zara] said that 'scores' of people were either killed or taken hostage by the Islamist raiders."

Mr. Kirby was asked: "Why did the U.S. fight their inclusion last week at the UN?" Kirby's response was that the ISSG "agreed that al-Nusra and Daesh, because they're designated by the UN as foreign terrorist organizations, would not be party to the cessation." But the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 (at §8) says the ceasefire does *not* apply to ISIL, Nusra, *and* "other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council, and as may further be agreed by the ISSG and determined by the Security Council," Therefore, the Security Council can expand the list of terrorist groups any time it wishes, which is what Russia attempted to do, when Russia proposed adding Ahrar al-Sham to the list of terrorist groups.

In my opinion, the U.S. policy was *wrong* to protect Ahrar al-Sham from the terrorist designation. I am sorry to see Kirby — a retired U.S. Navy admiral and man of integrity — forced to defend a repugnant U.S. policy. As Kirby said in the quotation above, "attacks against innocent civilians are absolutely inexcusable". But attacks against civilians are part of the behavior of terrorist organizations, which is one reason why Ahrar al-Sham should be designated a terrorist organization.

17 May 2016: 81th day of ceasefire

On Tuesday, 17 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

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

In the Damascus province, formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, have performed mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Hutaita al-Jarash and al-Sahiya. Dahiyyat al-Asad and Masaqid Barza city sectors of Damascus have also been shelled with mortars.

In Aleppo, militants of Jaysh al-Islam carried out multiple launch rocket systems against Makanis al-Duwairi city sector.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue warfare. Within last 24 hours, shelling with multiple launch rocket systems and mortars have been performed against Ashrafiya, Sheikh Maqsood and Salah al-Din city sectors of Aleppo. Handrat, Hailan and Braige al-Reeh have been shelled with multiple launch rocket systems.

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

On 18 May at 12:00 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in Syria during 17 May. As mentioned above, on 17 May the ISSG met in Vienna.

18 May 2016: 82th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 10 ceasefire violations have been registered (Damascus province — 8, Aleppo province — 2).

In the Damascus province, formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the government troops near Jaubar, Huteita al-Jarash, and Duma. Ibn al-Walid health resort, Dahiyat al-Asad, Masakid Barza city sectors and Shab'a have suffered mortar shelling. Units of the Syrian army and civilians have been shelled with multiple launch rocket systems in al-Sakhiyah sector of Damascus.

In Aleppo, militants of Jaysh al-Islam have performed shelling with multiple launch rocket systems against al-Asad city sector and mortar shelling against al-Zagra.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire regime down. Within last 24 hours, fire with MLRS, mortars and small arms have been performed against Sheikh Maqsood, al-Asad, Salah al-Din, and Meidan sectors of Aleppo. Handrat (Aleppo province) has suffered two shellings.

In the Latakia province, Qinsibba and Nehshebba inhabited areas have been shelled with MLRS. Artillery and mortar shelling have been performed against Ard al-Wata.

In the Damascus province, terrorists of Jabhat al-Nusra carried out shelling with MLRS and mortars against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Marj al-Sultan. Moreover, Nula has also suffered mortar shelling.

Near Zar'a and Narb Nafsa (Hama province), units of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists using tanks have launch counter-attack against the government troops. The offensive of militants has been stopped by units of the Syrian Armed Forces.

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

One day after the ISSG meeting in Vienna, Jaysh al-Islam again distinguished itself as a persistent violator of the ceasefire in Syria.

On 18 May, the Associated Press reported:

A series of airstrikes in a rebel-held central Syrian town Wednesday killed at least 12

people, including 10 children and two women who were taking cover in an underground shelter, activists said.

Homs-based activist Bebars Al-Talawy said at least eight air raids struck the town of Rastan, one of them hitting a house, destroying it while its residents were taking cover in the shelter.

"Activists: Airstrike in central Syria kills at least 12," [Associated Press](#), 19:30 GMT, 18 May 2016.

Earlier, [Reuters](#) also reported airstrikes on Rastan in Homs province. I looked at the English-language website of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), but found *no* explanation of why Assad attacked Rastan.

19 May 2016: 83th day of ceasefire

On Thursday, 19 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

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

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces in Duma and two shellings in Jaubar and Zibdin. Basatin Abu Jarash, Masaqid Barza sectors of Damascus have also suffered mortar shelling.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue warfare. Within last 24 hours, fire with MLRS, mortars and ZU-23x2 air defence systems has been performed against Handrat, Bash Key, Hailan, al-Zandik inhabited areas, and Salah al-Din and Sheikh Maqsood sectors of Aleppo. The government troops have stopped offensive of militants near Muheim Handrat. Terrorists have suffered significant losses.

In the Latakia province, Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists shelled Qinsibba, Ain al-Kantara, Hakur Tahtani, Ard al-Wata, Nahshebba and Akch Baer with mortars and MLRS.

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

On 19 May, the Associated Press reported Assad's army struck the Ghouta suburb east and south of Damascus:

Fighting in Syria continued in earnest Thursday [19 May] as air and missile-strikes pounded rebel positions in Damascus's eastern Ghouta suburb, clearing the way for soldiers and Hezbollah militants to seize valuable farmland that nourished residents trapped in the blockaded area, according to two activist groups, the Local Coordination Committees and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

An opposition media activist inside the Ghouta enclave said news of the advance is a

blow to the opposition. "It is agricultural land," said the activist of the area of the push, speaking on condition of anonymity fearing for his safety.

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The rebel ultraconservative Islam Army has dominated the enclave since its fighters expelled Islamic State militants in 2014, but has drawn the ire of other rebel factions and civil society groups for its high-handed rule.

[I edited the AP article to rearrange two sentences and expand "Observatory" to the full name:] Tensions [in Ghouta] exploded into open warfare last month as moderate rebels and al-Qaida-linked extremists arrayed against the Islam Army. Around 500 militants have been killed in three weeks of infighting, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

....

Also on Thursday, activists said suspected government warplanes carried out airstrikes in the rural part of the central Homs province, killing at least 11 civilians including at least three children.

Philip Issa, "Syrian government troops take rebel stronghold near Damascus," [Associated Press](#), 18:43 GMT, 19 May 2016.

[Reuters](#) reported that the Syrian army seized the town of Deir al-Asafir in eastern Ghouta.

It seems that the message of the 17 May ISSG meeting in Vienna has *not* reached either Assad or Jaysh al-Islam.

[Reuters](#), grimly published a news article titled: "Jihadists mobilize in Syria as peacemaking unravels". Nusra Front and jihadist groups have revived the Jaish al-Fatah, or the army of conquest. Reuters reported: "The May 6 capture of another town, Khan Touman south of Aleppo, from pro-government Shi'ite militias including Iranians was openly attributed to Jaish al-Fatah, with rebels identifying Nusra and another group, Jund al-Aqsa, as the leading forces."

My comment on the Reuters article in the previous paragraph: The ISSG Statement on 11 Feb at ¶10(d) and the Russia/USA Cessation of Hostilities Agreement on 22 Feb at ¶4(d) say violators may be excluded "from the arrangements of the cessation of hostilities, and the protection it affords them." In my essay for [February 2016](#) I commented: "This may motivate some rebel groups to abandon cooperation with Nusra Front." However, it seems that Nusra has been able to forge alliances with jihadist groups, despite the threat of the jihadists being excluded from the ceasefire.

20 May 2016: 84th day of ceasefire

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

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

last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered (Damascus province — 7, Aleppo province — 1).

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Duma, Haush Harabu, Zibdin, and two shellings have been performed twice near Jaubar. Moreover, militants have performed mortar shelling against Dahiyat al-Asad city sector and Ibn al-Walid health resort in Damascus.

In Aleppo, militants of Jaysh al-Islam carried out mortar shelling against al-Asad sector and a Military Academy.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

....

In the Hama province, Jabhat al-Nusra militants took efforts to capture electricity station located on al-Mahruk mountain. Loss of the facility, which provides most territories of the province, will cause humanitarian catastrophe for citizens.

Citizens of Birin, Tumin, Jarjisa, al-Biyah, Deir al-Fardis, Samalil and al-Mahruk (Homs province) are leaving their houses because of massacre performed by Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists in Zaraa settlement.

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (May 20, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 20 May 2016.

The Russian report on 20 May mentions that Nusra attacked a total of 9 towns in the provinces of Aleppo, Latakia, and Damascus. It appears that Nusra, along with various jihadist groups (e.g., Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham), are causing most of the recent violence by insurgents in Syria.

On 21 May at 02:00 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria. The big news is that the Russian defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, had proposed joint Russian/USA airstrikes on Nusra Front and other insurgents operating in Nusra-controlled territory.

To obtain the Russian view of their proposal, I looked at the RIA-Novosti website and found a series of quotations from Sergei Shoigu:

“To continue the fight against UN-designated terrorist organizations, we are offering the United States — as co-chair of the International Syria Support Group — to begin joint actions on May 25 between Russian Aerospace Forces and the US-led coalition, on planning and carrying out airstrikes against al-Nusra Front and illegal armed groups that do not adhere to the ceasefire, as well as convoys with weapons and ammunition, armed groups illegally crossing the Syrian-Turkish border.”

“We suggest the United States to continue its work with the ‘moderate’ opposition and those who have sided with them in the cessation of hostilities until May 25 of this year, to give exact definitions of the regions under their control, and to withdraw units observing the conditions of the cessation of hostilities from the territories controlled by al-Nusra Front formations and other international terrorist organizations.”

“Russia reserves the right to unilaterally carry out airstrikes against terrorists not observing the ceasefire in Syria beginning from May 25.”

“We believe that the adoption of such measures could allow transitioning to the process of peaceful settlement on the whole territory of Syria. Of course, these measures are agreed with the leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic.”

Shoigu said that the free crossing of al-Nusra Front and Daesh terrorists through the Syrian-Turkish border destabilizes the situation in Syria.

“This allows terrorists to reinforce their units with fighters, as well as arms and military equipment, to bring in weaponry, which will lead to a growth in their new combat capabilities and attempts to capture new territories,” Shoigu added.

“The main violations of the ceasefire in Syria are tied to attempts by the Nusra Front and its backers to sideline the peace settlement of the conflict. The main violations of the cessation of hostilities and the periodic intensity of the situation in northern Latakia, the province of Aleppo, and the outskirts of Damascus are tied with attempts by the Nusra Front and those armed formations allied with them to sideline the peaceful settlement of the conflict and return to full-scale military activities in Syria,” Shoigu said.

"Russia Offers US to Conduct Joint Strikes Against al-Nusra Front in Syria," [RIA-Novosti](#), 13:42 GMT, 20 May 2016.

The Associated Press reported the U.S. reaction to the Russian proposal in the same news article that also reported continued fighting in Syria:

"Russian operations are supporting the Assad regime and our focus is solely on degrading and defeating ISIL," [Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis] said, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State.

Shoigu warned that Moscow reserves the right to unilaterally strike militants refusing to respect the cease-fire, as well as weapons and militants crossing into Syria from Turkey, starting from May 25.

....

Meanwhile in Syria, rebels and pro-government forces fought on several fronts on Friday [20 May] after the Syrian army, backed by the Lebanese Hezbollah militant group, managed to seize valuable territory around the capital, Damascus.

Activists reported continued fighting in the Ghouta suburbs of Damascus with warplanes — belonging to either Russia or the Syrian military — intensifying airstrikes on the besieged, rebel-held area of Daraya.

Airstrikes on a rebel-held village in the northwest Idlib province killed at least eight civilians, according to the Local Coordination Committees group. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, another group that tracks the Syrian war, said nine had died, including two children and three women.

The Observatory also raised its death toll from airstrikes Thursday [19 May] on rebel-held villages in the central Homs province to 22 civilians.

....

Also Friday, ultraconservative rebel factions and government forces clashed in the central Hama province around the predominantly Alawite town of Zaara, which al-Qaida-linked militants seized from government control last week. The Observatory said both sides suffered casualties in the fighting.

Vladimir Isachenkov (and Philip Issa on fighting in Syria), "Russia urges joint action with US against Syria's al-Qaida," [Associated Press](#), 17:12 GMT, 20 May 2016.

Reuters reported:

Russia has proposed to the U.S.-led coalition that they stage joint air strikes on Syrian rebels, including militant Islamist group Nusra Front, who are not observing a ceasefire, but the United States responded coolly on Friday.

....

"There is no agreement to conduct joint air strikes with the Russians in Syria," said U.S. State Department spokesman John Kirby. He added that the United States believed that Assad's government was responsible for most of the violations of the fitful ceasefire that began on Feb. 27. "We look to Russia to end such (government) violations, which includes strikes that have hit civilians and civilian facilities," he said.

"Russia urges joint strikes on Syria rebels but U.S. reacts coolly," [Reuters](#), 21:49 GMT, 20 May 2016.

Back on 21 March 2016, the Russians threatened to respond unilaterally to violators of the ceasefire in Syria, but the Russians abandoned their threat. Russia may again abandon its threat of airstrikes on violators of the ceasefire.

My comment is that Russia is proposing joint Russia/USA airstrikes for three different purposes:

1. defeating Nusra Front,
2. defeating jihadists who are cooperating with Nusra Front, and
3. destroying weapons and munitions sent from Turkey to insurgents.

Personally, I think all three purposes are good, *but* there are reasons why the USA would

decline:

1. The U.S.-led Coalition focuses only on attacking ISIL, which is mostly in eastern and northern Syria. By focusing solely on ISIL, the USA avoids routine interactions with Russia, whose airstrikes are mostly in western Syria.
2. I suspect the U.S. is reluctant to attack jihadists who cooperate with Nusra, because that would offend Saudi Arabia and Turkey, who support the jihadists. Moreover, attacking jihadists would upset the HNC that is the main opposition delegation in the Geneva negotiations (i.e., the chief HNC negotiator is a leader of Jaysh al-Islam).
3. I suspect the U.S. would refuse to attack weapons shipments to insurgents, because that would deprive insurgents who fight against Assad. Some of those insurgent groups receive support from the USA, other insurgent groups receive support from allies of the USA (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey). If the USA were to attack convoys of weapons from Turkey to insurgents, then Turkey would surely deny the USA continued use of the Incirlik airbase for airstrikes on ISIL.

Also, Russia is the wrong partner for airstrikes with the USA. My previous essays (e.g., [October 2015](#), [February 2016](#), [March 2016](#), [April 2016](#)) chronicle that Russia and/or Assad have conducted many airstrikes on hospitals in Syria — which are almost certainly war crimes. *If* Assad's air force is responsible for *all* of these airstrikes on hospitals, then Russia is at least protecting and aiding Assad in his war crimes. So, while I agree with Russia's three purposes for the proposed airstrikes, I also agree with the USA that it should *not* partner with Russia in airstrikes.

21 May 2016: 85th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 9 ceasefire violations have been registered (Damascus province — 7, Aleppo province — 2).

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, carried out mortar shelling against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Mayda, Duma, Zibdin and Jaubar (Damascus province). Moreover, militants have performed mortar shelling against Harasta al-Basal quarter of the Syrian capital and al-Sahia, Haush al-Hayat inhabited areas.

Militants of Jaysh al-Islam units carried out mortar shelling against al-Asad and al-Zagra quarter of Aleppo.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down. Within last 24 hours, Sheikh Maqsood, Halidiyah and Salah al-Din quarters of Aleppo have been shelled with multiple launch systems and mortars. Handrat and Hailan (Aleppo province) have been shelled for several times either.

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

On 22 May at 06:00 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in Syria during 21 May.

22 May 2016: 86th day of ceasefire

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

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 8 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Damascus province.

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam fired with mortars and small arms against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Arbil, Harasta, Hutayta al-Jarash, Mayda, Duma and Haush Harabu inhabited areas. Masakid Barza and Basatin Abu Jarash sectors of Damascus have been shelled with multiple rocket launch systems and mortars.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down. Within last 24 hours, Handrat inhabited area, al-Nairab airfield, Sheikh Maqsood, al-Ramusty and Halidia sectors of Aleppo have been shelled with multiple rocket launch systems and mortars.

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

Reuters reported an ultimatum from the U.S.-supported Free Syrian Army (FSA) to end the ceasefire:

Mainstream Syrian rebel groups said on Sunday [22 May] they would no longer abide by a threadbare "cessation of hostilities" deal unless the Syrian army ended a major assault on their positions in the suburbs of Damascus within 48 hours.

A statement by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) signed by nearly 40 rebel groups that operate across Syria said they would deem the ceasefire as having "totally collapsed" if the assault by Syrian government and allied Lebanese Hezbollah forces fighters did not cease within two days.

The signatories, who include Western- and Turkish-backed groups operating on the main frontlines in northern and southern Syria, said that once the two-day period had ended, rebels would respond with "all the legitimate means to defend the civilians living in these areas".

Syrian forces and allied fighters seized an extensive area southeast of the capital on Thursday [19 May]. The rebel-held town of Daraya, located just a few kilometres (miles) from President Bashar al-Assad's Damascus palace, was also pounded for the first time since the broader "cessation of hostilities" accord, which took effect at the end of February.

....

Rebel brigades were considering withdrawing from a "futile political process", they said, which "gives legitimate cover to continue the crimes and massacres by the criminal Assad regime and its allies."

The Syrian army stopped extending the cessation of hostilities this month after accusing rebels of violating the agreement by firing at government-controlled residential areas.

....

Major power foreign ministers meeting in Vienna failed last week [17 May] to revive the ceasefire or set a new date to resume Syrian peace talks.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "FSA rebels to Syrian army — End assault in 48 hours or truce finished," [Reuters](#), 15:54 GMT, 22 May 2016.

Agence France-Presse wrote about the FSA declaration:

Rebel groups Sunday [22 May] set a 48-hour deadline for the US and Russian sponsors of a February ceasefire in Syria's conflict to halt a regime offensive in the Damascus region.

"We are giving the sponsors of the ceasefire 48 hours to rescue what remains of the accord and to force the criminal regime of (President Bashar al-) Assad and his allies to completely and immediately halt their brutal offensive against Daraya and Eastern Ghouta," 29 rebel groups said in a statement.

"In view of the regime's offensive against all the liberated regions, in particular Daraya... we consider the ceasefire accord to have totally collapsed," the groups said.

"Rebel groups will take all possible measures and respond with all means to defend our people and on all fronts until the regime totally halts its offensives against all liberated regions, especially Daraya, and pulls back to its pre-May 14 positions," they said.

Syria's army, backed by Lebanon's Shiite militia Hezbollah, on Thursday [19 May] recaptured the town of Deir al-Assafir and nine nearby villages in the Damascus region, taking advantage of clashes in the Eastern Ghouta area between rival rebel groups Jaish al-Islam and Faylaq al-Rahman which were among those listed on the joint statement.

"Rebels give US, Russia 48 hours to end Assad assault," [Al-Arabiya](#), 18:57 GMT, 22 May 2016.

So where is John Kerry, when the rebels he supports are threatening to end the ceasefire that Kerry helped create in February? Kerry is in Burma (now called Myanmar) on 22 May. On 22-25 May Kerry will be in Vietnam. [U.S. State Dept.](#) There is no crisis in either Burma or Vietnam, but there is a huge crisis in Syria. The parties to the Syrian civil war did *not* get the

message from the ISSG meeting in Vienna on 17 May, and the ceasefire in Syria continues to be violated. In particular, Assad's assault on Rastan on 18 May, and Assad's assault on Ghouta on 19 May show that Assad did *not* get the message.

Reuters reported:

Air strikes hit the only road into rebel-held areas of Aleppo city on Sunday [22 May] in the heaviest bombing since February, a rebel official and monitors said, jeopardising access where around 300,000 Syrians live.

Russian warplanes carried out the attacks on the Castello road, which was still open but dangerous, the official and monitors said. Defence officials from Syria's government and its ally Russia could not immediately be reached for comment.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights group said the road was hit in a week of escalating air strikes, with Sunday's attack the most intense yet.

Tom Perry & Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Heavy air strikes hit rebel road to Syria's Aleppo - monitor, rebels," [Reuters](#), 21:13 GMT, 22 May 2016.

23 May 2016: 87th day of ceasefire

On Monday, 23 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

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

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, fired with mortars and small arms against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Arbil, Duma and Zibdin as well as against Basatin Abu Jarash sector of Damascus.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

Within last 24 hours, fire with multiple rocket launch systems and mortar has been performed against Handrat and Hailan inhabited areas, al-Nairab airport, and Sheikh Maqsood, Kariyat al-Ansari and Halidiya sectors of Aleppo.

Near Aleppo, leaders of Jabhat al-Nusra are finishing forming a strike grouping (more than 6,000 militants) in order to block the government troops in the city by striking from the south and cut off the corridor to Nubol city in the north.

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

On 23 May, there were a series of seven bombings by ISIL in Tartous and Jableh, two coastal cities that are controlled by Assad. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 148 dead. Russia has a naval base in Tartous and Russia's airbase is 5 km from Jableh. [Associated Press](#)(16:06 GMT); [Reuters](#)(21:32 GMT); [Al-Arabiya](#)(20:05 GMT). And

[SANA](#) reports that "a suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance of emergency department at Jableh National Hospital." Although [Reuters](#) reports that ISIL claimed responsibility for the bombings, a later report by [SANA](#) blamed Ahrar al-Sham ("Ahrar al-Cham") and their sponsors in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar. On 24 May, the death toll in the seven bombings rose to 161 dead. [Associated Press](#).

At 20:46 GMT on 23 May, [Reuters](#) reported: "Russian defense ministry said on Monday it has called for a 'regime of calm' in Syria's Eastern Ghouta region and the town of Daraya for 72 hours, starting on Tuesday [24 May]." This is apparently a response to the FSA's demand on 22 May to either stop the fighting or the Cessation of Hostilities is finished. At 01:15 GMT on 24 May, there was *no* mention of the "regime of calm" at the Syrian Arab News Agency website, and there was also *no* mention of the "regime of calm" in the daily report by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

On 23 May, the [website](#) of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights displayed a "This account has been suspended" message from their webhosting service.

On 23 May, the deputy spokesman for the U.S. State Department, Mark Toner, issued a press statement that said in part:

We also call for an end to the Asad [sic] regime's escalating attacks on Aleppo and Daraya, as well as its besiegement of towns and obstruction of humanitarian access. These actions demonstrate a disregard for the Cessation of Hostilities, UN Security Council Resolution 2254, and efforts to advance a political solution to the conflict, as well as its own commitments to facilitate full access for humanitarian relief supplies. Secretary Kerry raised these concerns in a call with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov earlier today and urged him to press the regime to cease at once airstrikes against opposition forces and innocent civilians in Aleppo and the Damascus suburbs.

Russia has a special responsibility in this regard to press the regime to end its offensive attacks and strikes that kill civilians, immediately allow relief supplies, as determined solely by the UN, to reach all in need, and to comply completely with the Cessation of Hostilities, so that political talks aimed at ending the crisis have a chance to succeed. Such a solution will allow all parties to focus on the shared threat posed by Da'esh and other terrorists.

Mark C. Toner, "Da'esh Attacks in Jabla and Tartus and Regime Offensive Actions in Syria," [U.S. State Dept](#), 23 May 2016.

Later on 23 May, the deputy spokesman for the U.S. State Department, Mark Toner, said at his daily press briefing:

QUESTION [by Arshad Mohammed of Reuters]: What makes you — you say that the Secretary urged Foreign Minister Lavrov in a phone call today to put pressure on the Syrian Government to cease its offensive attacks on civilians. What makes you think they're — that the Russians are (a) actually going to do that today, and (b) that it would actually have any effect on the Syrians if they did?

MR TONER: Well, it's a fair question, Arshad. Also, as you noted, we've seen a deterioration over this weekend, and as we mentioned in our statement, given the

Assad regime's attempt to seize territory in the besieged Damascus suburb of Darayya. As we came out of the ISSG last week, Russia was there, obviously, and signed onto what was among all the members of the ISSG a reaffirmation and agreement to strengthen and put in place the cessation of hostilities.

And by doing that — and we've talked about this a lot — and all of this, what happens in — happened in Vienna last week was only words on paper, but where the rubber hits the road is their ability to influence the parties on the ground. It's incumbent on us and others, parts of the ISSG, to put that pressure on the opposition forces. But it's incumbent on Russia and to a certain extent Iran to put that pressure on the regime, and we haven't seen it. And we're very concerned that we've, frankly, if anything, seen an uptick in violence over the weekend, and we're fully aware of the fragility of the cessation of hostilities. And frankly, we're working and engaging with Russia to try to reinforce it and try to put it back in place.

QUESTION: But what makes you think — since you said that we haven't seen it, and clearly, when you say we haven't seen "it," you're referring to Russian pressure on the Syrian Government, correct?

MR TONER: Or, rather — or —I mean, there's two parts to that. There's (a) whether Russia is applying the kind of pressure necessary and (b) whether the regime is even listening.

QUESTION: Are they applying pressure, to your knowledge?

MR TONER: They have conveyed that they are. And again, I don't want to speak for — on behalf of the Russian Government. That's for them to speak to. But again, they were in Vienna last week. They took part in the ISSG. They even took part — Foreign Minister Lavrov — in a joint press avail with Secretary Kerry. In all of that they expressed their commitment to implementing this.

....

MR TONER: Or why they'll change their pattern? Look, I think what we're seeing on the ground — and I am hesitant to wade too much into operational details, but clearly what we're seeing is an attempt by the Assad regime to gain tactical advantage. That they're doing it with airstrikes, that they're attacking civilians in the process is, frankly, barbaric, but we believe that that's what they're doing.

And so what we're looking to is to see whether Russia is able to, again, provide the necessary pressure, influence, whatever you want to say or however you want to call it, in order to get them to reconsider the fact that, if this keeps up, we may be looking at a complete breakdown of the cessation. And I think all sides will agree that the cessation of hostilities did bring about a credible reduction in the level of violence, allowed humanitarian assistance to get into all besieged areas — or not all besieged areas, some besieged areas; let me rephrase that — and frankly, as we've said many times, sets the kind of environment we need in order for negotiations to begin again in Geneva.

QUESTION: Just one last one from me on this.

MR TONER: Yeah, sure.

QUESTION: You said, "If this keeps up, we may be looking at a complete breakdown of the cessation" of hostilities. When you say "this," you're referring specifically to —

MR TONER: Continued attacks and violations by the Assad regime of the ceasefire, or the cessation.

Daily Press Briefing, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 23 May 2016.

24 May 2016: 88th day of ceasefire

On Tuesday, 24 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

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

"Silence regime" has been established in Eastern Ghuta and Darayya (Damascus province) since 12 p.m. [should be "a.m."] May 24 and will last for 72 hours.

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, fired with mortars and small arms against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Duma, Haush Harabu, Haush al-Farah, Jaubar and Ziblin (Damascus province).

Kermel (Latakia province) has been shelled with multiple launch rocket systems.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

Within last 24 hours, shelling with MLRS and mortars has been performed against Handrat inhabited area and Sheikh Maqsood, Salah al-Din and Halidiya sectors of Aleppo.

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

The "silence regime" began at midnight on Monday, 23 May, which is 00:00 on 24 May, sometimes called 12 a.m. In the above-quoted Russian bulletin, it was erroneously written as 12 p.m., which is noon.

At 10:31 GMT on 24 May, the RIA-Novosti English-language website had their first mention of the "regime of calm" that Russia declared at night on 23 May.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) on Tuesday [24 May] accused the Syrian government of violating the period of silence in the Damascus suburbs of Darayya and Eastern

Ghouta.

On Monday [23 May], the head of the Russian Reconciliation Center in Syria urged the introduction of a “period of silence” in Ghouta and Darayya for three days starting on Tuesday. Russia also urged moderate opposition forces to withdraw from areas held by the Nusra Front terrorist group, which will continue to be targeted by Russian airstrikes.

"Within the first hour of the 'silent period', government troops violated it by trying to capture one area under opposition control, but were repelled with fire and retreated. After that, they opened machine gun fire and fired surface-to-surface missiles on the given stretch of the frontline," an FSA statement, obtained by RIA Novosti, said.

Such actions indicate the lack of a serious approach by the Syrian government to maintaining the period of silence, the statement added, accusing international mediators for government actions and vowing to end the ceasefire if the situation deteriorates.

"Free Syrian Army Blames Government for Breaking 'Silent Period' in Damascus," [RIA-Novosti](#), updated 10:59 GMT, 24 May 2016.

On 24 May, the Associated Press reported:

The Russian military says it has called for a 72-hour cease-fire in Syria between government and opposition forces in two Damascus suburbs.

In a statement issued late Monday, Lt. Gen. Sergei Kuralenko says this would allow Russian war planes to carry out airstrikes against the Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of al-Qaida.

Kuralenko, who heads the Russian center monitoring joint efforts with the United States to curb the fighting, says the Russians have called for a "regime of silence" in Eastern Ghouta and Darayya starting at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday.

He says Moscow urges "all parties concerned to stop offensive operations and shooting and to distance themselves from the regions controlled by" the al-Qaida affiliate in Syria.

"The Latest: Russia denies losing helicopters at Syrian base," [Associated Press](#), 13:10 Beirut time, 24 May 2016.

On 25 May at 02:00 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in western Syria during 24 May. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights put its website back online at night on 24 May, but its most recent news stories are dated 18 May.

On 22 May, the Free Syrian Army and other rebel groups issued an ultimatum to stop the fighting within 48 hours, or the Cessation of Hostilities agreement would be finished. Their deadline expired on 24 May, and the Cessation is apparently still being honored by the Free Syrian Army.

25 May 2016: 89th day of ceasefire

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

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

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, fired al-Asad and al-Zagra sectors of Aleppo with mortars and small arms. Al-Halidia sector has been shelled too.

....

“Silence regime”, which had been established in Eastern Ghuta and Darayya inhabited area (Damascus province) since 12 p.m. [a.m.] May 24, is continued.

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

Within last 24 hours, shelling with multiple rocket launcher system and mortars has been performed against Handrat inhabited area, al-Nairab airport and Salah al-Din, Sheikh Maqsood sectors of Aleppo.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist formations shelled Fuah inhabited area (Idlib province), and Hakur Tahtani, Rusha and Haddada inhabited areas (Damascus province).

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

On the morning of 25 May, Agence France-Presse reported:

Two key opposition-controlled areas near Syria’s capital were relatively calm on Tuesday [24 May] after appeals by Russia for a temporary freeze in fighting there, a monitor and an activist told AFP.

Fierce fighting had been rocking the besieged opposition-held town of Daraya, southwest of Damascus, and in Eastern Ghouta, a large rebel bastion east of the capital.

But clashes subsided in both by Tuesday morning, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group.

“It has been quiet in both areas since dawn,” Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman told AFP.

Daraya-based activist Shadi Matar confirmed that the shelling and clashes that had shaken his hometown over the past two weeks had stopped.

“There was fighting around midnight but it stopped around 1:00 am on Tuesday and it’s been calm since then,” he told AFP. But he said fellow residents were skeptical that the quiet would hold.

"Calm near Syrian capital as fighting freezes," [Al-Arabiya](#), 05:39 GMT, 25 May 2016.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was offline again on 25 May. This time the Arabic-language homepage had an explanation in English:

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights apologize to our followers, about stopping our website in the next few days due to intense electronic attacks by several parties who didn't like what SOHR is publishing about the truth of what is going on in Syria, the website will be back online as soon as the maintenance is complete and the website is safe against such attacks.

[SOHR](#), 25 May 2016.

Reuters reported that Russia was postponing airstrikes on Nusra:

Russia's defense ministry said on Wednesday it was holding off from striking rebels with the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front to give other armed groups time to move away from Nusra positions. The ministry said in a statement it had received requests from multiple armed groups, mainly in Damascus and Aleppo, asking for a pause in air strikes.

Dmitry Solovyov, "Russia says holding off air strikes on Nusra Front in Syria," [Reuters](#), 09:41 GMT, 25 May 2016.

The Washington Post reported:

Russian news agencies carried a vague statement attributed to Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, a Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, declaring that unidentified Syrian opposition groups had asked Moscow to suspend attacks.

It said the rebel factions, including in Damascus and Aleppo, agreed to stop "provocative" shelling of government targets. In return, the statement said, Russia would suspend airstrikes for an unspecified period to allow the groups to "separate" from Jabhat al-Nusra.

....

Rebel fighters contacted by telephone, however, denied any communication with Russia, which began a campaign of airstrikes last fall on behalf of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Russian warplanes have dealt crippling blows to opposition forces.

....

"The Russian statement is totally inaccurate," said Qutaiba al-Dughaim, a fighter with the Northern Division rebel group. "None of the rebels in northern Syria have any contact with the Russians." He said the Russian announcement was an attempt to further divide Syria's fractured opposition.

Hugh Naylor, "Russia calls off attacks against Syria's al-Qaeda franchise," [Washington Post](#), 25 May 2016.

On 20 May, Russia threatened to unilaterally attack violators of the ceasefire, beginning 25 May. This threat has *not* materialized. Russia's benevolent postponement of attacks on Nusra *may* be a way of abandoning the 20 May threat.

26 May 2016: 90th day of ceasefire

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

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

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam fired al-Zagra, al-Halidiya, and al-Asad sectors of Aleppo with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

Within last 24 hours, fire with mortars and MLRS has been performed against Handrat inhabited area, al-Nairab airport, and Sheikh Maqsood, al-Halidiya, and Ashrafiya sectors of Aleppo.

Armed formations of Jabhat al-Nusra shelled Fuah (Idlib province), al-Zaka and Jubbain (Hama province), Ard al-Wara and Hakur Tahtani (Latakia province).

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

On 27 May at 05:40 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in Syria during 26 May.

27 May 2016: 91th day of ceasefire

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

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

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to opposition, fired against al-Halidia and al-Zagra sectors of Aleppo with multiple launch rocket system. The last one has been shelled twice.

“Silence regime” has been prolonged in Eastern Ghuta and Darayya (Damascus province) for 48 hours under approval of all concerned sides.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

Armed formations of Jabhat al-Nusra shelled Ard al-Wata, Hakur Tahtani and Haddada

(Latakia province); airport and al-Zaka, Hamamiyat, al-Rukeita (Hama province); eastern region of Manshiya sector (Daraa province). Jabhat al-Nusra formations have launched offensive from Khan al-Shikh and Zaakia, and have captured Deir Habiyah settlement.

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

The "silence regime" announced on the night of 23 May, which began at 00:00 on 24 May and lasted for three days, expired at midnight on 26 May. The "silence regime" was extended for 27-28 May.

On 28 May at 01:30 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any titles about attacks in Syria during 27 May.

28 May 2016: 92th day of ceasefire

On Saturday, 28 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

The ceasefire has been observed in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Within last 24 hours, 2 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Damascus province.

Formations of Jaysh al-Islam, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, fired with mortars against Marj al-Sultan inhabited area and positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Harasta village.

.....

"Silence regime", which had been prolonged for 48 hours, is continued in Eastern Ghuta and Darayya (Damascus province).

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down. Within last 24 hours, shelling with multiple launch rocket systems and mortars has been performed against Handrat inhabited area, al-Nairab airport and al-Halidiya, Sheikh Maqsood sectors of Aleppo.

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist formations shelled Rasha, Ard al-Wata and Kermel (Latakia province), and capital airport (Hama province).

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (May 28, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 28 May 2016.

On 29 May at 05:15 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any articles about attacks by jihadists in Syria during 28 May.

The website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was online again on 28 May. SOHR had a new report about the [death toll](#) in the Syrian civil war.

29 May 2016: 93th day of ceasefire

On Sunday, 29 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

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

Jaysh al-Islam formations have shelled Harastsa and Marj Sultan inhabited areas, and Masakid Barza sector with mortars and multiple launch rocket systems in the Damascus province.

Al-Zagra sector of Aleppo has been shelled with MLRS.

....

“Silence regime” is continued in Eastern Ghuta and Darayya (Damascus province).

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

Within last 24 hours, terrorists have performed shelling with mortars and MLRS against Handrat, al-Nairab airport, and Sheikh Maqsood, Meidan, and Salah al-Din sectors of Aleppo.

Terrorist formations of Jabhat al-Nusra shelled Fuah (Idlib province), capital airport (Hama province), Meshherfa (Homs province), Hakur Tahtani, Rasha, and Ard al-Wata (Latakia province).

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (May 29, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 29 May 2016.

On 30 May at 02:00 GMT, I searched the Associated Press and Reuters websites for news articles on Syria, but I did *not* see any articles about attacks by jihadists in Syria during 29 May.

On 29 May, Lavrov and Kerry had a telephone conversation. Lavrov asked Kerry to persuade the Turks to stop weapons shipments from Turkey to Syria, and also to stop new insurgents from traveling from Turkey to Syria. [RBTH](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [SANA](#). My comment is that Turkey has been *promising* for more than one year to seal its border with Syria, but Turkey has accomplished little. Sealing the border really needs to be done, but that route is also how the rebels and jihadists — who are supported by the USA and its allies, including Turkey — obtain their munitions. Moreover, the USA needs continued access to the Incirlik airbase in Turkey, so the USA can not make demands on Turkey.

30 May 2016: 94th day of ceasefire

On Monday, 30 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

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

last 24 hours, 2 ceasefire violations have been registered in the Damascus province.

Jaysh al-Islam formations, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, have performed mortar shelling against Harastsa and Ibn al-Walid health resort located in the Dahiyat al-Asad city sector.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down.

In the Aleppo province, Sheikh Maqsood, Meidan, al-Khalidiya city sectors, al-Nairab airport, and Handrat village have been shelled with improvised artillery and mortars.

Terrorists have also shelled Rasha (Latakia province), Haush Harabu (Damascus province), and an airport (Hama province).

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (May 30, 2016)," [Russia MoD](#), 30 May 2016.

At night on 30 May, the Associated Press reported:

A wave of air strikes on a rebel-held stronghold in northwest Syria Monday [30 May] night caused mass casualties and sparked fresh clashes.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group counted 10 air strikes on the city of Idlib in the evening, which it said killed at least 14 civilians, including three children. The group said it believed Russian jets were responsible.

....

The opposition Civil Defense, which carries out rescue operations, gave a much higher casualty figure, saying dozens were killed and hundreds wounded in the air strikes in which several hospitals were damaged. The group said it had deployed its entire Idlib corps to take part in rescue operations.

....

Idlib is under the control of the newly resurrected Army of Conquest coalition, which is dominated by ultraconservative insurgent groups and rebel factions. Al-Qaida's Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front, leads the coalition.

....

The [Army of Conquest] responded to the air strikes by shelling the nearby besieged towns of Foua and Kefraya, according to the Observatory. The two towns are seen as loyal to the government.

Bassem Mroue, "Air strikes pummel rebel-held city of Idlib," [Associated Press](#), 00:56 GMT, 31 May 2016.

Reuters tersely reported:

Heavy air strikes in Syria's rebel-held city of Idlib on Monday evening killed and injured more than 150 people, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The war monitor said it believed the planes were Russian.

"Heavy air strikes on Syria's Idlib kill and injure dozens — monitor," [Reuters](#), 03:00 GMT, 31 May 2016.

31 May 2016: 95th day of ceasefire

On Tuesday, 31 May, the bulletin issued by the Russian Ministry of Defense says:

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

Jaysh al-Islam formations, which had claimed to belong to the opposition, have performed mortar shelling against Ibn al-Walid health resort located in the Dahiyat al-Asad city sector as well as positions of the Syrian Armed Forces in Duma, Jaur al-Basha inhabited areas and in Jaubar twice.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra international terrorist organization continue performing provocative actions aimed at breaking the ceasefire down. Within last 24 hours, shelling with MLRS and mortars has been performed against Handrat inhabited area, Sheikh Maqsood, Amriyah sectors, north-eastern part of Ancient Aleppo sector, and al-Nairab airport.

Terrorists have shelled Rasha, Ard al-Wata and Kermel (Latakia province), Herbet al-Meri inhabited area and checkpoint of the Syrian troops near Kafr Nan (Homs province), Haush Harabu (Damascus province), and Jaba (al-Quneitra province).

Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists continue attacks against positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Muheim Handrat (Aleppo province). All the attacks have been repelled by the government troops and militia units.

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

Note that the Russian bulletins on 30-31 May did *not* mention the airstrikes on the city of Idlib, or anywhere in Idlib province.

On 31 May, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported:

Tens of people killed and injured — including children — in a massacre committed by Russian warplane when they targeted with more than 10 airstrikes the National Hospital area in Idlib, al-Jalaa' Park, Mutanabi roundabout area and other areas in the center of Idlib city[.] [T]he bombardment resulted in material damage, where the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights managed to document the death of 23 people at least, including 7 children and citizen women, and the death toll is expected to rise because there are some people in critical situation and because there still people

missing under the rubble,

"Russian warplanes carry out a massacre killing and injuring tens of people by targeting the city of Idlib," [SOHR](#), 31 May 2016.

On 31 May, the Associated Press reported:

A wave of late night airstrikes pummeled the northwestern Syrian city of Idlib, killing at least 23 people, wounding dozens and trapping several under the rubble of their homes, opposition activists said Tuesday [31 May].

At least seven children were among those killed in the strikes, said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group that relies on local activists.

The Observatory said Russia carried out the airstrikes on the city, which is controlled by several insurgent groups, including a local al-Qaida affiliate known as the Nusra Front, but Moscow denied any involvement.

"The Russian aviation hasn't performed any combat tasks, moreover hasn't conducted any airstrikes in the province of Idlib," the Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said in a statement Tuesday.

....

A Syria-based reporter for Al-Mayadeen TV, an Arab News channel based in Beirut, said the airstrikes targeted a Nusra Front meeting.

A Syrian opposition figure said the airstrikes "demolished" three centers for the Army of Conquest, a coalition of several militant factions including Nusra Front and the powerful ultraconservative Ahrar al-Sham group. The opposition figure said more than half of those killed in Idlib on Monday were fighters.

....

The Local Coordination Committees, another activist group that monitors the war, said the airstrikes hit two hospitals. It said 50 people were killed and over 200 were wounded. Different tolls are common in the aftermath of big attacks.

Bassem Mroue, "Airstrikes kill 23 in Syria, Russia denies involvement," [Associated Press](#), 14:49 GMT, 31 May 2016.

Reuters reported Russia denied its airplanes bombed Idlib:

Russia on Tuesday [31 May]denied its planes had conducted air strikes overnight against the Syrian rebel-held city of Idlib, which the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said had killed 23 people.

"Russian planes did not carry out any combat missions, to say nothing of any air strikes, in the province of Idlib," Igor Konashenkov, a Russian Defence Ministry spokesman, said in a statement.

"Russia denies it conducted fatal air strikes on Syria's Idlib," [Reuters](#), 12:38 GMT, 31 May

2016.

If it is true that Russia is innocent, then Assad's airplanes must have bombed Idlib. The insurgents have *no* airplanes. Turkey would not dare fly into Syria, where Russian anti-aircraft missiles are waiting for revenge for Turkey shooting down a Russian airplane on 24 Nov 2015.

As usual, the U.S. Government was clueless about what was happening with airstrikes in Syria. Obama's press secretary said:

QUESTION: On Syria, Syrian activists are reporting that Russian airplanes have been hitting a hospital in northern Syria and 50 people dead. Can you, first of all, confirm actually that it was the Russians who hit the hospital? And this is the second incident, I believe, in a short period of time. Do you still believe that the Russian motivation there is really fighting ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra?

MR. EARNEST: Well, let me start by saying that I cannot confirm those reports. Obviously I've seen them and we are following up on those reports. But if it is confirmed, this strike would be the latest in a series of strikes against medical facilities in Syria. The international community needs to get to the bottom of this and those who are responsible for these threats need to be held accountable.

So we'll continue to take a look at these reports. As it relates to Russia, we've continued to make clear that Russia needs to be onboard with implementing a Cessation of Hostilities. It means that they have specific obligations as it relates to their own activities, but it also means that it is incumbent upon them to use their influence with the Assad regime to get the Assad regime to abide by the Cessation of Hostilities. And that doesn't just mean in some particular corners of the country. That means in every area that's covered by the Cessation of Hostilities, including communities like Aleppo, Latakia and Idlib.

Josh Earnest, "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 5/31/2016," [White House](#), 31 May 2016.

Part of Earnest's response was quoted at [Reuters](#), 18:37 GMT, 31 May 2016.

On 31 May, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department, John Kirby, said at his daily press briefing:

QUESTION: No problem. Okay, let me go on to Syria. The Russians denied that they had any role or that they are responsible for the bombing in Idlib. Do you have any comment on that?

MR KIRBY: We're still looking into what happened in Idlib. I don't have — we don't have a great sense of complete knowledge here about who was responsible. Obviously, the images coming out of Idlib are very troubling. Obviously, the killing of innocent civilians is a violation of the cessation of hostilities, period, and we're going to continue to work closely inside the cessation of hostilities task force with the Russians to try to figure out what happened here, and then we'll take it from there.

But I can assure you that we're very focused on it. We've seen the images, same as you there, and we're going to do what we can to get to the bottom of it.

Daily Press Briefing, [U.S. State Dept.](#), 31 May 2016.

It seems that every time Russia or Syria conduct airstrikes in Syria on a hospital or civilians, the U.S. Government promises to investigate. Then these war crimes are forgotten, and — of course — *no* one is punished for violations of international law.

Finally, back on 20 May, Russia threatened unilateral airstrikes against Nusra Front. On 31 May, Lavrov said those airstrikes will begin this week (1-3 June) but he did not give a precise date. [RIA-Novosti](#).

Summary of Violations

The following table summarizes violations of the Cessation of Hostilities agreement, as reported by Russia — the only publicly available data on violations.

Event	dates	total violations/days	average violations/day
	18-25 March	43/8 days	5.4/day
	1-17 April	98/17 days	5.8/day
18 April: HNC walks out	18-29 April	94/12days	7.8/day
"silence regime"	1-8 May	64/8 days	8.0/day
9 May Reaffirmation			
	10-16 May	46/7 days	6.6/day
17 May ISSG meeting			
	18-23 May	46/6 days	7.7/day
"silence regime"	24-31 May	28/8 days	3.5/day

For comparison, I include violations during 18-25 March, a period with relatively few violations, when people were pleased with the ceasefire. This average from March may represent a minimum number of violations by the insurgents in Syria.

The number of violations per day reported by Russia does *not* tell the whole story, because Russia does *not* include violations by Assad and his allies, and because some violations are more atrocious than others. Note that the average number of violations/day reported by Russia during 1-17 April, when journalists were screaming about the ceasefire unraveling, is essentially the same as during 18-25 March, when everyone was pleased.

Note the increase in the average number of violations/day beginning on 18 April, when the HNC walked out of negotiations in Geneva and when Ahrar al-Sham began attacks in Latakia province. On 22 April, Jaysh al-Islam began attacks in Damascus province.

The number of violations per day declined during 24-31 May, when Russia imposed the "silence regime".

On 1 June 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) a total of 4927 deaths in Syria during May 2016, which is an average of 159/day. This death rate is much higher than the 86/day during March 2016 or 104/day during April 2016 (see my essay for [April 2016](#)). The death rate during May 2016 is similar to the death rates *before* the Cessation of Hostilities began on 27 Feb 2016.

U.N. Reports

On 22 Feb 2014, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139, which required parties in Syria to allow humanitarian aid and to stop targeting civilians. Although this Resolution was effective immediately, *all* of the parties in Syria ignored it. The U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, issued monthly Reports on the situation in Syria, beginning March 2014.

A list of all of the Secretary General's reports on Syria can be found at my [webpage](#), which has links to the original reports.

Prosecution for War Crimes ?

My essay for [March 2016](#) collected quotations from four monthly reports (Oct 2015 to Jan 2016) by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in which he called for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. All of his calls were ignored by the United Nations Security Council. The last time the Security Council attempted to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court was in May 2014 — two years ago — when Russia and China both vetoed the referral.

In Ban's monthly report in February 2016, he does *not* specifically mention referral to the International Criminal Court, but he does say something equivalent: "Such actions are reprehensible and may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. There must be accountability for these and other crimes." (S/2016/156 at ¶57.)

Ban's monthly reports in March and April 2016 mention *neither* war crimes, referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC), *nor* accountability. Ban may have stopped calling for referral to the ICC to avoid interfering with peace negotiations in Geneva, and/or because the cessation of hostilities agreement in Syria was proceeding.

On 6 May 2016 Ban's spokesman condemned bombing of civilians in Syria and said: "[Ban]

again urges the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court." (Full quotation in Cessation of Hostilities section, above. Original at [U.N.](#), 6 May 2016. Copy at [U.N. Press Release](#).)

Ban's monthly report issued on 19 May 2016 again says: "I reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court." (S/2016/460 at ¶48.) That same monthly report at ¶¶5-12, 47 described renewed fighting in Syria and especially mentioned attacks on civilians. And ¶¶21-40, 44-45, 48 of that report described interference by Assad's government with delivery of humanitarian aid, which greatly annoyed Ban.

In my opinion, the call for referral to the International Criminal Court is unlikely to solve any current problem. Assad and some of the insurgents have been defying international law for at least three years, and ignoring repeated threats of criminal prosecution. Russia and China are likely to veto any referral. *If* a referral occurs, it could take *more* than ten years to investigate and prosecute the alleged violations of international law. For example, Slobodan Milosevic was being tried in the Hague for crimes committed in Serbia during 1991-1998, when Milosevic died of natural causes in March 2006. Radovan Karadzic was found guilty on 24 March 2016 for war crimes during the 1990s. A third example, from a different forum (Extraordinary African Chambers), on 30 May 2016, Hissene Habre was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Chad during 1982-1990.

Secretary General called for end to munitions flow into Syria

Here, I summarize calls in 2013 and 2014 by the U.N. Secretary General for nations to stop sending munitions to Syria. Again, all of his calls were ignored. Stopping the flow of munition would have forced the insurgents to negotiate a surrender and ended the Syrian civil war.

On 14 June 2013, when the U.S. proposed to send weapons and munitions to rebels in Syria, the U.N. Secretary General reacted. "Mr Ban warned that there could be no military solution to the conflict and increasing the flow of arms to either side 'would not be helpful'." [The Independent](#) in the U.K.

On 24 Sep 2013, the U.N. Secretary General addressed the U.N. General Assembly and said: "I appeal to all States to stop fuelling the bloodshed [in Syria] and to end the arms flows to all the parties." ([U.N.](#), also see my [first essay](#)).

On 14 March 2014, in another speech to the U.N. General Assembly, the Secretary General said: "And I call for an end to the flow of arms and fighters that continues to fuel the violence. All those who persist in seeking a military solution are making a political solution even more distant and elusive." (see my essay for [March 2014](#)).

On 24 March 2014, the Secretary General's first report on Syria said: "I reiterate my firm opposition to the transfer of arms and fighters from outside the Syrian Arab Republic to

either side inside the country and call upon all States, organizations and groups to immediately cease supporting the violence and to use their influence to promote a political solution instead." (¶45 of S/2014/208).

On 23 April 2014, the Secretary General's second report on Syria said: "With the ever-increasing violence and extremism, I repeat my strong calls on all in the region and beyond to stop the flow of arms and fighters to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic." (¶49 of S/2014/295).

On 22 May 2014, the Secretary General's third report on Syria said: "Once again, I appeal to Governments in the region and beyond to stop the flow of arms and fighters to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic." (¶47 of S/2014/365).

On 20 June 2014, the Secretary General gave a speech that included:

.... But our fundamental objective — an end to the conflict — remains unmet. Divisions within Syria, the region and the international community, even within the United Nations and continued arms flows, continue to fuel the conflict.

....

It is essential to stem the flow of arms pouring into the country. It is irresponsible for foreign powers and groups to give continued military support to parties in Syria that are committing atrocities and flagrantly violating international principles of human rights and international law.

I urge the Security Council to impose an arms embargo. If divisions in the Council continue to prevent such a step, I urge countries to do so individually whatever they can to impose this arms embargo. Syria's neighbours should enforce a firm prohibition on the use of their land borders and airspace for arms flows and smuggling into Syria.

I recognize that an arms embargo at this time would risk freezing an imbalance in place, given the extent and capacity of the Syrian Government's weaponry. But the Syrian war cannot be won by military means. The sides will have to sit across from each other again at the negotiating table. The only question we can pose is how many more people must die before they get there?

Ban Ki-moon, "Secretary-General's address at The Asia Society: 'Crisis in Syria: Civil War, Global Threat'," [U.N.](#), 20 June 2014.

On 23 July 2014, the Secretary General's fifth report on Syria said: "I repeat my call for an arms embargo [to Syria]." (¶51 of S/2014/525).

On 21 August 2014, the Secretary General's sixth report on Syria said: "Once again, I appeal to the Governments of the region and to all those with influence to stop the flow of arms, fighters and resources to all parties to the conflict...." (¶52 of S/2014/611).

If Obama and the leaders of the Arab nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc.) who were sending munitions to insurgents in Syria had listened to the Secretary General, the civil war in Syria would have ended in 2014. More than 130,000 lives would have been saved. But

no one obeyed the Secretary General's calls to stop sending munitions into Syria.

Since mid-2011, Obama has continued his obsession with removing Assad as president of Syria, and leaders of other nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey) also continue their proxy war in Syria. However, their proxy armies have been unable to defeat Assad.

The United Nations Secretary General has become an *à la carte* cafeteria, in which nations select what they like, and ignore positions with which they disagree. It is all right to disagree with the Secretary General, but the disagreement should be *open* (i.e., public, *not* by silence) and with clearly expressed reasons. *Open* disagreement contributes to a dialogue and refinement of positions, and perhaps contributes to developing a consensus.

I mention the disagreement should be open, because Obama has been clandestinely supplying weapons and munitions to rebels in Syria through a secret CIA program that was exposed by:

- Mark Hosenball, "Obama authorizes secret support for Syrian rebels," [Reuters](#), 1 Aug 2012. ("The full extent of clandestine support that agencies like the CIA might be providing also is unclear.")
- Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Steps Up Aid to Syrian Opposition, Pledging \$60 Million," [NY Times](#), 28 Feb 2013. ("According to an official in Washington, who asked not to be identified, the C.I.A. since last year [2012] has been training groups of Syrian rebels in Jordan.")
- C.J. Chivers & Eric Schmitt, "Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid From C.I.A.," [NY Times](#), 24 March 2013.
- Greg Miller & Joby Warrick, "CIA preparing to deliver rebels arms through Turkey and Jordan," [Washington Post](#), 14 June 2013.
- Adam Entous, Julian E. Barnes, & Siobhan Gorman, "U.S. Begins Shipping Arms for Syrian Rebels," [Wall Street Journal](#), 27 June 2013.
- Ernesto Londono & Greg Miller, "CIA begins weapons delivery to Syrian rebels," [Washington Post](#), 11 Sep 2013.
- Greg Miller & Karen DeYoung, "Secret CIA effort in Syria faces large funding cut," [Washington Post](#), 12 June 2015. ("... funding of a secret CIA operation to train and arm rebels in Syria one the [CIA]'s largest covert operations, with a budget approaching \$1 billion a year.")

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.

On 4 May 2016, Reuters reported:

Russia has withdrawn around 30 aircraft from Syria, including all of its Su-25 attack planes stationed in the country, TASS news agency cited the Russian Defence Ministry as saying on Wednesday [4 May].

"Russia withdraws 30 aircraft from Syria: TASS cites defense ministry," [Reuters](#), 11:37 GMT, 4 May 2016.

On 4 May 2016, the Associated Press reported:

The Russian military says it has withdrawn about 30 aircraft from its base in Syria, including all of the Su-25 ground attack planes stationed there.

Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov gave no details Wednesday [4 May] about how many aircraft remained, saying only that it was precisely the number necessary for fighting the Islamic State group and the Syrian al-Qaida affiliate known as the Nusra Front.

President Vladimir Putin in March ordered the withdrawal of most of Russia's forces from Syria, without specifying how many aircraft would be pulled out or how many would remain.

Russia had deployed more than 50 jets and helicopters to its Hemeimeem air base on Syria's coast. The air campaign, which began Sept. 30, allowed Syrian President Bashar Assad's army to win back some key ground.

"THE LATEST: [on Syria's civil war]," [Associated Press](#), 17:15 Damascus time (14:15 GMT), 4 May 2016.

Debacle in Iraq

Death Toll in Iraq

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

I am no longer listing the Iraqi death toll on my HTML webpage, because the statistics from the Iraqi government are seriously incomplete and *not* credible. But, for what it is worth, the United Nations reported 867 Iraqis killed in terrorism, violence, and armed conflict during May 2016. [UNAMI](#).

Atrocities in Iraq

Introduction

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

- ISIL executed hundreds of captured Shiite soldiers in Mosul and Tikrit during 11-14 June 2014.
- ISIL *crucified* eight rebels near Aleppo in Syria on 28 June 2014.
- ISIL threatened genocide of Yazidis in Iraq during August 2014 and 20-22 Oct 2014.
- an attack on a Sunni mosque in Iraq on 22 Aug 2014.
- ISIL executed captured Syrian soldiers in Raqqa, Syria in August 2014.
- Shiite militias in Iraq are murdering innocent Sunnis (reports: 14 Oct 2014, 26 Jan 2015).
- ISIL burned alive al-Kasasbeh, a pilot in the Jordanian Air Force, (see my essay for [Feb 2015](#)).
- ISIL in Libya beheaded 21 Christians on 15 Feb 2015.
- and — beginning with my essay for [Oct 2014](#) — I documented some of the car bombs in Iraq that killed large numbers of people, most commonly in or near Baghdad.

May 2016: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 1 May, ISIL detonated a car bomb in Samawa, a town 230 km south of Baghdad. At least 31 people were killed. Reuters reported that, as rescuers arrived, ISIL detonated a second car bomb, which killed rescuers. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Attacking rescuers is the same Islamic value that Assad shows when he bombs hospitals and medical clinics (and the civil defense building in Aleppo on 26 April).

On 2 May, an ISIL car bomb in Baghdad killed at least 18 Shiite pilgrims. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 8 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported that 4 attacks in or near Baghdad had killed at least 12 people.

On 9 May, [Reuters](#) reports that an ISIL car bomb in Baquba killed at least 16 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 11 May, an ISIL car bomb detonated in a Shiite district of Baghdad and killed at least 63 people. An ISIL suicide car bomb at a police station in Baghdad killed at least 18 people. And a third ISIL bomb in northern Baghdad killed at least 7 people. Later, the combined death toll from the second and third bombs reached at least 30 people. [Associated Press](#) at 19:29 GMT. These three bombings constitute the deadliest day in Baghdad so far in 2016. [Reuters](#) at 17:21 GMT. On 12 May, the final death toll was 68 dead in the first bomb, and at least 30 dead in the following two bombings. [Associated Press](#).

On 12 May, two suicide bombers detonated in a police station in western Baghdad, killing 5 policemen. [Associated Press](#).

On 13 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported that three ISIL gunmen with machine guns entered a cafe in the town of Balad, 80 km north Baghdad. When police arrived, two of the gunmen detonated their suicide bomb vests. When they were finished, at least 13 people were dead. [Reuters](#).

On 14 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported that "at least 14 suicide attackers broke into [a residential and government] complex at dawn" in Amiriyat Fallujah, which is 20 kilometers south of the city of Fallujah. Amazingly, only 6 people were killed in the attack. Agence France-Presse reports 8 suicide bombers, of whom 5 were killed by police and 3 detonated. [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 15 May the [Associated Press](#) reported that at dawn ISIL attacked a natural gas plant in the town of Taji, 20 km north of Baghdad, killing at least 14 people. A car bomb in the town of Latifiyah, 30 km south of Baghdad, killed 7 people. In Baghdad, three bombs killed a total of at least 8 people. The total of the five attacks was 29 dead. [Reuters](#) reported on the attack on the gas plant.

On 17 May at 13:57 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) reported the good news that work had resumed at the natural gas plant that was attacked two days earlier. But then a series of four bombs detonated in Baghdad, killing a total of at least 69 people:

1. "In Baghdad's northeastern Shaab neighborhood a roadside bomb first exploded outside the concrete blast walls surrounding the open-air market, followed by a suicide bomber who blew himself up as people gathered to help the victims of the first explosion". 34 dead, more than 75 wounded.
2. "a parked car bomb struck a fruit-and-vegetable market in the Shiite-dominated neighborhood of Dora, in southern Baghdad, killing eight people and wounding 22 others".
3. "In Baghdad's sprawling eastern Shiite district of Sadr City, a suicide car bombing hit a crowded outdoor market, killing 18 people and wounding 35 others."
4. "In northeast Baghdad, a suicide bomber targeted a restaurant in the Habibiya neighborhood, killing nine and wounding 18."

On 17 May at 18:57 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported at least 77 dead.

On 30 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported three ISIL bombs — two in Baghdad and one in Tarmiyah, 50 km north of Baghdad — killed a total of at least 24 people.

Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

During 8-17 May, journalists reported a long string of ISIL suicide bombings in Iraq. From

those reports, it appears that there was a large series of ISIL attacks. But journalists are inconsistent in reporting terror attacks in Iraq, and attacks that kill only a few people are ignored.

For example, my essay for [April 2016](#) cites news articles for a total of 76 people dead in terrorist attacks in Iraq, but the [U.N.](#) reported 232 civilians died in Baghdad province alone, and 410 civilians died in all of Iraq, during April. Clearly, journalists are reporting only a small fraction of the deaths from terrorism in Iraq.

For example, my essay for May 2016 (above) cites news articles for a total of 329 people dead in terrorist attacks in Iraq, but the U.N. reported 468 civilians died in all of Iraq, during May.

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

No Criminal Prosecution of Iraqi Army Officers

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

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

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

On 18 June 2014, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan reports that the four dismissed officers are "Lt. Gen. Mahdi al-Gharawi, his deputy Maj. Gen. Abdul Rahman al-Handal Mahdi, and chief of staff Brigadier General Hassan Abdul Razzaq Ghazi", along with one Kurdish officer, Brigadier General Hidayat Abdul Karim. Rudaw reports that only the Kurd will be charged in military court, the other three were dismissed but not criminally charged.

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

2014, as mentioned above, Maliki finally sacked Gharawi.

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

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

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

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

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

- [Washington Post](#) ("... Maliki, who has been widely accused of promoting officers based on loyalty rather than merit.");
- [Washington Post](#) ("[U.S. officials] say [Maliki] assigned commanders on the basis of sectarian loyalty, diminishing military capabilities and undermining morale.");
- [Associated Press](#) ("Many have blamed the army's poor performance on al-Maliki, saying he replaced top officers with inexperienced or incompetent political allies in order to monopolize power.");
- [Christian Science Monitor](#) ("These [sectarian policies] fostered the promotion of incompetent Shiite officers on the basis of loyalty to Maliki, and a military culture filled with greed and corruption.");
- [Politico](#) ("... [Maliki] systematically purged the most capable senior officers from the Iraqi Army and replaced them with Shiite cronies who were personally loyal to him, but were incompetent — and, under fire, proved to be cowards.");
- [CNN](#), ("As then Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki tightened his grip on power between 2006 and 2013, the high command of the Iraqi military became a political football — with loyalty to al-Maliki prized above competence.");
- [Washington Post](#) (General Petraeus: "The proximate cause of Iraq's unraveling was the increasing authoritarian, sectarian and corrupt conduct of the Iraqi government and its leader [Maliki] after the departure of the last U.S. combat forces in 2011.").

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

On 13 April 2015, Abadi involuntarily retired more than 300 Iraqi army officers. Abadi gave

no public explanation for the retirements. [Rudaw](#); [Daily Star](#)(AFP).

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

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

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

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

No Prosecution for Fall of Mosul

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

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

On 1 June 2016, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Mosul" after 21 August 2015, but I found no news about the investigation and prosecution of these suspects. I am concerned that the Iraqi Judiciary will "forget" to investigate and prosecute those who ordered the Iraqi army to flee from Mosul in June 2014.

No Prosecution for Rout at Ramadi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 1 June 2016, I searched Google News for the query "Iraq prosecution Ramadi" after 21 August 2015, but I found no news about the prosecution of the Iraqi army commanders who ordered the army to flee from Ramadi.

No Criminal Prosecution for Employing "Ghost Soldiers"

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

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

Ahmed al-Sharifi, an Iraqi political analyst, cited corruption as a major reason why the

Iraqi army performed poorly in Ramadi. He estimated that there were as many as 23,000 “ghost soldiers” on the government payroll in the province — people listed as drawing salaries but who were not actually performing military service. The actual number of soldiers who fought to defend Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, was closer to 2,000, he said.

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

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

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

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

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

Iraq is a Failed Nation

Introduction

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

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

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions the Iraqi government is 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.

My essay for [April 2016](#) chronicled Abadi's attempt to reformulate the ministers in Iraq to reduce corruption. But Abadi's new ministers need to be approved by the Iraqi parliament, which does *not* want to disrupt their personal enrichment and power. The Iraqi parliament refused to vote on Abadi's proposals during April.

May 2016

On 30 April 2016, Iraqi protesters from cleric al-Sadr stormed the Iraqi parliament building. The protesters departed the following day. [Reuters](#). The [Associated Press](#) reports their departure was owing to (1) concerns about Shiite pilgrims arriving in Baghdad and (2) recent ISIL terrorist bombings of civilians in Iraq. If parliament fails to approve both Abadi's proposed reforms and new ministers by 7 May, the protesters will return.

On 6 May, [Reuters](#) reported that the Iraqi security forces blocked roads leading to the Green Zone in downtown Baghdad, to prevent protesters from again demonstrating at the parliament building.

Let's do a quick review of this disgusting failure of the Iraqi parliament. Back on 31 March 2016, prime minister Abadi nominated a new set of ministers, in an attempt to reduce corruption at the highest levels of the Iraqi government. The Iraqi parliament was supposed to vote on Abadi's proposals within 10 days (i.e., by 10 April). [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). For a day-by-day description, see my essay for [April 2016](#). The Iraqi parliament procrastinated, and met infrequently, so that on 11 May the parliament still had *not* voted on all of Abadi's proposals. Worse, journalists are *not* reporting daily activity in the parliament, and protests by citizens disbanded on 1 May, so there is *no* pressure on the Iraqi parliament to vote.

On 12 May 2016, political protests resumed in the Sadr City district of Baghdad. Reuters reports that "Lawmakers scuffled inside the chamber a month ago and have not convened a session since Sadrist demonstrators stormed the parliament building" on 30 April. [Reuters](#).

On 17 May 2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "Parliament has not met for more than two weeks after supporters of influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr stormed Baghdad's highly fortified Green Zone." [Reuters](#) reported: "A power struggle within Iraq's Shi'ite Muslim majority has intensified as attempts to form a new government flounder, threatening to turn violent and ruin U.S.-led efforts to defeat Islamic State." Reuters says rival Shiite militia, each armed with rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns, almost fought each other on 30 April, when followers of Sadr the cleric stormed the parliament building.

On 20 May 2016, thousands of protesters stormed the Green Zone in Baghdad, where the parliament and prime minister's office are located. The Iraqi security forces fired tear gas and bullets at the protesters, injuring at least dozens of people. *The Washington Post* reported 617 people were taken to hospitals, mostly "from inhaling tear gas." [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#). Reuters said: "Parliament has not convened since [30 April], crippling government as it grapples with an economic crisis brought on by low oil prices and an Islamist insurgency that constitutes the biggest security threat to the OPEC oil producer since a U.S.-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003."

On 21 May at 09:57 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported that at least 4 protesters were killed and more than 90 injured by bullets in the protest on 20 May. There were additional casualties caused by tear gas.

My comment is that shooting unarmed protesters reminds me of Assad's overreaction to protests in March 2011. Assad's overreaction began the Syrian civil war. The real problem is a do-nothing Iraqi parliament that is blocking reforms, *not* the protesters. Furthermore, one wonders what Obama is thinking now about the so-called "national unity government" in Iraq that Obama has praised on many occasions, beginning in Dec 2010.

On 26 May, Abadi asked Iraqis to stop protesting in Baghdad, so that the army could concentrate on fighting ISIL in Fallujah. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). But on Friday, 27 May, thousands of protesters arrived in Tahrir Square in Baghdad. Security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets to repel the protesters. [Voice of America](#); [Rudaw](#).

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 3 May, U.S. Navy Petty Officer First Class Charles Keating IV was killed by ISIL during a firefight. Keating was part of a quick reaction force who was called in to assist U.S. Military personnel who were advising the Peshmerga near Erbil. Keating was the third U.S. Military man to be killed by ISIL in Iraq during the past seven months. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#). On 4 May, Col. Warren described the circumstances in which Keating was killed. [Pentagon](#).

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 between 9 February 2016 and 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.

May 2016: Ramadi liberated and uninhabitable

My essays for [Feb 2016](#), [March 2016](#), and [April 2016](#) tersely mention the destruction of Ramadi and the large number of remaining ISIL explosive devices. Iraq can *not* afford either to rebuild Ramadi or to remove the explosive devices, making Ramadi uninhabitable for the foreseeable future.

On 5 May, the Associated Press reports that much of Ramadi was destroyed during the liberation from ISIL.

This is what victory looks like in the Iraqi city of Ramadi: In the once thriving Haji Ziad Square, not a single structure still stands. Turning in every direction yields a picture of devastation.

....

The scope of the damage is beyond that in other Iraqi cities recaptured so far from the jihadi group. Photographs provided to The Associated Press by satellite imagery and analytics company DigitalGlobe show more than 3,000 buildings and nearly 400 roads and bridges were damaged or destroyed between May 2015, when Ramadi fell to IS, and Jan. 22, after most of the fighting had ended.

....

.... When IS fighters withdraw, they leave an empty prize, blowing up buildings and wiring thousands of others with explosives. The bombs are so costly and time-consuming to defuse that much of recently liberated Iraq is now unlivable.

....

In January, after IS was pushed out of Ramadi, thousands of families returned to their

homes. But residents have since been barred from coming back because dozens of civilians died from IS booby traps.

Susannah George, Desmond Butler, & Maya Alleruzzo, "Iraq routed IS from Ramadi at a high cost: A city destroyed," [Associated Press](#), 5 May 2016.

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 2015 do *not* mention progress in liberating Fallujah. (There was *no* briefing around 7-8 October 2015.) His briefings for 4, 13, 18, 24 November 2015 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.

May 2016: Fallujah

So what's happening in Fallujah? Beginning in January 2016, 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); [BBC](#)(10 May); [Reuters](#)(27 May).

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).

On Sunday night, 22 May 2016, Abadi gave a televised speech in which he announced that the liberation of Fallujah would begin. Reuters reported that Abadi declared: "The moment of great victory has drawn near and Daesh has no choice but to flee." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 23 May, the Iraqi army began an assault on Fallujah. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 24-25 May, ISIL was refusing to allow at least 50,000 civilians in Fallujah to leave the city, because ISIL wants to use the civilians as "human shields". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Every day, beginning 17 May, U.S.-led Coalition airplanes bombed ISIL in or near Fallujah. U.S. troops are advising the Iraqi army about the liberation of Fallujah. Then, on 23 May, Iranian General Qassem Soleimani visited Shi'ite militias in Fallujah to give his advice on how to liberate Fallujah. On 28 May, Sunni politicians in Iraq objected to Soleimani's visit. [Reuters](#); [Asharq Alawsat](#).

On 29 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported that "Iraq's special forces completed a troop buildup around Fallujah on Sunday [29 May]". The AP also reported: "In a televised speech to parliament, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said the 'current second phase of the Fallujah operation' will last less than 48 hours, after which the offensive to recapture the city will begin."

On 30 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported Iraqi government "the troops had recaptured 80 percent of the territory around Fallujah" on 29 May. On the morning of 30 May the Iraqi troops began a push "into Fallujah from its southern edge".

On 31 May, ISIL attacked the Iraqi government troops in a four-hour battle in southern Fallujah. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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](#).)

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](#).

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

Beginning in August 2014, I have included this section in my essays. In the USA and

Western Europe, many Christians do *not* personally know any Muslim person, so the only time these Christians encounter Muslims is in reading about atrocities of Islamic terrorists. That is a public relations problem for mainstream Muslims, as the reputation of the Islamic religion is besmirched by Islamic terrorists, who act in the name of their interpretation of Islamic theology.

Then some military leaders and politicians developed the notion that Muslim clerics needed to explain *why* so-called "Islamic terrorism" was unIslamic, to stop the flow of foreigners into Syria to fight for ISIL and Nusra Front, and to stop the financial support of terrorists. This exposure of the erroneous ideology of Islamic terrorism is a different kind of public relations problem from defending mainstream Islam.

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

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.) But beginning in September 2014, Muslim clerics stopped publicly denouncing terrorism. There needs to be a consistent and continuing condemnation of terrorism by Muslim clerics, in part to discourage young Muslims from joining Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

This continuing condemnation by Muslim clerics is *not* something that is nice to have. It is an essential element in fighting against Islamic terrorism. On 3 Dec 2014, sixty nations agreed that "ideological delegitimization" was one of five "lines of effort" that would be used to defeat ISIL, see my essay for [Dec 2014](#). However, this program was quickly ignored by nearly everyone.

In the context of the Islamic terrorist attack in Paris on 7-9 Jan 2015, my [essay](#) explains two different reactions by Christian politicians to Islamic terrorism:

1. Some Christian politicians have condemned Islamic terrorism as unIslamic, but I think it is inappropriate — and *not* credible — for Christians to say what is, or is not, proper Islam. Instead, such distinctions should come from Islamic clerics.
2. Other Christian politicians carefully refuse to make a connection between Islam and terrorism. This may be "politically correct", but it is factually wrong. The facts are obvious, but I will tersely review them anyway. Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

It is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics — and Islamic opinion leaders — consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government.

My Proposal

There are genuine cultural differences between mainstream Islam and Christianity. For example, Saudi Arabia does *not* issue driver's licenses to women. Women in Afghanistan wear a burqa. The effort here should *not* be to impose orthodoxy and make mainstream Islam more like Christianity. Instead, the effort here should be for Muslim clerics and other Muslim opinion leaders to cite their holy book and other theological documents to show that it is forbidden for Muslims to:

- invade nations in an attempt to spread an interpretation of Islam on other Muslims
- invade nations in an attempt to spread Islam on non-Muslims
- kill civilians (i.e., noncombatants)
- kill unarmed military prisoners
- deny water, food, and/or medical supplies to besieged cities
- impose a tax (i.e., Jizya) on non-Muslims
- sell captured women as sex slaves

In other words, the focus should be on defeating Islamic terrorism (e.g., Al-Qaeda and ISIL), and *not* on attacking mainstream Islam.

On 8 May 2015, I suggested creating hundreds of small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere to hire Arabs to counter propaganda from ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

I suggest that the U.S. government fund a hundred small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab nations to hire native speakers of Arabic-language to counter ISIL propaganda. Some of these employees could monitor social media and post counter-propaganda. Other employees could design websites that explain why ISIL is violating teachings of Islam, violating Fatwas, and list atrocities committed by ISIL. Using small companies (e.g., 30 employees per company) ensures that they are quickly adaptable to changing conditions. Using native speakers of Arabic adds authenticity. A few thousand Arabs might be able to swamp ISIL's propaganda operation.

There are millions of Arabs who have fled from their homes in Syria and Iraq, because of Islamic terrorists. Many of these refugees are either unemployed or have minimal income. Putting them to work countering propaganda on the Internet from Al-Qaeda or ISIL would not only help defeat Islamic terrorism, but also provide much needed income to refugees.

Standler, [Syria & Iraq: May 2015](#), 1 June 2015. See end of the section on the Terror Attack in Garland, Texas.

A manager would recognize that there are economies of scale, by having *one* central office to handle payroll, benefits, etc. And I have no problem with consolidating payroll in one central office that serves all of the small companies.

A manager would also recognize cost savings by purchasing equipment and Internet access in large quantities in *one* central office, to provide *all* of the small companies. Whoa! I want managers in each small company to be able to use a credit card to *quickly* purchase whatever

they need, without going through a central bureaucracy. There are security advantages when different companies use different computer operating systems, different webbrowsers, different antivirus and firewall software, and different Internet service providers. That way one computer virus, or one denial of service attack, will not affect all of the different companies.

I want the small companies to maximize creativity in attacking ISIL's message, and to maximize productivity. To do that, equipment costs would not be minimized.

I envision these small companies attacking ISIL and Al-Qaeda in four ways:

1. Collect and display truth about Islamic terrorism:

Create and operate websites that

- A. explain why ISIL and Al-Qaeda are violating teachings of Islam,
- B. collect and display Fatwas against ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- C. list atrocities committed by ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- D. hire Muslim clerics to write blogs or essays about how terrorism is evil.

Each website to have versions for Arabic, French, and English languages.

2. Social media: Monitor social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and refute propaganda. Cite URLs of websites that display truth about Islamic terrorism.

3. Produce press releases that can be published by newspapers or reported by radio/television stations.

4. Use ridicule and parody to humiliate ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

I have seen calls for Internet Service Providers to shut down websites that espouse Islamic terrorism. (See, e.g., plan for Europol to shut down ISIL's social media accounts.

[Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); 22 June 2015.) I am opposed to shutting down websites for three reasons:

1. First, if we shut down a website, the terrorists will move their webpages to a new location, making the shut-down efforts futile. The goal here is *not* to inconvenience Islamic terrorists, but to defeat Islamic terrorists. Shutting down websites only inconveniences the terrorists.
2. Second, shutting down websites that we do not approve is censorship. The terrorists will respond by saying Western Civilization can not win the debate in the marketplace of ideas, so Western Civilization simply censors unapproved messages.
3. Third, as Justice Brandeis famously said: "... the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence." *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 377 (1927) (concurring opinion).

In summary, Western Civilization *can* refute the arguments of Islamic terrorism. Winning the debate is the right way to defeat Islamic terrorism.

Need to Kill *Ideology* of Islamic Terrorism

The U.S. has killed several influential Islamic terrorists:

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).
- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.
- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).
- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.
- On 15 October 2015, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December 2015, 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".
- On 4 May 2016, Australia announced that a Cambodian immigrant who had joined ISIL had been killed by a U.S. airstrike in Mosul on 29 April. His name was Neil Prakash, also known as Abu Khaled al-Cambodi. Neil had been featured in ISIL recruiting videos. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [ABC](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#).
- On 9 May 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that an airstrike on 6 May had killed "Abu Wahib, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's military emir for Iraq's Anbar province". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 21 May 2016, the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, was killed by an airstrike from a U.S. drone in Pakistan. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). [Reuters](#) reported: "The death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour ... could further fracture the Taliban — an outcome that experts cautioned might make the insurgents even less likely to participate in long-stalled peace efforts." And [Reuters](#) reported the Pakistani government is wailing about the U.S. violation of Pakistani sovereignty. [Obama](#) was pleased that Mansour — also spelled Mansur — was killed by the U.S. military. Four days after Mansour was killed, the Taliban elected a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

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

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

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

Mullah Omar was the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 1996. Omar was reclusive and not seen in public since 2001. On 29 July 2015, there were unconfirmed reports that Omar had died in a hospital in Karachi, Pakistan in April 2013. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 30 July 2015, the reports were confirmed and the Taliban appointed a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Express Tribune](#) in Pakistan; [Associated Press](#). This example shows us how unimportant a leader is to a terrorist organization. The Taliban functioned successfully with a dead leader for more than two years! Journalists report that Omar's death may make peace negotiations more difficult, because some Taliban want to continue fighting. But — regardless of who leads the Taliban — there will be some Taliban who want to continue fighting, in the hope for a total victory.

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

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

ISIL is *not* defeated

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

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

8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan".

during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."

21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
- 25.

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

As of April 15, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$7.2 billion and the average daily cost is \$11.7 million for 617 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 10 May 2016.

Note that the number in the previous paragraph 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. The U.S. Government has probably spent a total of about three billion dollars in 2014, 2015, and 2016 to provide clandestine military support to the rebels in Syria (i.e., the U.S. proxy army in Syria).

Furthermore, the U.S. taxpayers pay for humanitarian aid for the people of Syria, who are starving as a result of the civil war that is supported by the USA, Russia, Iran, and Syria's neighbors. On 4 Feb 2016, the U.S. Government has spent a total of \$ 5.1 billion on humanitarian aid for Syria. [State Dept.](#)

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.

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.

1 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On April 30, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack and remotely

piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 26 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL mortar system and five ISIL bed down locations.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.
- Near Albu Hayat, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bayji, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Hit, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL anti-air artillery system, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) site, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL tunnel entrance, and an ISIL VBIED storage facility and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate large ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, four ISIL assembly areas, five ISIL vehicles, two ISIL VBIEDs, two ISIL mortar positions, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL bunker, and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL mortar systems, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, five ISIL heavy machine guns, four ISIL mortar systems, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike immobilized two ISIL excavators.

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

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

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

2 May 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 2 May 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and

Syria:

On May 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack, ground-attack and fighter 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, ground-attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Hawl, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Shadaddi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL staging areas and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL crane.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Fallujah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL weapons cache, five ISIL tunnel entrances, four ISIL bunkers, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL bunker, 12 ISIL boats, an ISIL fuel truck and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Hit, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kirkuk, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, two ISIL tunnel systems, three ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL command and control node, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tunnel system, and an two ISIL mortar systems.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL financial center and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed two ISIL machine guns and two ISIL mortar systems.

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

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

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

3 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted 25 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, ground-attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL finance center and an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bashir, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and four ISIL tunnel entrances.
- Near Bayji, two strikes destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL tunnel entrances and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Fallujah, six strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL tunnel entrances, two ISIL staging areas, an ISIL bed down location, an ISIL-used bridge, an ISIL medium machine gun and an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery piece.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, three ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL rocket rail, and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 19 ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL mortar position, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, 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](#), 3 May 2016.

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

4 May 2016: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 4 May 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq: On May 3, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Iraq. In Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes coordinated with and in support of the

Government of Iraq using ground-attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bashir, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised device (VBIED).
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL VBIED, two ISIL bed down locations, six ISIL tunnel entrances, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL improvised artillery piece, and degraded two ISIL trenches.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, 10 strikes struck nine separate ISIL tactical units, an ISIL headquarters and destroyed nine ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL heavy machine gun, three ISIL large machine guns, two ISIL weapons caches, four ISIL mortar systems, 17 ISIL vehicles, an ISIL bull dozer, two ISIL-used bridges, two ISIL VBIEDs, and an ISIL fuel truck.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL heavy machine gun.

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

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

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

5 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 4, 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 ground-attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck an ISIL logistics facility, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility and an ISIL ammunition storage center.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed two ISIL tunnel entrances.
- Near Fallujah, six strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL anti-aircraft artillery system, three ISIL tunnel entrances, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL weapons cache, and four ISIL bed down locations.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, three ISIL mortar positions, and four ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Mosul, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, one heavy machine gun, 10 ISIL mortar systems, three ISIL rocket rails, and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL vehicle, and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL weapons facility.

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

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

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

6 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 5, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using ground-attack and attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using ground-attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

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

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, five ISIL rocket rails, and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs).
- Near Bashir, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three

ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL tunnel entrance, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL-used bridge, and two ISIL rocket rails.

- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL vehicles, three ISIL tactical vehicles, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Makhmur, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL rocket rails and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL VBIEDs, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL improvised weapons facility and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL excavator and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

The three strikes in Al-Baghdadi were corrected to two strikes in the press release on 7 May, as the number of destroyed rocket rails declined from 5 to 3, owing to an error in reporting.

7 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 6, 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 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL command and control node, and ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and damaged an ISIL

fighting position.

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL boat, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bashir, one strike destroyed an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike damaged an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL communications facility and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL heavy machine gun and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

Additionally, on May 5, one strike was erroneously reported due to an administrative error. The correct assessment reads:

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL command and control node, three ISIL rocket rails, and an ISIL bunker.

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

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

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

8 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 7, 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 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Waleed, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL storage facility and an ISIL bed down location and damaged a storage facility and a bed down location.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and four ISIL rockets.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine position.
- Near Mosul, six strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL vehicles.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed 10 ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL light machine gun.

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

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

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

9 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 8, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Palmyra, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and three ISIL vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL fuel cache.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL weapons caches, 20 ISIL rockets, six ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL recoilless rifle, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL staging area, and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL rockets, six ISIL rocket rails, and an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

10 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 9, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 27 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL artillery piece, and an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes destroyed an ISIL tactical unit, three ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Al Huwayjah, four strikes struck an ISIL VBIED factory and destroyed an ISIL tunnel system and suppressed an ISIL mortar firing position and denied

ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL staging area, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Bashir, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 22 ISIL assembly areas, four ISIL supply caches, two ISIL heavy machine guns, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL bulldozer, three ISIL rocket rails, and an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL artillery pieces, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL bulldozer, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.

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

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

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

11 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using ground-attack, attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Waleed, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck an ISIL bed down location and destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive

- device (VBIED), two ISIL tunnel systems, and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.

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

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

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

12 May 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL staging facility and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and 12 ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Manbij, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL boat, an ISIL fighting position, and three ISIL staging areas.
- Near Bashir, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar position and two ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two strikes destroyed nine ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket system and an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

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

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

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

13 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 12, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack, fighter, bomber, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Manbij, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tamakh, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL bunker and damaged a separate ISIL bunker.
- ~~Near Waleed, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.~~

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Bashir, one strike denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed four ISIL tunnel systems and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles and five ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), five ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.

- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail, an ISIL vehicle, 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](#), 13 May 2016.

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

The airstrike at Waleed Syria is deleted, because it was an administrative error in reporting, as mentioned in the 14 May press release.

14 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack, fighter, 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 rocket artillery and 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 rocket rail.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ar Rutbah, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL headquarters, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility, and an ISIL staging facility.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL mortar system.

Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL tunnel system and an ISIL road-roller.

Additionally, on May 13, one strike was erroneously reported due to an administrative error. There were no strikes conducted near Waleed, Syria.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 14 May 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 14 May 2016.

In the 16 May press release, one additional airstrike is added to Iraq: "Near Albu Hayat [Iraq], one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility."

15 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 14, 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 nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL mortar system, six ISIL artillery pieces, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL assembly area, and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) storage facility and destroyed two ISIL boats.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL supply cache, two ISIL rockets, an ISIL vehicle, and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Waleed, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL mortar system, and three ISIL weapons storage facilities.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 15 May 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 15 May 2016.

16 May 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL financial headquarters.
- Near At Tanf, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and damaged an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL bunker, an ISIL front end loader, an ISIL artillery piece, and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and three ISIL assembly areas.

Additionally, on May 13, one strike [in Iraq] was not reported due to administrative error. Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) facility.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 16 May 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 16 May 2016.

17 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 16, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL bunker and two ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL fuel tanker, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED), and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Qayyarah, five strikes struck three separate ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL assembly area, and two ISIL rocket rails and suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.

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

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

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

18 May 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near At Tanf, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.

- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL command and control node.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL mortar system, and an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL weapons caches, two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area and three ISIL boats.

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

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

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

19 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Abu Hayat, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and an ISIL front end loader.
- 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 Kisik, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL assembly area.

- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL assembly areas and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL mortar systems, and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL command and control nodes, two ISIL bed down locations, six ISIL supply caches, an ISIL staging area and damaged an ISIL oil tanker.

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

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

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

20 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 19, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil pump-jack.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and two ISIL heavy machine guns.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed four ISIL tunnel systems.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas, four ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, and 26 ISIL rocket rails.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed four ISIL tunnels.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL rocket launcher.

- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed two ISIL bed down locations and an ISIL weapons cache.

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

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

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

21 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 20, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using bomber, ground-attack, 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 rocket artillery and bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL weapons cache and destroyed an ISIL oil pump-jack and an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and three ISIL command and control nodes.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery piece.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) cache, two ISIL staging areas, and an ISIL excavator.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL-used bridge, and four ISIL-used culverts.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, two ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL weapons cache and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Rawah, one strike struck an ISIL staging area and an ISIL safe house.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle storage area, two ISIL

weapons caches, two ISIL command and control nodes, and an ISIL IED facilitation node.

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

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

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

22 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 21, 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 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil pump-jacks.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL command and control node and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

[The 23 May press release mentions four additional airstrikes in Syria.]

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL ammunition cache.
- Near Fallujah, one strike destroyed two ISIL bunkers and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Haditha, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL bulldozer.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL weapons cache, two ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised device (VBIED) facility and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

23 May 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 23 May 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Syria

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

- Near Shadaddi, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Raqqah, three strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle bomb-making facility and an ISIL oil pump-jack.
- Near Ayn Isa, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck an ISIL weapons storage facility and destroyed an ISIL rocket rail.

Iraq

Attack and fighter aircraft conducted 10 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government:

- Near Huwayjah, a strike suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Fallujah, two strikes struck an ISIL weapons facility and an ISIL improvised weapons factory and destroyed three ISIL bunkers and two ISIL tunnel entrances.
- Near Habbaniyah, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL supply cache, and an ISIL vehicle, and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck an ISIL communications control center and destroyed two ISIL vehicle bombs, two ISIL mortar systems, and two ISIL supply caches and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, a strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Additionally, due to an administrative error the following strikes in Syria were not included in the May 22 news release:

- Near Raqqah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

[Pentagon](#), 23 May 2016.

CENTCOM used the 23 May URL for a 25 May press release, thereby overwriting the 23 May press release.

24 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 23, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and

Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shaddadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ar Raqqa, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL military garrison.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Fallujah, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL light machine gun, an ISIL front end loader, an ISIL mortar system, three ISIL VBIED storage facilities, two ISIL rocket positions, and three ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL IED storage facility.
- Near Mosul, four strikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL mortar system, and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck two ISIL headquarters.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

25 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 24, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using ground-attack and 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Bayji, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL front end loader.
- Near Habbaniyah, three strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position, four ISIL weapons caches, and an ISIL tunnel and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, three ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL bed down locations, and an ISIL tunnel and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL mortar systems.
- 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](#), 25 May 2016.

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

26 May 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Al Shaddadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed

two ISIL tunnels, four ISIL vehicles, an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL weapons cache, and three ISIL fighting positions.

- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL bunkers, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Mosul, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units, five ISIL headquarters, an ISIL media center, and an ISIL communication headquarters and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck two ISIL rocket production facilities and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Tal Afar, eight strikes struck eight ISIL-used bridges and an ISIL-used culvert and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 26 May 2016. (CENTCOM miscounted the number of strikes in Iraq, corrected here.)

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

27 May 2016: airstrikes

On Friday, 27 May 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Syria

Attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted two strikes in Syria:

- Near Raqqah, a strike destroyed two ISIL oil pumpjacks.
- Near Isa, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles.

Iraq

Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 23 strikes in Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government:

- Near Baghdadi, a strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.
- Near Huwayjah, a strike struck an ISIL financial center.
- Near Fallujah, five strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL weapons caches and an ISIL vehicle bomb.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece and an ISIL recoilless rifle.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL supply cache, an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units; destroyed an

ISIL fighting position, four ISIL vehicles and four ISIL assembly areas; and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Qayyarah, a strike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Sinjar, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck two ISIL-used bridges.

[Pentagon](#), 27 May 2016.

CENTCOM used the 27 May airstrike URL (and also the 23 May airstrike URL) to report a story about U.S. forces in Syria wearing patches of the Kurdish YPG.

28 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 27, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 28 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factory.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL-used cave.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL bunker and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Fallujah, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL vehicles and an ISIL tunnel entrance.
- Near Habbaniyah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Kisik, two strikes suppressed two separate ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL assembly areas, six ISIL supply caches, an ISIL command and control node, and an ISIL VBIED and damaged an ISIL

staging area and suppressed an ISIL rocket position.

- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL rocket position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, four strikes struck three separate ISIL headquarters and an ISIL weapons storage facility.

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

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

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

29 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 28, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using bomber, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft and against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) factory and an ISIL weapons storage center.
- Near Manbij, four strikes destroyed 11 ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL ammunitions facility and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles and an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL VBIED and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Fallujah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicles, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL VBIED, an ISIL weapons cache, an ISIL tunnel entrance, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Habbaniyah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, 12 ISIL rocket rails, and an ISIL bunker.
- Near Hit, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, and an ISIL boat.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.

- Near Mosul, 12 strikes struck eight separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed 15 ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL supply cache, five ISIL weapons caches, four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL command and control nodes and damaged an ISIL assembly area and suppressed three ISIL tactical units.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed five ISIL rocket rails with rockets.

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

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

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

The 30 May press release added a second airstrike near Hit, Iraq.

30 May 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 30 May 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Syria

Attack and fighter aircraft conducted five strikes in Syria:

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, a strike destroyed six ISIL cranes and two ISIL road graders.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 13 ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL command and control node, and three ISIL boats.

Iraq

Coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes in Iraq, using rocket artillery and bomber, ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft, coordinated with and in support of the Iraqi government:

- Near Baghdadi, a strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Huwayjah, a strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bashir, a strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units, damaged an ISIL fighting position, denied ISIL access to terrain, and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL tactical vehicles, an ISIL front-end loader, an ISIL improvised bomb, two ISIL tunnel entrances and three ISIL-used foot bridges.
- Near Habbaniyah, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, a strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL boats, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, a strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, eight strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL weapons storage center; damaged an ISIL anti-air artillery piece; suppressed an ISIL rocket position and an ISIL tactical unit; denied ISIL access to terrain; and

destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL tunnel entrance, seven ISIL weapons caches, five ISIL vehicles, five ISIL command and control nodes, 11 ISIL mortar positions, six ISIL artillery pieces, two ISIL rocket rails and seven ISIL vehicle bombs.

- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit; suppressed an ISIL machine gun position; and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL headquarters, and an ISIL mortar position.

Additionally, on May 28, a strike in Iraq was not reported due to an administrative error:

- Near Hit, a strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL heavy machine guns, two ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL boat.

[Pentagon](#), 30 May 2016.

CENTCOM used the 30 May URL to report the 31 May press release, in the third error of this kind in recent days (also see 23 May and 27 May press releases). Also, at noon on 31 May, the most recent press release linked at the CENTCOM media webpage is dated 11 May. I have been accessing recent press releases by entering a URL in my webbrowser, instead of clicking on a link.

31 May 2016: airstrikes

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

On May 30, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes using bomber, attack, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, ground-attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil pump jack.
- Near Manbij, nine strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL improvised explosive device (IED) factory and destroyed 26 ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar position, two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL supply cache, and three ISIL tunnels.
- Near Washiyah, one strike struck an ISIL weapons production factory.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL bed down location and an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Abu Hayat, one strike struck an ISIL weapons cache.

- Near Fallujah, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, five ISIL vehicles, an ISIL heavy machine gun, three ISIL heavy machine gun positions, two ISIL recoilless rifles, and an ISIL mortar system and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Hit, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL anti-air artillery piece, an ISIL vehicle, and two ISIL weapons caches and suppressed an ISIL machine gun position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, eight ISIL assembly areas, five ISIL vehicles, an ISIL command and control node, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised device (VBIED) facility, three ISIL VBIEDs, and an ISIL heavy machine gun and suppressed an ISIL mortar position and an ISIL light machine gun position and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, two ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL mortar system, three ISIL supply caches, and an ISIL IED factory.
- Near Tal Afar, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

Terrorism & Migration in Europe

Islamic Terrorism in Europe

History in my previous essays:

- My [first essay](#) tersely — and incompletely — recounts a history of Islamic terrorism from 1972 to 2013.
- My essay for [June 2014](#) mentions the Islamic terrorist attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels on 24 May 2014, and an attack in France on March 2012.
- My essay for [Jan 2015](#) describes the Islamic terrorist attacks in France on 7-9 January.
- My essay for [Feb 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Copenhagen on 14 Feb.
- My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions a a 15 y old girl in Denmark who stabbed her mother to death after repeatedly watching on the Internet (YouTube) videos of ISIL executions with her 29 y old boyfriend who was a so-called "refugee" from Iraq. That essay also mentions an Iraqi terrorist in Berlin who was killed by police in an attack on 17 Sep 2015.
- My essay for [November 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Paris that killed

130 people on 13 Nov 2015.

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

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.

On 18 May 2016, Australian Immigration Minister Peter Dutton raised the issue of poorly educated immigrants:

"They won't be numerate or literate in their own language, let alone English. These people would be taking Australian jobs, there's no question about that," Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said when asked about the proposed increase in the humanitarian intake quota.

"For many of them that would be unemployed, they would languish in unemployment queues ... and the rest of it so there would be huge cost and there's no sense in sugar-coating that, that's the scenario," he told Sky News late on Tuesday [17 May].

Matt Siegel, "Australian minister warns against 'illiterate, innumerate' refugees," [Reuters](#), 03:25 GMT, 18 May 2016.

Also see [Sydney Morning Herald](#); [Australian Broadcasting](#); [Australian Broadcasting](#) (19May).

While Dutton's remarks are controversial, it is obviously more difficult to teach an immigrant the English language and job skills if that immigrant is illiterate in his/her native language. And immigrants do take jobs from local people, unless there are more employees sought than local people available to fill those jobs.

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.

On 22 May 2016, an anti-immigrant candidate was defeated for the position of President of Austria, but he received 49.7% of the vote, in a very strong showing.

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 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.

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 283,200 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria

approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).

- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than four million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

The Syrian government — regardless of who leads it — does *not* have the resources to repair buildings, electricity supply, and other infrastructure that was destroyed during the five years of civil war in Syria.

Conclusion for Iraq

The Syrians have an effective government and an effective military. In contrast, Iraq — only slightly better than Yemen, Somalia, and Libya — is now a failed nation. These facts make the Iraqi government weaker than the Syrian government.

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

1. The Iraqi government is corrupt. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [January 2016](#))
2. The Iraqi government is dysfunctional. During July-October 2014, the Iraqi Parliament *slowly* formed a new government — during an existential crisis. My essays for July 2014 through February 2015 summarized the infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. (See the summary for July through October 2014 in my [webpage](#).)
3. The Iraqi army was unable to stop the ISIL invasion during the first six months of 2014. In June 2014, the Iraqi army was exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout in Ramadi.
4. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable or unwilling to prosecute:
 - A. corrupt politicians or corrupt government officials,
 - B. army officers who hired ghost soldiers (see [above](#)),
 - C. desertion at Mosul on 10 June 2014 (see [above](#)),
 - D. fleeing from Ramadi on 17 May 2015 (see [above](#)), and
 - E. terrorists who kill innocent civilians in frequent bombings in or near Baghdad.
5. Beginning in August 2014, my essays each month have chronicled suicide bombings, car bombs, kidnappings, and other horrible crimes in Iraq. Such attacks have become an almost routine part of life in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. These continuing attacks are an indication that civilization has collapsed in Iraq.

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

It will take years to fix the defects in the Iraqi army, while effective troops on the ground are needed *now* — truly were needed back in January 2014 — to prevent ISIL from capturing more cities and infrastructure. In September 2015, it was obvious that the Iraqi army and Shiite militia in Iraq are unable — or unwilling — to liberate either Fallujah, Mosul, or Ramadi from ISIL. This lack of competent ground forces in Iraq is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism

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

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

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

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

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

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

in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq show.

This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria33.pdf>
begun 1 May 2016, revised 1 June 2016.

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

[my homepage](#)