

Syria & Iraq: August 2016

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 33 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 quote only a small part 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, no summer time.

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. On 28 July 2016, Nusra voluntarily ended its affiliation with Al-Qaeda, but Nusra remains Al-Qaeda inspired. After July 2016, Nusra is called "Jabhat Fatah al-Sham".
 - 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".

On 28 July 2016, Nusra voluntarily ended its affiliation with Al-Qaeda. [Reuters](#) reported Nusra's leader said the change was made: "to remove the excuse used by the international community — spearheaded by America and Russia — to bombard and displace Muslims in the Levant: that they are targeting the Nusra Front which is associated with al Qaeda". Henceforth, Nusra Front would be called "Jabhat Fatah al-Sham". See also [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 28 July. Despite the change of name and loss of the Al-Qaeda franchise, Nusra is the same group of terrorists with the same ideology and same goals as before the change. The U.S. State Department spokesman, John Kirby, [said](#) "... we judge any organization, including [Nusra], much more by its actions, its ideology, its goals. Affiliations may be a factor, but ultimately it's their actions, ideology, and goals that matter the most. we certainly see no reason to believe that their actions or their objectives are any different, and they are still considered a foreign terrorist organization."

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. OPCW has also issued occasional fact-finding reports that report their conclusion whether or not chemical weapons were used in Syria at a specific place and time, but do *not* conclude *who* released the chemical weapons. 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.

Assad appears to have stopped dropping cylinders of chlorine gas in Syria from June 2015 through July 2016.

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. On 24 November 2015, United Nations Security Council document S/2015/908, beginning at page 194, contains an OPCW fact-finding report that concludes "with the utmost confidence" that mustard was used in Marea on 21 August 2015.

August 2016

On 1 August 2016, insurgents shot down a Russian helicopter, killing five Russians aboard. [Reuters](#). On 2 August 2016, Assad apparently retaliated by dropping cylinders of poison gas — probably chlorine — on Saraqeb in Idlib province, near where the helicopter was shot down. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Guardian](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

On 10 August 2016, Assad dropped poison gas — probably chlorine — on Zabadieh, a rebel-held neighborhood in Aleppo, killing four people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 11 August, de Mistura in a press conference called the chlorine gas a potential war crime.

QUESTION: ... the dropping of the chlorine toxic gases, is that a war crime? Is that something that you are pressing with both the Americans and the Russians to lean upon the government to stop doing?

SdeM: It is really not for me to assess who did it and whether it actually took place, although there is a lot of evidence that they actually did take place. We have a special UN and other organizations addressing that. But if it did take place, it is a war crime and as such it would require everyone, all the co-chairs and everyone else, to address it immediately. I think the investigation is still taking place and they are people more competent than you and I to be able to access that, but your point is well taken, that is a war crime.

[CORRIGENDUM NOTE: The Special Envoy's intention in answering this question was to underline that if proven true, allegations of chemical attacks would constitute a war crime. He also meant to convey his sense that there should be an investigation into these allegations by the relevant international organisations.]

"Transcript (including a corrigendum) of stakeout by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, and Mr. Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the Special Envoy for Syria following the meeting of meeting of the ISSG Humanitarian Taskforce," [U.N. Geneva](#), 11 August 2016.

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.

The first report of the JIM is U.N. Security Council document [S/2016/142](#) (12 Feb 2016), which became publicly available on 24 Feb 2016, 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 ¶¶43, 46, and 47 of their report.

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 in Geneva. 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. But in April 2016, the negotiations in Geneva collapsed, making negotiations an irrelevant concern.

Third JIM Report

On 24 August 2016, the JIM released its third report, which concluded:

1. Syrian government released chlorine in Talmenes on 21 April 2014;
2. Syrian government released chlorine in Sarmin on 16 March 2015; and
3. ISIL released sulfur mustard in Marea on 21 August 2015.

More investigation is needed for the cases at:

4. Kafr Zita in Hama province on 18 April 2014 (chlorine?);
5. Qmenas in Idlib province on 16 March 2015 (chlorine?); and
6. Binnish in Idlib governorate on 24 March 2015 (chlorine?).

No further investigation is recommended for the cases at:

7. Kafr Zita on 11 April 2014;
8. Al-Tamanah on 29-30 April 2014; and
9. Al-Tamanah on 25-26 May 2014.

The third JIM Report will be publicly distributed "shortly" after it is discussed by the U.N. Security Council on 30 August. [U.N.](#) Journalists immediately reported that Russia and China would likely prevent any U.N. sanctions on Assad for releasing chlorine gas during war. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The [White House](#) issued a statement on the Third JIM Report that said: "It is now impossible to deny that the Syrian regime has repeatedly used industrial chlorine as a weapon against its own people in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2118."

In forensic investigations, police *know* that it is essential to begin collecting and preserving

evidence immediately after a crime occurs. But the JIM investigated crimes that occurred *more* than six months ago, and, in the case of Kafr Zita, more than two years ago. This delay by the United Nations reduces the credibility of the findings by the JIM.

One wonders how many millions of dollars the U.N. spent on this year-long JIM project, which found *only two* uses of chlorine by Assad. One could read news articles by Reuters and the Associated Press since April 2014 to learn about cylinders of chlorine being dropped from helicopters in Syria. Assad had — before the Russian imported their helicopters in September 2015 — the only military that flew helicopters in Syria.

Finally, I comment that these OPCW investigations *may* be useful to war crimes prosecutors, sometime ten or twenty years in the future.

At the 30 August meeting of the U.N. Security Council, Russia expressed doubts about whether Assad had released chlorine gas on the two occasions that the JIM found. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). That means Russia will probably veto any sanctions against Assad.

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. I have searched for, but *not* found, any official OPCW report on the use of mustard in Iraq in August 2015.

March 2016: 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 the United Nations and OPCW has little enthusiasm for investigating use of chemical weapons in Iraq.

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.

Why foreign nations indifferent to Syrian civil war

On 6 August 2016, Hisham Melhem, a columnist for *Al-Arabiya* News Channel, [asked](#) "Aleppo is dying but where is the outrage? Where is the outrage in the majority Arab and Muslim states? In Europe, which is being directly impacted by the Syrian tragedy? Where is the outrage in America? Have we become too numbed because of the unbearable stench of death and dying in the Middle East?"

His questions were [echoed](#) by Margaret Evans, the European correspondent for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

As one symptom of the indifference to Syria, *The Washington Post* published only one news article about Syria during 29 July to 14 August 2016. That one article mentioned the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo and the liberation of Manbij from ISIL, but mentioned neither

de Mistura nor the negotiations in Geneva. As another symptom of the indifference to Syria, *The New York Times* notes the absence of discussion of Syrian policy in the current U.S. presidential election campaign.

I remember back in Jan/Feb 2014, during the first peace negotiations in Geneva, there was intense coverage by journalists. But during the current peace negotiations in 2016, there has been comparatively little coverage by journalists. Indeed, one could ask if there are really current peace negotiations, given that the last negotiations in Geneva ended on 27 April 2016 and reconvening the negotiations is *not* realistically foreseeable in August 2016. What passed for so-called negotiations was the HNC, the main opposition group, issuing pre-conditions (i.e., demands) since it was formed in December 2015 — demanding what it could *not* win in five years of civil war.

Meanwhile, the barbarians in Syria — Assad and insurgents — continue to besiege cities, and continue to destroy what remains of Syria. Assad and his cronies continue to [bomb hospitals](#) and dump chlorine gas on civilians. This is an appalling disregard for international humanitarian law, and accumulating more war crimes than anyone can count.

Given the atrocious misconduct by Assad, and lesser misconduct by insurgents, and given the unwillingness of the opposition to negotiate in Geneva, we may say the leaders of Syria — both Assad and insurgents — do *not* deserve our help in ending their civil war. Before people deserve help, they need to stop making their problems worse. The continuing failures of both Assad and leaders of the opposition may justify the indifference currently shown by politicians in Western Europe and the USA, as well as by journalists.

Melhem asked a rhetorical question about why Arab and Muslim states are not showing outrage about Aleppo. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, etc. all have a Sunni majority and all want to see Assad the Shiite removed from office. A ceasefire in Syria is *not* a big concern for Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, and other Muslim nations. Moreover, Islamic clerics rarely condemn besieging cities or bombing hospitals.

Finally, de Mistura and the humanitarian aid personnel in Syria are concerned about the suffering of more than a million civilians in Syria. But neither Assad nor the leaders of the Syrian opposition take de Mistura seriously.

Noting the inability of the United Nations to end the civil war, and the inability of the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria, several of my friends have asked me why we (i.e., USA and Western Europe) don't simply walk away from Syria and let the Syrians solve their own problems. It's a legitimate question, given the many frustrations in Syria that makes diplomacy futile. There are at least five reasons why we can *not* just walk away from Syria.

1. The Syrian civil war is a proxy war supported by foreign meddlers and with a political opposition (e.g., Syrian National Coalition and HNC) controlled by expatriates from Syria and now living in Turkey or Saudi Arabia. If we simply walk away from Syria, then Syria will be carved up by Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other nations. In other words, the Syrians can not solve their own problems because they are being dominated by foreign meddlers.

2. Nusra Front (now called Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) and ISIL each have the ability to destabilize not only Syria, but the entire Middle East region. These two terrorist organizations must be defeated. To achieve that goal, the U.S. began bombing ISIL in Syria in September 2014. The annihilation of Nusra and ISIL needs to be completed, for which the Syrians will need foreign help.
3. As long as the Syrian civil war continues, there will be refugees fleeing from Syria. In 2015, there was a flood of 1,325,000 refugees into Europe, of whom 378,000 (29% of the total) were from Syria.
4. The Syrian civil war — which began in 2011 as a pro-democracy revolt against Assad — was hijacked in 2013 by Nusra, ISIL, and numerous jihadist groups who want to establish an extremist Islamic government in Syria. As a matter of humanitarian concern, we should help the people of Syria resist having their current nonsectarian government be replaced by a radical Islamic theocracy.
5. The frustrations are caused by the leaders (i.e., Assad, the HNC, the leaders of the many insurgent groups) and by the foreign meddlers who support either an insurgent group or Assad. But it is the *people* of Syria who are suffering from malnutrition, lack of medical care, having their homes bombed or shelled, and having their places of employment destroyed. The *people* of Syria deserve our help. In my opinion, Assad and the leaders of insurgent groups should be tried for their war crimes. The foreign meddlers who paid for the civil war should pay for the reconstruction of Syria.

However, if we continue to be involved in Syria, there is *no* guarantee of a happy ending for Syria.

Deaths in Syria

On 1 September 2016, the the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll for the month of August.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 4475 persons in the month of August 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilian casualties: 1289 civilians, including 263 children under the age of eighteen, and 191 female citizens over the age of 18, they were killed as follows:
 - 690 citizens including 148 children and 118 citizen women killed in raids by Russian and Syrian warplanes' bombing and helicopters' barrel bombs,
 - 14 persons were executed by the "Islamic State" organization,
 - 189 people including 44 children and 28 citizen women were killed in the shelling by rocket and artillery shells, missiles believed to be ground-to-ground and sniper fire and targeting by the regime forces,
 - [1] man was executed by the fighters of the factions,
 - 24 persons were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons and dungeons of its intelligence branches,
 - 12 were killed in the bombing by warplanes of the international coalition,

- 222 persons including 28 children and 37 citizen women killed by the fall of shells and targeting by the rebel and Islamic Factions and the “Islamic State” organization,
 - 6 persons including a child were killed by gunshots of the Turkish and Jordanian border guards,
 - 6 people were killed in a booby trapped vehicles and explosive belts detonation,
 - [1] citizen killed by the Jordanian border guards,
 - 2 persons one of them is a child died due to poor health conditions and the bad living conditions and the lack of medication,
 - 8 persons were killed in the shelling and the gunshots of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Aleppo province, and
 - 75 including 4 children and 10 citizen woman killed in different circumstances like unidentified gunmen, explosions, landmines, sniper fire and unknown circumstances.
- Syrian nationality fighters from the rebel and Islamic fighters and The Syria Democratic Forces and other organization: 658
 - Defected soldiers and officers: 3
 - The regime forces: 561
 - Members from Popular Committees, NDF and militiamen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 653
 - Militiamen from the Lebanese Hezbollah: 15
 - Non-Syrian Pro-regime mostly Shia militiamen: 82
 - Unidentified casualties: 30
 - Fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions, the “Islamic State”, Fath al-Sham Front, Jaish al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar and the Islamic Turkistan Party of non-Syrian nationalities: 1184

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.

"1300 civilian casualties are among about 4500 killed in August 2016," [SOHR](#), 1 Sep 2016. [Formatting as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

When I add the indented list of civilian deaths, I get 1250, *not* 1289.

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* 297,000.

In May 2016, SOHR estimated that the actual death toll was approximately 148,000 greater than the number that they documented. (See my essay for [May 2016](#).) That addition would suggest an actual total of approximately 450,000 dead at the end of August 2016.

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 Sep 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 14 months to choose a leader for the Free Syrian Army, during an existential war.

Turkey is an ally from Hell

Introduction

In my essay for [July 2015](#), I gave five reasons why "Turkey is an ally from Hell."

My essay for [August 2015](#) mentions that Turkish airstrikes inside Iraq were a sixth reason why "Turkey is an ally from Hell."

My essay for [November 2015](#) said "The arrests of journalists and reckless shooting down a Russian airplane are more reasons why Turkey is an ally from Hell." My essay for November also says Turkey conducted "*only four* airstrikes against ISIL from 24 July to 31 Oct."

My essay for [February 2016](#) mentions the Turks were shelling the Kurds in Syria at a time when the United Nations was trying to arrange a ceasefire in Syria. Also, the U.S. Government continues to urge Turkey to seal their border with Syria.

My essay for [March 2016](#) tersely mentions that the Turkish government seized control of *Today's Zaman* newspaper in Turkey, and also the Turks had failed to seal their border to prevent foreign fighters and munitions from entering Syria to reinforce ISIL and Nusra.

This history that I chronicled shows that Turkey is really an ally from Hell. Erdogan is more interested in exterminating Kurds (ethnic cleansing) than in fighting against ISIL.

My essay for [July 2016](#) mentions a failed military coup in Turkey on 15 July 2016.

August 2016

In the aftermath of the failed military coup in Turkey on 15 July 2016, the paranoid Turkish government ordered large-scale (i.e., 60,000 by 21 July, 80,000 by 17 August) purges of government employees, including judges, teachers, professors, policemen, and military personnel. One consequence of this large-scale purge will be a lack of experienced employees in Turkey's government — which purge will make the Turkish government less competent and more dysfunctional. [Associated Press](#)(21 July); [Reuters](#)(26 July); [Reuters](#)(10 Aug); [NPR](#)(20 Aug).

On 17 August 2016, the Turkish government announced it would release 38,000 criminals from its prisons, to make room for participants in the failed coup. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 22 August 2016, after an ISIL suicide bomber killed 54 people at a wedding party in Turkey, the Turkish foreign minister declared that the Turkish-Syrian border region must be "completely cleansed" of ISIL. But Turkey is *also* concerned about Syrian Kurdish fighters in Manbij and the Syrian Kurds who are planning to attack Jarablus, Syria, near the Turkish border. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

August 2016: Turkish invasion of Syria

On 24 August 2016, the Turkish military attacked ISIL in Jarablus, Syria with tanks, special forces troops, artillery, and airstrikes. Between 500 and 1500 Syrian rebels, Turkmen and Arabs, accompanied the invading Turks. This is the first time since November 2015 that Turkish airplanes have entered Syrian airspace. The Associated Press says: "Turkey codenamed its cross-border assault 'Euphrates Shield,' suggesting the aim was to keep the [Kurdish] YPG east of the Euphrates River." [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).

The main [Reuters](#) article on the Turkish invasion of Syria on 24 August had its final version at 22:35 GMT on 25 August. That URL now redirects to an article on 26 August. In this way, Reuters overwrote much of the early history of the Turkish invasion of Syria.

Assad's government condemned the Turkish invasion as a "blatant violation of [Syrian] sovereignty". [SANA](#). The Syrian Kurds also condemned the "blatant aggression" by Turkey. [Reuters](#).

U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden was in Ankara, Turkey on 24 August 2016 where he joined Turkish president Erdogan in declaring that *no* Kurds should be west of the Euphrates River in northern Syria. Biden specifically said any Kurds west of the Euphrates would lose U.S. support: "They [i.e., Kurds in the Syrian Democratic Forces] cannot, will not, and under no circumstances get American support if they do not keep that commitment, period." [White House](#); [Associated Press](#) (at 17:15 Turkish time); [Washington Post](#); [Haaretz](#); [Bloomberg](#); [Reuters](#); My comment is that this evokes memories of the Sykes-Picot

Agreement of 1916, in which colonial powers divided up what is now Syria and Iraq. The Biden-Erdogan Agreement of 2016 interferes with the ability of the people of northern Syria to arrange their post-Assad government as they wish. Moreover, if ISIL is not entirely defeated in northern Syria, then the Syrian Kurds could provide a buffer zone between Turkey and ISIL, which could be beneficial to Turkey. Erdogan can not see that advantage, because Erdogan has been engaged in a campaign of ethnic cleansing of Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria since July 2015.

On 25 August, the [Pentagon](#) announced the Turkish liberation of Jarablus.

On 25 August, the Turkish invasion pushed about 10 km south of Jarablus, which brought the Turks into contact with Syrian Kurds fighters. The Turks fired on the U.S.-supported Syrian Kurds. Once again, the Turks are an ally from Hell. [Reuters](#)(08:17 GMT); [Reuters](#)(main article); [Reuters](#)(26 Aug); [Associated Press](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). An editorial in [The Guardian](#); says Turkey's primary concern is pushing the Syrian Kurds away from the border with Turkey, containing the Kurds east of the Euphrates River.

On 26-27 August, the Turks fired on the U.S.-supported Syrian Kurds for the second and third days. [Associated Press](#)(26 Aug); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(27 Aug).

Turkey claims it is fighting against ISIL, which is excluded from the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Syria. However, the Turkish invasion comes at a time when de Mistura is frantically attempting to obtain a nationwide ceasefire in Syria, resume deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria, and arrange for a continuation of peace negotiations in Geneva. By escalating the Syrian civil war, the Turks are *not* helping de Mistura to restore calm in Syria.

On 28 August, the Turks invaded deeper into Syria, expelling Kurds from two Syrian villages. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 35 dead Syrian civilians. Turkey boasted their airstrikes had killed 25 Kurds. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#).

On Monday, 29 August, the U.S. Government publicly criticized the Turks for their invasion of Syria, which was clearly intended to push the Syrian Kurds out of towns that the Kurds had liberated from ISIL. The U.S. Secretary of Defense told the Turks to stop targeting the Kurds. The U.S. Government — with good reason — now fears that the Kurds will be fighting against the Turkish invaders instead of fighting against ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Later, [Reuters](#) published a news article with the headline: "U.S. tries to stop feuding allies from unravelling Syria strategy".

On 29 August, the U.S. Secretary of Defense said the following about Turkey's attack on Kurdish fighters in Syria:

First, we very much appreciate the efforts of both partners, Turkey and the Syrian Defense Forces[sic - Syrian Democratic Forces], in the fight against ISIL. They both made material contributions. We've worked with both of them. And all of our interactions are intended to keep that going. So yes, we have called upon Turkey to not — to stick — stay focused on the fight against ISIL and not to engage Syrian Defense Forces [sic].

And we've had a number of contacts over the last several days, including very

importantly, the chairman spoke to his counterpart just yesterday. And I'll actually be meeting with my counterpart face-to-face next week in Europe.

And there have been other contacts as well at all levels, emphasizing, first of all — take Turkey — to Turkey, that the United States was very supportive and is very supportive of their general counter-ISIL activities and everything they did to secure the area between the border and Jarablus, and then westward, but not south of Jarablus, nor to engage the Syrian Defense Forces[sic].

And as far as the YPG portion of the Syrian Defense Forces[sic] is concerned, to maintain their understanding which they have with us and to continue to implement that understanding, to withdraw their forces east of the Euphrates. And that would be — they are doing that, yes, but that's the understanding we have with them and we want to make sure that they continue that.

So we've called on both sides to not fight with one another, to continue to focus the fight on ISIL. That's the basis of our cooperation with both of them. And specifically, not to engage one another and to — to retain those geographic commitments that they've made.

Ashton Carter, "Joint Press Conference by Secretary Carter and Minister Parrikar in the Pentagon Briefing Room," [Pentagon](#), 29 Aug 2016. [text in brackets was inserted by the Pentagon]

My comment is that Secretary Carter is being diplomatic when he mentions that Turkey has made "material contributions" "in the fight against ISIL". The only significant thing that Turkey has done was allow the USA to use the Incirlik airbase in Turkey for military missions over Syria since July 2015, and that was only after a ten-month delay by the Turkish government. On the other hand, the Kurdish fighters have valiantly fought to expel ISIL from Kobani and Manbij. Note that Carter says the wrong name for the Syrian Democratic Forces, who have been an essential partner on the ground in Syria in the fight against ISIL.

On 30 August, journalists reported that the Turks and Kurds had made a "loose agreement" to stop shooting at each other. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 31 August, the Turkish government clarified that Turkey would continue to attack Kurds in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) reports that the Turkish prime minister belligerently declared that the Turkish military would *not* stop its campaign in northern Syria until "all threats are removed and [Turkey's] national security is guaranteed". On 31 August, Russia asked Turkey to stop attacking Kurds. [Reuters](#).

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". Obama said: "I've approved the deployment of up 250 additional U.S. personnel in Syria, including Special Forces," [White House](#).

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.

On 18 August 2016, Assad's aircraft bombed Kurdish fighters near the town of Hasakah. U.S. personnel were near the bombing site, so the U.S. sent fighter aircraft into Syria to defend the U.S. personnel. This was apparently the first time that Assad has bombed Kurdish fighters who are engaged in fighting against ISIL. [CNN](#); [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that if Assad bombs U.S. personnel, there will be calls by Americans for the U.S. military to retaliate against Assad. But, as my previous essays make clear, U.S. President Obama had *no* Congressional authority to send U.S. troops into Syria, *and* the U.S. troops in Syria are violating the sovereignty of Syria. Each of these two reasons make the U.S. troops in Syria an unlawful activity by the USA.

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 commentators say 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, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, and U.K. prime minister David Cameron. In January 2017, Assad will have outlasted Obama and John Kerry.

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).

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, at §1, says the Council "... stresses that the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria".

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.

Planning for Peace Conference in Geneva

Introduction

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 2016, 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.

My essay for [May 2016](#) chronicled the ISSG meeting on 17 May, the resignation of the chief negotiator of HNC (Mohammad Alloush) on 29 May, and explains why there were

no negotiations during May.

My essay for [June 2016](#) explains why there were *no* negotiations during June, and mentions the failure of the HNC to select a new negotiating team.

My essay for [July 2016](#) explains why there were *no* negotiations during July, and again mentions the failure of the HNC to select a new negotiating team.

HNC faltering?

On 31 May, [Reuters](#) reported that the HNC would meet on 10 June and decide on a new negotiating team for Geneva. An anonymous source in the HNC told Reuters: "The idea was that the chief negotiator and head of the delegation should be a specialist, someone with experience in diplomacy and international law". [Asharq Al-Awsat](#) reported an anonymous source in the HNC indicated "the existence of a trend to expand the circle of representatives in the negotiating team to include new parties from 'the Cairo Platform' and 'the Moscow platform' ".

During all of June and continuing up to 14 July, the HNC failed to meet, despite their announcement on 31 May. The obvious explanation for why the HNC failed to select a new negotiating team is that the HNC does *not* expect to return to negotiations soon.

My essay for [July 2016](#) reports that the HNC met during 15-18 July, but did *not* select a new negotiating team.

It appears that the HNC is like a flat tire on a bicycle. Maybe the HNC can be patched and then puffed up again. Or maybe the HNC will be tossed in the trash bin and replaced with a new opposition delegation. I suggest a new opposition delegation consisting of people who currently live in Syria, and who are willing to compromise in negotiations, in order to end the civil war in Syria.

26 July 2016: U.N. pretends negotiations will resume

On 26 July 2016, the U.S. State Department issued a terse, three-paragraph press release, which said:

The United States participated in a trilateral meeting today in Geneva with Russian officials, convened by the UN Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura. The UN Special Envoy updated the two chairs of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), the United States and Russia, on the status of his consultations with the parties and shared his perspectives on the next round of talks.

The United States and Russia urged the UN to prepare a proposal for political transition based on relevant UN Security Council resolutions and input given by the Syrian parties in previous rounds of intra-Syrian talks and in subsequent technical consultations. This proposal should serve as the starting point for future negotiations.

In addition, the United States emphasized the need to restore compliance with the terms of the cessation of hostilities — particularly in Aleppo city — as well as the need to improve humanitarian access, as positive progress in these areas would significantly improve the prospects for successful talks.

"U.S. Participates in Trilateral Meeting on Next Steps in Syria," [U.S. State Dept](#), 26 July 2016.

My comments: In the first paragraph, "The UN Special Envoy updated the two ... on the status of his consultations with the parties and shared his perspectives on the next round of talks." What he should have said was the talks were dead for the foreseeable future.

At the end of the third paragraph, the U.S. alleged: "as positive progress in these areas would significantly improve the prospects for successful talks." On 18 April 2016, the HNC walked out of the negotiations in Geneva and said they would not return until after a (1) end siege on rebel-held areas, (2) delivery of humanitarian aid to *everyone* in Syria who needs aid, (3) end airstrikes on civilians, and (4) release detainees. "Significantly improve" is an euphemism for satisfying some of the demands of the HNC.

28 July 2016: Russia/Assad blindsides U.N. and USA

My essay for [July 2016](#) describes how, on 28 July, Russia and the Syrian government suddenly announced a plan to open "humanitarian corridors" for residents and rebels to leave Aleppo. The plan was a surprise to both de Mistura and Kerry, leaving them blindsided.

On 29 July, the independent *Security Council Report* summarized what had happened earlier in July 2016:

US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on 14 July to discuss the US proposal for military cooperation to target Al-Nusra in exchange for ending attacks on other opposition groups, talks that would lead to a political transition and a renewed nationwide cessation of hostilities, including the requirement that the Syrian government ground its air force. For the US, this would be a departure from its current counter-terrorism operations in Syria, which almost exclusively focuses on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). While the US has carried out strikes against Al-Nusra targets, they have been extremely limited. Al-Nusra is comprised mostly of Syrians and is regarded by many Syrian armed opposition groups as an effective anti-regime fighting force, which is why such opposition groups often seek to cooperate tactically with Al-Nusra. For Russia, agreement to the proposal would be a change from its military activity in Syria, which has targeted Western-backed opposition groups fighting the government. Aside from Russian air support to the government's Aleppo offensive, other recent examples include two strikes near the Jordanian border: a 12 July strike against a US-backed opposition group and a 16 June strike at the At-Tanf garrison which, according to media reports, also housed American and British special forces.

.... On 11 February, when Russia and the US, as co-chairs of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), announced a nationwide cessation of hostilities (which

subsequently failed to take hold), there was an agreement to delineate the territory held by ISIL and Al-Nusra Front, so that those parties and the areas they control would be excluded from the cessation of hostilities. Until now, however, there had been no progress on that task because of concerns that Russia would use such intelligence to target opposition groups rather than avoid them.

"August 2016 Monthly Forecast for Syria," [SCR](#), 29 July 2016.

Surprisingly, the U.S. State Department said very little on this topic during 1-5 August 2016.

On 6 August, [Reuters](#) released a news article with the title: "Kerry presses on with Russian talks on Syria despite Aleppo setbacks". But Kerry's daily schedule shows Kerry is mostly engaged in visiting nations that have *no* crises, instead of Kerry remaining in Moscow or Geneva until the Syrian problem is solved. Specifically, on 29-31 July Kerry was in Paris France, on 4 August Kerry was in Argentina, on 5-6 August Kerry was in Brazil for the opening of the Olympic games. The last time Kerry was physically in Moscow was 14-15 July 2016, and the last time Kerry was in Geneva was on 1-2 May 2016.

On 10 August, de Mistura was again blindsided by Russia about the three-hour/day ceasefire in Aleppo, as explained below.

On 14-15 July 2016, Kerry went to Moscow to propose U.S. airstrikes on Nusra in cooperation with Russia, in exchange for Russia grounding Assad's airplanes, enforcing a ceasefire in Syria, and having Assad begin a political transition. One month later, on 16 August, Russia and the USA are continuing to discuss the proposal. [Reuters](#). And Kerry met Lavrov in Geneva on 26 August, as described below, again failing to resolve all of the issues.

It appears increasingly likely that the Russians are continuing to *talk* to the U.S. Government, but with *no* intention of reaching an agreement on substantive issues. Instead, Russia will support Assad in his quest for a military victory in Syria.

1 August 2016: target date missed

At the daily press briefing in the United Nations headquarters in New York City, Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General, mentioned the planned resumption of negotiations in Geneva:

Question: I noted what you said about Staffan de Mistura's talks in Iran and Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy in Damascus; but today is 1 August, and that was supposed to be the deadline for the start of the transition negotiations in Syria. And I wonder whether the SecretaryGeneral is concerned disappointed that this deadline is passing without any movement on that issue?

Deputy Spokesman [Farhan Haq]: Well, on that, of course, it's discouraging how long it's taken to get any movement on talks, and so any delays in the process are discouraging. And yet, at the same time, we have to be aware, as Staffan de Mistura has repeatedly made clear, that we want to make sure that these are not just talks for the sake of talks, but these are negotiations that can accomplish something. So, to that

extent, Mr. Ramzy is in Damascus today and he has invited the Syrian authorities to come to talks by the end of this month. What our hope is is that, by then, we will have the right atmosphere for productive negotiations, productive discussions to take place. At this stage, we are not at that point, and from all the things we have been reporting in recent days, you can see why that is. But, at the same time, as you know, the guarantors of the International Syria Support Group have been working with each other and we want to see what the results of that will be, and our hope again is that by the end of this month, we will have intra-Syrian talks going.

"Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," U.N., 1 August 2016.

The situation on the ground in Syria was bad on 18 April 2016, when the HNC walked out of negotiations in Geneva. Since then, the situation has become *worse*. With Assad's assault on the city of Aleppo, in August 2016 we are farther from satisfying the HNC's four demands for returning to negotiations than in April.

The journalist who asked Farhan Haq the above-quoted question accepted de Mistura's slight-of-hand in changing the 1 August target date to a date for the resumption of the negotiations. (See my essay for [June 2016](#) for how, on 9 June, de Mistura changed the meaning of the 1 August target date.) History shows that the 1 August date is actually for agreement on forming the Transitional Governing Body in the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. The 1 August date in U.N. Resolution 2254 at §4 is for the goal to "establishes credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance". The 1 August date in the 17 May 2016 ISSG Statement at ¶15 is "for the parties to reach agreement on a framework for a genuine political transition". The Geneva negotiations in 2016 — despite six months of opportunity — *failed* to achieve that 1 August target date because the HNC consistently refused to negotiate.

[Below](#), I explain why I believe the Geneva negotiations have *failed*.

1 August 2016: Kerry's opinion

On Monday, 1 August, John Kerry was asked about the failure of the negotiations in Geneva. Here is all of what was said about that topic.

QUESTION: I would like to ask you on Syria: Are you disappointed that the target date came by today and still there are no concrete results?

SECRETARY KERRY: So with respect to the issue of the target date, the target date was set with the agreement that the parties were going to be able to go to the talks and begin immediately to negotiate. But because of the continued offensive operations of the Assad regime, the opposition found it impossible to sit in Geneva and actually negotiate without the cessation of hostilities according to the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 being upheld and adhered to. And so almost all of the time from the moment of the announcement of the target date until today has been consumed by trying to get a cessation of hostilities in place that is meaningful. And that is precisely what we are engaged in right now.

Now, there are obviously great concerns about what is happening on the ground there;

we all share them. And there is a situation where Assad regime attacks, conducts offensive operations, but Nusrah, which doesn't want a cessation, also attacks and goes into offensive operations. And you get into a cycle of one side versus the other saying who started what. What we're working on is trying to make sure that we get out of that cycle and actually stop the violence. And it is critical, obviously, that Russia restrain both itself and the Assad regime from conducting offensive operations, just as it is our responsibility to get the opposition to refrain from engaging in those operations.

Now, my hope is that we can arrive at that. If we can't, nobody's going to sit around and allow this pretense to continue. These are important days to determine whether or not Russia and the Assad regime are going to live up to the UN, live up to the cycle, or not. And the evidence thus far is very, very troubling to everybody.

So we are — we will see in the course of the next hours, few days, whether or not that dynamic can be changed. But it's very complicated when both parties on the ground want to fight rather than live up to the obligation of the UN Security Council resolution.

"Press Availability With Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Angela Holguin," [State Dept](#), 1 Aug 2016.

Kerry has his facts wrong. From the moment of the creation of the HNC, in December 2015, the HNC has been issuing pre-conditions (i.e., demands) that must be satisfied *before* the HNC will negotiate. History — chronicled in my previous essays — shows that the HNC never negotiated. History shows that the HNC walked out of the talks in Geneva on 18 April and the HNC has *not* returned to negotiations. That's why the Geneva negotiations failed.

On 1 August, Kerry said: "And so almost all of the time from the moment of the announcement of the target date until today has been consumed by trying to get a cessation of hostilities in place that is meaningful." But, as explained in the next paragraph, the target date was first announced on 14 November 2015, but the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was first announced on 22 February 2016, more than three months after the target date was first announced. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement began to unravel in April 2016, but nothing effective was done to restore the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Kerry has apparently forgotten that the target date for an agreement on the Transitional Governing Body within six months of beginning negotiations was first expressed in the ISSG Statement of 14 November 2015 at ¶10. That same Statement, at ¶4, says "a nationwide ceasefire in Syria [will] come into effect as soon as the representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition have begun initial steps towards the transition". Those initial steps have not yet occurred on 1 August 2016. Instead, Russia and the USA announced a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, which began on 27 February, to satisfy one of the demands of the HNC.

Kerry is misleading when he says: "Nusrah, which doesn't want a cessation, also attacks" Nusra is specifically excluded from the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, so it is irrelevant what Nusra wants.

Kerry is absolutely correct when he said: "it's very complicated when both parties on the

ground want to fight rather than live up to the obligation of the UN Security Council resolution." Given the desire of both Assad and the insurgents for a military victory, it is easy to understand why the Geneva negotiations failed.

My essay for [May 2016](#) describes Kerry's threat to unleash "Plan B" — more military aid to the insurgents. Fortunately, Kerry seems to have forgotten about his belligerent threat on 3 May 2016.

4 August 2016

On 4 August, de Mistura's deputy gave a press briefing in Geneva.

Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy: Last week, Special Envoy de Mistura informed you of his intention to hold the intra-Syrian talks towards the end of August. We are committed to that and we will do everything possible to make sure that these talks are fruitful. For these talks to be fruitful, the cessation of hostilities has to stand and be reinforced, and here, the United States and the Russian Federation, as co-chairs, are in discussion on this particular issue. Also, the humanitarian situation has to improve. Not much has been accomplished over the past month, largely due to the intensification of the military activities. That is why we attach great importance to the discussions between the co-chairs on that issue. The issue of Aleppo has come-up in the humanitarian taskforce, given the increased military activities and the consequences on the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Russian Federation presented its proposal last week, the United Nations studied this proposal and has reacted, both publicly and otherwise and we are currently in intensive discussions with the Russian Federation and the Government of Syria to ensure that the civilian population in Aleppo is protected and that the Standards of International Humanitarian Law are respected in any operation on humanitarian assistance.

Jan Egeland: We had hoped to reach 1.2 million people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas affected by conflict in July. What we could report now to the humanitarian taskforce was that we reached 40 percent only, and it is heartbreaking really for humanitarian workers that are ready with supplies, with trucks and people who are willing to risk a lot, that we were prevented from reaching 60 percent of the 1.2 million that we had hoped to go to.

The main reason for this is the fighting. There is now cross-fire. There is fighting in too many places and that affects, more than anything else, the besieged areas. We were able to reach four besieged areas — Al Waer, Moadamiyah, East Harasta, and with air drops, Deir Ez Zor. That was just about 38% of the people in these besieged areas, 14 areas were not reached at all. In addition to the fighting, the Four Towns Agreement is not working. This agreement was negotiated by non-UN parties in September and it allowed for humanitarian supplies to be delivered; and the last supply was (delivered) at the end of April. It is not working anymore.

....

We also discussed the crisis of the medical work. We received reports of 44 hospitals,

clinics and health posts being attacked in the month of July alone. We are investigating all of these. It's a priority for the humanitarian taskforce in the coming weeks and months that medical facilities and health workers must be protected.

QUESTION: You have been asking for those 48 hours-pauses in Aleppo, but it's not happening. I'm surprised to see that you still have the intention to hold peace talks at the end of this month. Don't you both feel that the situation is slipping away from anything the UN could do right now?

Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy: I wouldn't say so, I think there are intensive consultations going on between the co-chairs regarding the cessation of hostilities, we have been in contact with various parties, we continue to talk to all the interested parties to make sure the cessation of hostilities is in place to allow us to move ahead. So I think there still is time, we have not given-up hope, we cannot give-up hope. So, bear with us, and I think in the next few days there might be some movement, because for us what is important is to have credible talks, talks in which parties will engage in a serious manner, and that requires the regional parties to be on board, but also the situation on the ground, whether the humanitarian side, or the military, and we are all working very hard on that.

....

QUESTION: We are used to hear the mantra of "no military solution," but apparently the Russians and the Syrians think there is a military solution in Aleppo. On the other hand you're saying that you're hopeful that there is a broad agreement for a humanitarian proposal, which doesn't seem to be Russia's proposal. Are you seriously thinking that the Russians and the Syrians are going to stop their action in Aleppo sometime in the next week for a period of 24, 48 or 72 hours. Is that realistic? And also if you can share with us any updates on the military talks. Mr. de Mistura told us last week that US and Russian officials were coming to Geneva, we haven't heard anymore but obviously that's pretty crucial.

Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy: On the Russian-American military talks, they are ongoing, I can confirm, we're hoping that the results will be fruitful within short order because I think that would unlock the entire situation. As to the military plans of the Governments of Syria and Russia I think you should ask them about that, but we continue to believe that no one has an interest in further escalating the military situation in Aleppo in a way that would impede humanitarian aid and the chances of political settlement. Aleppo, as Jan has said, is iconic, very important, and we need to do something about Aleppo, very quickly. I think that there is still a chance for that in the next days.

....

QUESTION: Are you talking to the opposition? They don't seem inclined to participate in the talks at the moment. Would you have peace talks without them?

Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy: I assume you are referring to the HNC. Certainly not, and

we have been in continuous contact with them, we have had people in Riyadh, off and on, over the past weeks, and that continues. If there are going to be talks, there has to be two sides, one is the government of Syria, the other is the opposition, there's no doubt about that. So rest assured that we are in contact with everyone.

"Near verbatim transcript of stakeout by Mr. Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, United Nations Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, and Mr. Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the Special Envoy for Syria, following the meeting of meeting of the ISSG Humanitarian Taskforce," [U.N. Geneva](#), 4 August 2016. [Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

My comment is that the current situation in Syria is horrible, and it is difficult to have any optimism that the situation will improve until after Assad captures all of Aleppo. Given Assad's speech on 7 June 2016 in which he declares his pursuit of a military victory, I see *no* hope of a ceasefire in Syria. Given that Assad has been besieging cities for years, I see *no* hope of regular deliveries of humanitarian aid.

I discuss some of the Russian or Syrian airstrikes on hospitals [below](#). The reprehensible and continuing airstrikes on hospitals and civilians by Russia and Assad, makes it clear that de Mistura and Kerry are dealing with barbarians. Obviously, barbarians are *not* reliable partners in a quest for peace.

Ramzy said that the United Nations was still committed to negotiating with the HNC. That is too bad, because the HNC has been spewing pre-conditions since the HNC was formed in December 2015, and the HNC has been unwilling to meet in Geneva since 18 April 2016. In my opinion, de Mistura needs to find a new opposition delegation that is willing to negotiate and compromise.

On 5 August, the Associated Press gave a realistic view of what was actually happening in Syria and what was likely to happen in the future:

The U.N. says it wants to resume Syria peace talks in late August, but more than five years after anti-government protests erupted in 2011, the country is still consumed by fighting.

.....

The U.N.'s special envoy for Syria has set late August as a target for resuming peace talks, but it's unclear who could represent the fractured opposition, and with the government on the front foot in Syria, it is unlikely to make any major concessions in Geneva.

This augurs more conflict for the country until the government can secure what some analysts call "useful Syria" — a portion containing the four largest cities and Syria's Mediterranean coast — while leaving the fates of the jihadi-controlled northwest, the Kurdish-controlled north, and the Islamic State-controlled east to the chess game of international diplomacy.

Looking past the shades of color on the map, there are practically no victors to this war. Even if, or when, the government retakes the alleged target stretch of Syria, it will still face the massive task of rebuilding a shattered economy and wrestling back control

from militias and profiteers who have built robust patronage networks that rival the traditional hierarchies of the Assad family's authoritarian rule.

Zeina Karam & Philip Issa, "Beyond Aleppo, Syria's War Rages On With No End in Sight," [Associated Press](#), 16:10 GMT, 5 August 2016.

On 3 August, Reuters reported an interview with Sheikh Naim Qassem, the deputy leader of Hezbollah, a Shiite terrorist organization in Lebanon. Hezbollah has fought for Assad in Syria.

Lebanon's Hezbollah said the partition of Iraq and Syria was a possible outcome of sectarian fighting across the region and there was no prospect of any end to the war in Syria until after November's U.S. presidential election.

....

Both coalitions [U.S.-led coalition and Russia-Iran-Hezbollah coalition] fear [Assad's] sudden departure could destroy what is left of Syria after more than five years of civil war, bequeathing a shell state to the jihadis of Islamic State and Al Qaeda.

....

Qassem said the United States, one of the power brokers in finding a solution to the crisis, was distracted by its November presidential elections and not ready to commit to any action until a new president takes over next year. "The US administration is convinced that the period ahead of the presidential elections is a wasted time, that it can await until the new president assumes power. Then, the prospects of a solution or of a prolongation of the crisis will be clear."

Samia Nakhoul, Laila Bassam, & Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Hezbollah sees no immediate end to Syria war, partition in Iraq and Syria a possible outcome," [Reuters](#), 16:12 GMT, 3 August 2016.

My comment is that the new U.S. President in January 2017 is likely to change the U.S. policy toward Syria. However, Kerry seems willing to work now to improve the situation in Syria, but with little cooperation from Russia and Assad, and with insurgents who prefer to fight, a ceasefire and peace negotiations are out-of-reach.

11 August 2016

As chronicled [below](#), Russia and Syria have ignored a 21 July proposal by the United Nations for 48-hour ceasefires in Aleppo each week, to allow delivery of humanitarian aid. The fighting and besieging of Aleppo continues to worsen, which gives extraordinarily dim prospects for any negotiations in Geneva during August 2016.

On 9 August, Russia urged that the negotiations in Geneva continue, regardless of fighting in Aleppo and regardless of besieging of civilians in Aleppo. [Reuters](#). The obvious problem is that the Syrian opposition delegations have refused to attend the negotiations until after a ceasefire and after routine deliveries of humanitarian aid — the HNC walked out on 18 April

and other opposition delegations issued similar pre-conditions on 28 June. The Russian proposal seems designed to deflect attention away from the recent Russian bombing of Aleppo and instead blame the Syrian opposition for the failure of the negotiations in Geneva. While I continue to believe the HNC is mainly responsible for the failure in Geneva, Assad and the Russians — by pursuing a military solution — are *not* helping to end the Syrian civil war.

On 11 August, de Mistura and Jan Egeland held a press briefing. I have broken de Mistura's one long initial paragraph into four shorter paragraphs.

de Mistura: Good afternoon. Much is happening, and it has been a long meeting on the humanitarian taskforce for obvious reasons. There have been a lot of new developments this week in terms of military activities and militarization of the conflict and that the so called “battle for Aleppo” is becoming again one major issue which is drawing attention from the political but also from the humanitarian point of view. Next week frankly is going to be crucial on that. Regarding what we sadly start looking at as the “battle for Aleppo,” it is currently proving one thing once again, and I did refer to that when I spoke to the Security Council two days ago, no military sustainable solution is possible in Aleppo or nowhere else in Syria. It seems that this is sometimes forgotten, but what has happened and what has been happening in Aleppo the last few days, with attacks and counter-attacks is once again proving it. Secondly, that in all of this, again, civilians on both sides of the conflict, on both sides of Aleppo, are in danger, of being surrounded and affected by shortages and bombings.

Regarding the Russian Federation announcement, first of all, we, the UN, were not consulted, second, based on what we heard from Yacoub El Hillo, our Humanitarian Coordinator in Damascus, three hours are not enough. Next point, we have been reiterating, we need 48 hours, in order to make convoys doable and effective. But we have noted today, from the Russian Federation its positive availability and willingness to discuss as soon as possible, with the UN, how to improve what has been, in my opinion, an initial idea. Now, elsewhere, military acceleration of the conflict is affecting many people, and many people are waiting for the military and political discussions between the co-chairs to produce some type of effect.

Let me then refer to a very effective message that Yacoub El Hillo gave to us from Damascus. Kareem Yaseen Abdul Rahman, 9 years old, Lemar Saif El-Deen, 10 months, Sayed Adnan Kheitu, 6 years old, Ibrahim Adnan Kheitu, 11 years old, Wissam Wajih Yousef, 14 years old, Hammam Mahmoud al Marashali, 6 years old, Rawan Jamil Shada, 24 years old, Najah Adi Yousef, a year and three months old, Rawad Maoul, 4 years old, Ahmed Hussein Al-Halbouni, 30 years old, Mohamed Ramiz Ankish, 17 years old, Anas Az-zeeldeen, 6 months, Saraj Amer Abdulwahab, one year old, Ghani Ahmad Kuwaider, 10 years old, Lena Radda' al-Shamaa, 22 years old, Yamen Ezzedine, 8 years old, all of them are stuck in Madaya, and they are in desperate, urgent, medical evacuation need. Those who control access, and reference was by Yacoub El Hillo, are the Hezbollah and the Government. The UN is ready to evacuate them, they are in desperate, urgent medical emergency, why on earth this should not be possible? This should not be waiting for the Aleppo ceasefire, or an overall ceasefire. This should and can be done before it's too late. At the same time, Nada Mohammad Ali Kurdi, 32 years old, and Mariam Al Kurdy, 45 years old, in Fua,

are both in the same emergency medical situation, and both of them, one of them shot in the chest, and the other one is a very serious infection, both of them are in Fua and here the key is in the hands of Ahrar Al-Sham and its allies. They too, can, just by a decision of a minute, allow the UN to evacuate them and bring them to a medical facility where they could be saved. These are not numbers, these are people who are waiting to be medically evacuated, in what has become a medieval approach to a conflict.

Now back to us on other issues. You are aware that Russian and American teams have been meeting in this building, they have been recently focusing on the Castello road developments, and on general new approaches for reduction of violence. We have been supporting and helping those discussions which are still ongoing, and we at the UN will do anything to assist such meetings of the co-chairs. But time is of essence. Both the Russian and the American delegations are aware of it. Regarding the intra-Syrian talks, I will not elaborate further to what I have already said at the Security Council.

Jan Egeland: Today in the meeting, the Russian delegation confirmed their willingness to sit down with us today and tomorrow to try to agree on a workable humanitarian pause for us to go the Aleppo road and to help the people in the east and in the west. Three hours is indeed not enough, it's really nothing. We need 48 hours, that's how we see it now and we want to sit down with the Russian side. We need a pause in the fighting that has to be guaranteed by the Russians, the US, the Government (of Syria) and the armed opposition groups, we need 48 hours, because the people are so many, the convoys have to be picked, the roads are so destroyed, there are so many dangers, the logistics are so enormous that we need time each week and we need 48 hours. We also need a life line, cross-line from within Syria, Damascus and elsewhere, and we need a cross-border life line, because much of the resources available are across the border in Turkey. We need inspection schemes to make sure that all items to those areas are purely and solely humanitarian. Nobody understands better than Staffan and I and the humanitarian people that this is taking too long, this should have happened a long time ago. In the Four Towns, the children bleeding to death can be helped today, tomorrow, we are willing and able to evacuate them and give them the care that they need so that their lives be saved. The next hours will decide whether these children will die or whether they will survive. Who can make it happen, that they live? Well, Iran, Hezbollah, Ahrar al-Sham, and those countries that support opposition groups. In the city of four bridges, Istanbul, the Four Towns agreement was negotiated, and can also be revived there, and we hope it will happen without delay.

....

QUESTION: Sir, to the Security Council you said that you still hoped that the talks would start by the the end of August but I am wondering, what gives you reason to hope for that, it doesn't seem like the situation is going very well, I mean, do you really expect this will be possible while what is going on in Aleppo is happening? Thank you.

SdeM: It is not a matter of hope it is a matter of determination of maintaining a certain target in front of us in order to make sure that those who can contribute to that feel the

responsibility for making that happening. We need a target timing and the target timing is still towards the end of August.

Now I did also say in that occasion that while that is a target date, there is and should be no preconditions because if there are preconditions, those who don't want the talks to take place, could actually use those preconditions as a spoiling element in order to not have the talks take place.

Then I indicated that there are certain aspects that are unavoidably, according to everyone, both the Syrian government frankly and the opposition, important, in order to make sure that those talks, when they takes place, will have a chance to be constructive and effective. And I mentioned four, and you are probably familiar with those.

QUESTION: I would like to ask you whether Russia had planned actually to institute the three-hour humanitarian pause today, has Russia abandoned this in light of the talks that you are having in order to try to lengthen the time for this to occur, and also about two weeks ago Russia had established four corridors to leave the Aleppo, is that a dead issue now,

SdeM: Regarding the three hours, what we can say is what you heard from Jan and from myself that when we learnt and what Stephen O'Brien learnt in New York, we learnt it from the media ourselves. Regarding this initiative of the three hours, the reply today in the humanitarian task force was that any pause obviously should be seen and looked at with great interest because a pause means no fighting, but three hours are not enough.

And secondly, in order to organise sufficient and credible convoys we are talking of a 48 hours. On the other hand, the Russian reaction here at the task force was: we heard you, we need to talk in order to see how we can improve our original proposal. Well, we are available and interested in talking to ensure that the announcement about the three hours could be developed into a concrete proposal.

That's what I can tell you at the moment, the rest will depend on the further discussions with the Russians. We have made our point clear, they have indicated their willingness to discuss, we should see what is the outcome.

Regarding the four corridors proposal you also recall that events have taken over some of those announcements, and the issue about the four corridors has been in a way, first qualified by the UN response that in order to be part of corridors of that size there is a series of conditionality and guarantees and elements that need to be implemented.

"Transcript ... of stakeout by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, and Mr. Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the Special Envoy for Syria following the meeting of meeting of the ISSG Humanitarian Taskforce," [U.N. Geneva](#), 11 August 2016.

Jan Egeland mentioned the Four Towns Agreement on both 4 and 11 August. That Agreement was made in September 2015 for a ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid to four towns in Syria — Zabadani and Madaya in Rif Dimashq province and Foah and Kafraya

in Idlib province. (See U.N. Security Council document S/2015/813 at ¶¶7-8; S/2016/60 at ¶¶22, 35, and 53; S/2016/156 at ¶¶16, 43-44.) The two towns in Idlib province are besieged by insurgents, while Assad besieges Zabadani and Madaya. I am surprised that anyone still mentions this Agreement, after it has been violated *numerous* times in the past ten months, and is still being violated.

On 12 July 2016, Lavrov publicly accused de Mistura of "shirking his responsibilities" by not reconvening the stalled negotiations in Geneva. De Mistura was blindsided by Russia on 28 July about the "four corridors" proposal. Then de Mistura was again blindsided by Russia on 10 August about the three-hour/day ceasefire in Aleppo. This repeated kind of rude conduct by Russia shows a lack of respect for de Mistura, and one wonders if Russia wants to work constructively with de Mistura.

Since the HNC walked out of negotiations in Geneva on 18 April 2016, the situation on the ground in Syria has become worse and worse. On 22 July, de Mistura said "The next three weeks, ..., are going to be extremely important to give us a chance, not only for the Intra-Syrian Talks, but also for some possibility of reducing violence in Syria." The "next three weeks" ended on 12 August, when the situation in Aleppo was significantly *worse* than on 22 July. Given this history, it is difficult to have any optimism that negotiations will resume in August, or resume in the foreseeable future.

As one indication of the depraved situation in Syria, de Mistura mentioned 16 people by name and said they needed evacuation from Madaya for medical treatment. De Mistura publicly pleaded: "The UN is ready to evacuate them, they are in desperate, urgent medical emergency, why on earth this should not be possible?" The answer is that Assad and Hezbollah are barbarians.

[Above](#), I remark before people deserve help, they need to stop making their problems worse. The continuing belligerence of *both* Assad *and* leaders of the opposition — and the continuing refusal of the HNC to negotiate in Geneva — may justify the indifference currently shown by politicians in Western Europe and the USA to the continuing civil war in Syria.

18 August 2016

On 18 August 2016, de Mistura suspended or adjourned the Humanitarian Task Force meeting in Geneva for one week, because of continued intense fighting in Syria. This Task Force was formed on 12 February 2016. The suspension was a signal to the ISSG to *do something* to stop the fighting in Syria. De Mistura said there was "too much waiting, too many details, too many negotiations" and no pause in the fighting. De Mistura noted that it has been 110 days since the last delivery of humanitarian aid to any of the besieged areas in the Four Towns Agreement. Further, with the exception of Deir Ezzor, there have been *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid anywhere in Syria during August 2016.

SdeM: Good afternoon. Today we had a very short meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force. It lasted not more than 8 minutes. I decided to use my privilege as Chair to declare that there was no sense in have a humanitarian meeting today unless we got

some action on the humanitarian side in Syria.

Tomorrow is the World Humanitarian Day and in Syria what we are hearing and seeing is only fighting, offensives, counter-offensives, rockets, barrel bombs, mortars, hellfire cannons, napalm, chlorine, snipers, air strikes, suicide bombers.

Not one single convoy has so far reached any of the humanitarian besieged areas this month [*the SE was referring to the month of August*], not one single convoy, and why? Because one thing, fighting.

The priority clearly at the moment, at least from what we see is fighting. There is one exception that is moving and that is WFP, World Food Programme, maintaining its word, and actually airdropping now more than 100 times to Deir ez-Zor, where there are 200,000 people in government controlled areas, 100 times.

But we have now 110 days, 110 days, since Madaya or any of the besieged areas [*the 110 days refer only to besieged areas under the Four Towns Agreement — Madaya, Zabadani, Foah and Kafraya*] had been reached by convoys. That's why today, I decided to immediately adjourn the Humanitarian taskforce meeting, because what we need today is facts: our message is clear, the Secretary-General has made it, and so have we heard from Stephen O'Brien and frankly from Peter Maurer, the ICRC President. We ask for at least a pause of 48 hours — we insist on this, in order to achieve anything meaningful for Aleppo — to start with Aleppo, a 48 hours pause, that would allow UN humanitarian convoys, unhindered, to go via the Castello road to Aleppo, to everyone in Aleppo because the city is one, east and west. We are ready where is the pause.

This is why today, I have interrupted today, suspended [*meant adjourned*] today the meeting of HTF, Humanitarian Task Force, in order to give a chance to facts to prove that HTF meetings, are indeed, as they have been in the past, meaningful for the Syrian people.

We shall have this afternoon another type of meeting, the Cessation of Hostilities taskforce, which is also, like the HTF, a child of the ISSG ministerial meeting, and I am sure, and I certainly will myself contribute to that, that Aleppo and the cessation of hostilities in Aleppo to start with, for 48 hours, will be the main topic.

I will stop there, and be ready for some questions.

....

I believe that there is a genuine intention of finding a non-military solution, where I do share your concern is that St. Petersburg [should be Moscow] meeting which was an important meeting, between American and Russians at the level of President in Russia and with John Kerry on the other side with Sergey Lavrov. There were important discussions that was when? 15th of July. When are we today? The 18th of August and tomorrow is the International Humanitarian Day. Too much waiting, too many details, too many negotiations. I think the Syrian people and all of us, are all expecting that this

will produce, as we thought it was going to produce, a reduction of violence, and some type of arrangement, which will be actually making a difference in Syria. And since everything is about a pause, lack of violence, humanitarian aid and everything else come with it.

QUESTION. A follow-up to the question of my colleague, you just told us that in fact you used your privilege to suspend this meeting, to whom are you addressing in fact this sign that is showing the world that you are losing patience in the name of course of the Syrian people, what do you expect now? What kind of pressure would you like to use on the co-chairs? Because you say that on the one hand they are looking for solution but on the other hand we are seeing every day that in fact the conflict is increasing.

SdeM: Well I think the message of the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, of the President of the ICRC, and of Stephen O'Brien, of the Syrian people frankly, if you ask them you will hear that, is very clear, and what I simply did was conveying that message to the co-chairs and to all the members of the ISSG because they are in one form or the other, or most of them, involved in this conflict or at least able to influence those who are supposed to stop it. In other words if there is, as we are asking and I again insist, on behalf of the Secretary-General of the UN and of all the Syrian people to have a 48 hours pause in Aleppo to start with, that would require some heavy lifting, from not only the two co-chairs, but from those who have influence on those fighting on the ground.

....

[Response of de Mistura to a question that was inaudible to the transcriptionist:]
Let's be precise, today I adjourned the HTF meeting as a symbol of deep concern and as a sign of respect towards the World Humanitarian Day tomorrow and as a sign of deep unhappiness about the fact that due to the lack of a pause no humanitarian aid is reaching anywhere in Syria in the moment except in Deir ez-Zor [*the Special Envoy refers to the requested inter-agency convoys to besieged and priority hard-to-reach areas. No such convoy could take place this month*], and Aleppo is still, eastern Aleppo besieged and western Aleppo is at risk of becoming besieged.

But we are going to resume it next week and that would be where, I hope, that instead of having hopes or wishes or promises, the meeting will be talking about facts that have happened in the meanwhile. And we will have a meeting this afternoon, important one, more than what you think, or you might think, it is not going to be routine, because it will be all about the reason for why all this is happening, lack of a pause, and lack of a pause on Aleppo, 2 million people.

"Transcript (including corrigenda) of press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 18 August 2016. [Text inside italic brackets are corrigenda inserted in Geneva.] [Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

My comment is that de Mistura exaggerates the ability of the members of the ISSG to create a ceasefire in Syria. The real problem is that *both* Assad *and* the insurgents want to continue fighting, because only a military victory will achieve all of their goals — which is probably

why de Mistura does not ask Assad and the HNC to arrange a ceasefire. Russia, one of the two co-chairs of the ISSG, has been supporting Assad with airstrikes in Syria since 30 September 2015. The USA, the other co-chair of the ISSG, has been supplying munitions to the rebels in Syria. Other members of the ISSG (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey) are actively supplying weapons to insurgents in Syria. Iran is supplying weapons to Assad. *None* of these foreign meddlers want to stop supplying their proxy armies with weapons.

The [Associated Press](#) said de Mistura was "frustrated and unhappy". De Mistura is the *third* U.N. Envoy for Syria, after the previous two Envoys quit in disgust over the failure of ceasefires in 2012 and failure of peace negotiations in 2014. I think it is inevitable that de Mistura will also quit, maybe later in 2016, because the parties do *not* want to negotiate.

[Associated Press](#) (18 Aug) and [RIA-Novosti](#) (19 Aug) reported anonymous sources in the U.S. Government said that Kerry, Lavrov, and de Mistura would meet in Geneva on 26-27 August, a Friday and Saturday. However, there was *no* official confirmation. But, assuming this report of a meeting is true, the meeting will be too late to permit Syrian negotiations to begin in August. The [State Department](#) announced that Kerry will be in Saudi Arabia on 24-25 August, so it will be convenient for Kerry to travel to Geneva on his way back to the USA.

22-27 August 2016

On Monday, 22 August, John Kerry was in Kenya where he said the following about Syria:

QUESTION [by Lesley Wroughton from Reuters]: Iran today said it would stop Russia using the Hamadan Air Base to launch strikes on Syria. Is this U-turn a result of U.S. pressure on Iran? If not, how did you see this coming about? And when do you expect your next discussions to be with Minister Lavrov, and is an agreement on Syria still feasible this month?

KERRY: With respect to the question of Russia and the bombing and Iran, you'd have to ask the Iranians and the Russians why they made whatever decision they made to something that I'm not sure anybody had admitted previously was in fact going on. So I'm not going to comment on it except to say that we are indeed engaged currently in ongoing conversations that have been going on now for several weeks, and it is my hope we are reaching the end of those discussions one way or the other. In the next days, our team will meet — this week — and depending on where those discussions go, it is very possible, even likely, that Foreign Minister Lavrov and I would meet as a consequence of that, but that decision has to be made on the basis of where we are in the next couple of days. But I wouldn't be surprised, if they are positive and constructive, that we do get together sooner rather than later. And therefore, it is possible that something could be agreed at — upon before the end of the month, but I can't tell you whether it's likely. I wouldn't express optimism; I would express hope.

I will say this: This has to end — this Syrian travesty. It has gone on far too long. It has cost many too many lives. Day to day, there have probably been dozens if not hundreds of photographs that were similar to the one that somehow caught the attention of the world in the last few days. And it is imperative that Russia, Iran, the regime, all

of the parties supporting the opposition, people come together in order to find a way forward. And our hope is not that what we agree to with Russia is going to be the ultimate declaration of the end of the process; it's going to be a means of absolutely, legitimately, in the right atmosphere, in the right way, bringing the parties to the table in order to engage for the first time in the real discussions about the political transformation that needs to take place. But that has to be empowered by a legitimate cessation of hostilities and that is what we're working to achieve.

"Remarks With Kenyan Foreign Minister Amina Mohamed," [U.S. State Dept](#), 22 August 2016.

[Reuters](#) summarized this 22 August press briefing by Kerry. Kerry's remark about a recent photograph refers to a video of dazed 5-year old Omran Daqneesh being carried from the rubble of a bombed apartment building in Aleppo on 17 August. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). On 20 August, Omran's 10-year old brother died from injuries received in that bombing, three days earlier. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 24 August the [U.S. State Dept](#). confirmed that Kerry would travel to Geneva on the night of 25 August to meet Lavrov during 26 August. At the State Department daily press briefing on 24 August one journalist summarized what would likely happen at the meeting in Geneva: "And I understand that you [i.e., Director of the U.S. State Department Press Office] want to set expectations low because, frankly, that's where they should be considering what's happened at all the previous meetings."

On 25 August 2016, de Mistura held a press briefing in Geneva after a meeting of the humanitarian task force.

Staffan de Mistura: Now let me give you a little bit of an indication. The first thing I wanted to tell you is that I am not going to go through political analysis at the moment, and you know very much why: while we are meeting here, both the Secretary of State John Kerry and the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, are in Geneva [*Correction: FM Lavrov and Sec. of State Kerry are expected to meet in Geneva tomorrow.*], and there are important meetings taking place, which among other things, are going to cover and are likely very much to cover the issue of Syria. So you will understand why, at this stage, I prefer not to make any type of comments in light also of those meetings and we will be able to meet again, perhaps in two days' time or even earlier than that. But at the moment, the only thing I can tell you is that those meetings that are taking [*Correction: will take*] place outside this office, here in Geneva, are certainly going to have impact on the way we will be, and I plan to, present what are the political initiatives of the UN in order to re-launch the political process on Syria.

I will stop there for the moment. I was planning to tell you more but in view of what has happened and is happening, we need to take that into account as well. So forgive me if I am not going beyond on that.

Second point, you do remember I am sure, that I had an emotional part of my own intervention last Thursday [18 August], when we appealed very firmly and very strongly, I would say, on behalf of the Syrian people in general, but the people of Aleppo in particular, for a 48-hours' pause in order to reach both sides of Aleppo, and

particularly emphasizing that we needed that in order to be able to have UN convoys through the Castello road, the famous Castello road, which had been cut off, in order to reach eastern Aleppo, and frankly also western Aleppo, from the south. All Syrians are in need.

And I think you will be hearing that we have done our homework, we are ready, not only with intentions, we are ready concretely, practically, operationally and I think Jan he will be with you, and when Yacoub will be with you, he will be able to say so.

Just one word, these things, every pause, every humanitarian operation is difficult, but our focus, at least when we talk about humanitarian access, should be the people, not political posturing by one side or the other, but the people, that is what is guiding us and what will help of course, anything that happens regarding also the political process. That is why we are very much focused on maintaining our line: we want a pause for 48 hours, the Russian Federation replied 'yes', we will wait for others to do the same, but we are ready, trucks are ready and they can leave anytime we get that message.

Jan Egeland: We have also agreement now from the Russian Federation of the 48 hour pause, we are also waiting it from the other actors on the ground. That has taken more time frankly than I thought was needed, I thought everybody would help us make it happen, we are hopeful that it will be a very short time until we can roll and we can help the long-suffering people of Aleppo.

In addition we did of course focus on all of the other areas of great need in Syria. It hasn't gotten better in Madaya and Darayya because it got worse in Aleppo. And we are sorry to say that the four towns have now been 116 days without any convoy with food and other supplies. The one glimmer of hope was that at long last there was an evacuation in the recent week of 40 children and others of great medical needs in Madaya, Fouah and Kafraya. But our appeal is to those who are behind the four towns agreement, including Iran and Ahrar al-Sham, help us come to these four towns with the relief that they need, starvation is just around the corner.

The only place we were able to reach this month of August with land convoys was al-Waer, that is getting its second convoy today, this month. We were able to reach Deir ez-Zor and Qamishli with air drops and air bridge respectively. But we failed the other besieged areas of Syria and it is heartbreaking really when we have all of the supplies ready.

"Transcript (including corrigenda) of joint press stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura and UN Senior Advisor, Mr. Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 25 August 2016.

My comment is that de Mistura knows this is almost his last hope for establishing a 48-hour weekly ceasefire in Aleppo, delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, and resumption of the negotiations in Geneva that stalled in April 2016. Russia agreed to the 48-hour ceasefire on 18 August and the HNC agreed on 19 August. (See [below](#).) But neither Assad nor some of the jihadist groups have agreed to the 48-hour ceasefires in Aleppo, despite more than one week of waiting for agreement.

On Friday, 26 August 2016, Kerry and Lavrov met for four hours in the morning at the

President Wilson Hotel that overlooks Lake Geneva, then they took a lunch break. [Reuters](#); [Voice of America](#). For one deluxe lake-view room on the night of 27 August, that Hotel charges US\$ 930, so the U.S. taxpayer can be sure that Kerry is having an opulent experience. In case Kerry wants to splurge, there are two larger and more expensive classes of rooms, and then various exorbitant suites.

After the Kerry-Lavrov discussions on Friday, 26 August 2016, Kerry gave a long, rambling press briefing, some of which is quoted below:

As we stand here tonight, Aleppo continues to be besieged and bombarded by the regime and its allies, including Iran, Russia, and Hizballah. And the regime has just today forced the surrender of Daraya after a brutal four years of the siege and continues to take territory in the Damascus suburbs, which I might add runs counter to two iterations of a previously announced cessation of hostilities, which is what brings us here today. That's why we're here, because of this. And I think everybody in the world was transfixed by the photograph of two young boys, one of whom died, in that ambulance [in Aleppo on 17 Aug]. The image for some reason obviously caught everybody in a very special way, but it's an image that is probably repeated time and time again over any given week in the course of the life of Aleppo or the life of Syria. And it needs to motivate all of us to get the job done, to provide for a real ceasefire, and to meet the needs of the Syrian people. And that is why we came here today.

....

So needless to say, the situation has dramatically deteriorated since the brief oasis of calm that followed the launch of the cessation of hostilities in February. And I'm grateful that Sergey Lavrov and I were able to work together with other colleagues in the international community through the International Syria Support Group. We were able to cobble together the concept of the cessation of hostilities.

It is fair to say that well into March of this year, Syrians had benefited from a degree of calm they had not experienced in years. For a period of time, the cessation of hostilities held. And the cessation — even flawed — became something of real value to them. For a brief moment, a brief instant, life changed in some communities. People sat in cafes. People went out and began to try to resume life again, but that was lost. And it was lost because of the lack of accountability and the inability to be able to deal with violations.

....

Now some, including my friend Sergey Lavrov from Russia to my left here, may dispute the narrative I just laid out and attribute most of the regime actions to Nusrah.

....

....

Today, I can say that we achieved clarity on the path forward. We have completed the vast majority of those technical discussions, which were primarily focused on making this cessation real and improving the level of humanitarian assistance, and thereby

getting the parties to the table so we can have a serious negotiation about how to end this war. If the remaining details can be completed, we believe we will be able to address the two primary challenges to the cessation of hostilities: one, the regime violations, including the aerial bombardment of densely populated areas; and two, the increasing influence of the al-Nusra Front.

Now, last month in Moscow we also said before we could move forward with any enhanced cooperation, we need a period of reduced violence to convince the people of Syria and the opposition that the actions of the regime and its supporters will be consistent with the words put on paper. In Moscow, I said, “These are words on paper. What will matter are the actions.” And that is as true today as it was then.

We have a few narrow issues to resolve, and in the next days our experts will be meeting here in Geneva to conclude the remaining technical issues and to move forward in order to take the steps necessary to build the confidence to overcome the deep mistrust that does exist on all sides. For example, we do need to see clear adherence to the cessation of hostilities by the regime. We also need to see the resumption, unimpeded and sustained, of humanitarian access to all besieged and hard-to-reach areas, including Aleppo, according to the UN plans and procedures. And if we can achieve our goals, and we are able to implement a full and lasting cessation of hostilities, then we absolutely will have won the opportunity to have a fundamental change in the trajectory of this conflict.

But as I have been saying from the beginning of this process, the conflict will not end without a political solution. And that is why as soon as the narrow issues remaining are resolved and there is some space and good will established for productive dialogue, UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura will bring the parties back to the table to negotiate a political transition. That is our ultimate goal and that is the only way that this horrendous war can finally come to an end. It is really the only viable path towards the peace and security and normalcy that the people of Syria desire and deserve.

So with that, I again thank Sergey for coming here to Geneva, for meeting with me today, for being extremely patient while we conversed among ourselves and with Washington, and I appreciate that patience. We are close, but as I have said to you in other contexts before, we’re not going to rush to an agreement until it satisfies fully the needs of the Syrian people and the ability of the international community to address them in ways that can show real results. That’s what we’re after.

Thank you.

....

[Part of Kerry's response to a question:] And some of those details — we do not want to make an announcement. I don’t want to make an announcement, speaking for myself, nor does President Obama want an announcement made on behalf of our Administration that is not enforceable, that doesn’t have details worked out, that winds up in the place that the last two announcements have wound up. The work that can be done in the next week has the ability to resolve some of these remaining issues.

But until we have, neither of us are prepared to make an announcement that is predicated for failure. And so it is important for us to do this and to do it right. I think I've said that to you many times during the course of the Iran negotiation; this is no different. We don't want to have a deal for the sake of a deal; we want to have something done that is effective and that works for the people of Syria, that makes the region more stable and secure, and that brings us to the table here in Geneva to find a political solution. And so we're working on those details; and when they are ready, I assure you you'll be among the very first to know.

John Kerry, "Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a Press Availability," [State Dept](#), 26 August 2016.

Kerry said the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement failed "because of the lack of accountability and the inability to be able to deal with violations." I believe that Kerry is correct. My essay for [May 2016](#) mentions that Russia proposed designating both Jaish al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham as terrorist organizations to punish them for frequent violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. But on 11 May, the USA blocked that proposal by Russia. As I said in May 2016: "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." On 17 May, the U.S. and Russia again promised in an ISSG meeting to punish persistent violators of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, but then both the USA and Russia again failed to punish any violators. And the Russians also have unclean hands, in that the Russians have been bombing Syrian cities — especially Aleppo — and protecting Assad from punishment.

Kerry said "The work that can be done in the next week has the ability to resolve some of these remaining issues." That hints that an agreement *might* be reached in one week, on 2 September. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement unraveled in mid-April, four months ago. The timetable for restoring the Cessation of Hostilities keeps getting pushed forward, weeks at a time, when more than 4000 people are dying each month in Syria.

Lavrov spoke in Russian at the joint press conference and the U.S. State Department rudely failed to translate Lavrov's remarks. So one needs to rely on Reuters to report the whole picture:

It was unclear after Friday's meetings whether outstanding issues could all be resolved between Moscow and Washington, which back opposing parties in the Syrian conflict. The United States has insisted that the Syrian air force, which has dropped barrel bombs and chlorine on residential areas, be grounded but Lavrov said on Friday that was not the goal.

....

Kerry said the Syrian regime had "forced the surrender" of Daraya in contravention of the February cessation of hostilities agreement, but Lavrov said the local accord was an "example" that should be "replicated".

Lesley Wroughton & Stephanie Nebehay, "U.S. and Russia fail to close deal on ending violence in Syria," [Reuters](#), 21:06 GMT, 26 August 2016.

The surrender of Daraya is described [below](#). Kerry made an unsupported assertion that the

surrender violated the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, but — without citing the specific relevant section of the Agreement — Kerry's assertion has no credibility. There is nothing wrong with a town deciding to surrender, to avoid annihilation. Lavrov is surely correct that more towns should surrender and end the civil war.

On 27-29 August I did searches of Google, and also looked at the Russian Foreign Ministry's English-language website, but failed to find an English translation of Lavrov's remarks on the night of 26 August.

Late at night on 26 August, the Associated Press issued an insightful news article on the failure of Kerry and Lavrov to agree:

The United States and Russia said Friday they had resolved a number of issues standing in the way of restoring a nationwide truce to Syria and opening up aid deliveries, but were unable once again to forge a comprehensive agreement on stepping up cooperation to end the brutal war that has killed hundreds of thousands.

After meeting off-and-on for nearly 10 hours in Geneva on Friday, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov could point to only incremental progress in filling in details of a broad understanding to boost joint efforts that was reached last month in Moscow.

....

The complexities have also grown with the increasing internationalization of what has largely become a proxy war between regional and world powers, highlighted by a move by Turkish troops across the Syrian border against Islamic State fighters this week.

....

Yet, it was clear that neither side believes an overall agreement is imminent or even achievable after numerous previous disappointments shattered a brief period of relative calm earlier this year.

....

Expectations had been low for the talks, particularly given how efforts to forge a new U.S.-Russia understanding have fallen short virtually every month for the past five years.

Matthew Lee & Jamey Keaten, "US, Russia fall short on deal to restore Syria truce," [Associated Press](#), 22:32 GMT, 26 August 2016.

My comment is that is easy to get nations to agree on broad goals for Syria: (1) nationwide ceasefire, (2) routine deliveries of humanitarian aid to everyone who needs aid, (3) resume negotiations in Geneva. The U.N. Security Council Resolutions and ISSG Statements are filled with these desirable goals. The difficult part is deciding *how* to achieve these goals when Assad and Russia are engaged in a continuing series of airstrikes on civilians and hospitals, the insurgents use artillery to shell civilians, both Assad and insurgents want to

besiege towns, and the Syrian opposition (i.e., HNC) refuses to negotiate.

It is easy to get politicians and diplomats to agree to chant slogans (e.g., "no military solution in Syria"). But at the same time, these hypocritical foreign meddlers pour weapons and munitions into Syria to keep their proxy armies fighting.

De Mistura must be horribly frustrated:

1. De Mistura was unable to arrange a cessation of hostilities, so he called on Russia and the USA (the two co-chairs of the cessation of hostilities task force) to arrange a new cessation of hostilities. The Russians and Americans have been *talking* since 14 July 2016, but there have been *no* results.

As mentioned [below](#), on 21 July the United Nations proposed weekly 48-hour ceasefires in Aleppo to allow for delivery of humanitarian aid. Despite much negotiation, there is *no* agreement on ceasefires in Aleppo.

2. De Mistura and other United Nations diplomats are unable to arrange for routine delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria.
3. De Mistura has made no progress on the release of detainees.
4. Because of the continued fighting in Syria, and the failure to routinely deliver humanitarian aid to everyone who needs food/medicine in Syria, resumption of negotiations in Geneva is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Geneva negotiations failed

In my opinion, it is important to be clear that the negotiations in Geneva have *failed*. Further, de Mistura's slight-of-hand about the 1 August date, along with his optimistic promises to soon restart the negotiations, attempts to conceal the failure. There are at least seven indications that the negotiations in Geneva have failed:

1. In the six months after negotiations began in Geneva, the HNC never agreed to negotiate, because the HNC's pre-conditions (i.e., demands) had *not* been satisfied. The HNC's pre-conditions were items that they failed to achieve in five years of civil war.
2. The level of animosity and hatred was so high, the HNC delegates refused to meet Assad's delegation face-to-face during 2016.
3. In the 7 months after negotiations began in Geneva, discussions of the Transitional Governing Body never began. The TGB was the first milestone in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.
4. It is impossible to compromise on (a) the HNC's intransigent demand that Assad resign and (b) Assad's desire to remain president.

5. *Both Assad and the insurgents* clearly prefer a continuation of civil war to peace negotiations. That is why the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in February 2016 unraveled in April 2016.
6. On 18 April 2016, the HNC walked out of negotiations in Geneva. Moreover, on 28 June the other Syrian opposition participants threatened to quit the negotiations, unless their four demands were satisfied. There has been *no* progress on satisfying any of their four demands. So, on 1 August, de Mistura has *no* opposition delegation. With the grim situation on the ground in August 2016, if de Mistura were to call for resumption of negotiations, it is doubtful whether any opposition delegates would appear in Geneva.
7. Suspending the negotiations continuously from 27 April until sometime after 31 August — *more than 126 days without negotiations* — is a tacit admission that the negotiations have failed.

Missing the 1 August target date for establishing the Transitional Governing Body is *not* a reason for the failure of the negotiations. The target date can always be extended. But the above-mentioned reasons show that the Geneva negotiations have failed, because the parties did *not* attempt to meet that target date.

Diplomats like de Mistura will continue to try to make the negotiations a success, because good diplomats are full of idealism and optimism. Without the values of idealism and optimism, a diplomat would descend into nihilism when dealing with uncooperative, belligerent parties. So when de Mistura promises concrete results next month, he is really expressing his hope or desire, *not* expressing a realistic prediction.

On 7 July 2016, I wrote a [section](#) in the conclusion of this essay that identified five reasons why the negotiations in Geneva failed.

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. My essay for [June 2016](#) said: "With hindsight, de Mistura missed his last chance when he failed to convene negotiations in Geneva no later than 11 May." But if de Mistura had convened negotiations in early May, the HNC would *not* have attended the negotiations and any results of the negotiations would likely be ignored by rebels and jihadists fighting in Syria.

If there be any doubt that the Geneva negotiations have failed, look at the series of statements by the convenor (de Mistura) about when the next negotiations will begin:

1. 26 May 2016: "... start the next round of Talks as soon as feasible...."
2. 9 June 2016: Suggested 1 August 2016 "for beginning of a serious concrete message in terms of political transition."
3. 22 June 2016: "The window of opportunity is quickly coming to a close unless we keep

alive the cessation of hostilities, we increase humanitarian aid and come to some kind of understanding about political transition. This way, hopefully in July we can have intra-Syrian talks,"

4. 23 June 2016: "... when are we going to have the Intra-Syrian talks? The aim is still July remember, because August is not a fictional but is a real timetable...."
5. 29 June 2016: "... I'm still aiming — we are aiming at — within July but not at any cost and not without guarantees."
6. 22 July 2016: "... the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and, modestly, myself, are determined to actually look for a proper date, in August, for re-launching the Intra-Syrian Talks in Geneva."
7. 26 July 2016: "Our aim, and we say it very clearly, is to proceed with the third round of the Intra-Syrian talks towards the end of August."

Because of the worsening fighting in Syria and the consequent failure of deliveries of humanitarian aid, negotiations failed to resume in July, failed to resume on 1 Aug, and failed to resume later in August — *three* missed opportunities. It should be obvious that the failure of negotiations in Geneva is *not* the fault of de Mistura. Both Assad and the insurgents are pursuing a military victory, aided by foreign meddlers. From the creation of the HNC in December 2015, the HNC refused to negotiate until after its preconditions (i.e., demands) were satisfied. But there was *no* hope in 2016 of satisfying any of the HNC's demands. The HNC walked out of negotiations on 18 April 2016.

On 29 June 2016, de Mistura vaguely hinted that the negotiations must conclude before September 2016, because "the next General Assembly will be the last where the Secretary-General [Ban Ki-moon] will be there." On 11 July, de Mistura said in Rome: "Between now and September we have a window for finding a strategy that combines the fight against terrorism with a political transition". Unfortunately for the Syrian people, this vague September deadline was rapidly approaching during August 2016, without any negotiations in Geneva. The U.N. General Assembly meeting begins on 13 Sep 2016, and it seems certain that there will be *no* results from the Geneva negotiations to celebrate at that meeting. Ban Ki-moon's term as Secretary General expires on 31 Dec 2016, and the next Secretary General may want to appoint a different Special Envoy for Syria, to make a fresh start.

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](#).

On 17 May 2016, there was a fifth meeting of the ISSG in Vienna. See my essay for [May 2016](#).

I have collected the full-text of statements issued at ISSG meetings in my document at [rbs0.com](#)

August 2016: *no* ISSG Meeting

With de Mistura's repeated calls in June for foreign nations to use their influence to create a "critical mass" amongst the HNC and Assad's delegation, it would appear to be useful to have another ISSG meeting in June or early July. But the last ISSG meeting, on 17 May 2016, produced many promises, but few results. In July it was obvious that the brief ISSG meetings (less than one day for more than 17 nations to reach a consensus!) are carefully choreographed by Russia and the USA. I suspect that the statements issued by the ISSG meetings are drafted in advance by the USA, with the approval of Russia, and *not* the product of the participants at the ISSG meeting.

Notice that during October-December 2015, the ISSG met every month. But there have been only *two* meetings during eight months of 2016, despite significant problems in Syria. It appears that the ISSG is dead.

One might interpret the Kerry-Lavrov meetings in Moscow on 14-15 July 2016, or in Geneva on 26 August 2016, as a kind of ISSG meeting.

July 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.

My essay for [May 2016](#) chronicled the collapse of the cessation of hostilities, despite promises by the ISSG to restore the ceasefire. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported a death toll in May that was similar to months before the ceasefire began.

My essay for [June 2016](#) continued to chronicle violations of the cessation of hostilities. The only source of daily reports on violations is by Russia, which does *not* include violations by Assad and Russia. As I reflected during June 2016 on this omission, I decided to discontinue in July my quoting of the Russian statistics on ceasefire violations, because they are incomplete and misleading.

My essay for [July 2016](#) chronicles a failed Eid al-Fitr truce declared by Assad during 6-14 July, bombing of more hospitals in Syria, and some of the siege of Aleppo.

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.

United Nations proposes 48 hour ceasefire Syrians ignore the proposal

On 21 July, Jan Egeland, humanitarian aid advisor to U.N. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura, floated a proposal for weekly 48-hour pauses in fighting to allow delivery of food and medicine in Syria. [U.N. Geneva](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Besieging the city of Aleppo has prevented delivery of humanitarian aid. So, on 25 July, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, proposed a weekly 48-hour ceasefire, to allow delivery of humanitarian aid. [U.N. News](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

It's a silly proposal. The whole point of besieging a city is to starve the residents into

submission. Allowing weekly deliveries of humanitarian aid into a besieged city would completely frustrate the purpose of besieging that city. Both Assad's government and the insurgents have repeatedly proven that they are barbarians, so concern about starving civilians will *not* motivate a ceasefire in Syria. *If* suffering civilians were important to Assad and the insurgents, then we would have regular deliveries of humanitarian aid and *no* besieged cities in Syria.

On 9 August, outraged diplomats in the United Nations were screeching for an urgent ceasefire in Aleppo so the city's water system can be repaired. The [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) report that two million people have been without pipe water in Aleppo since 31 July.

The United Nations wants weekly 48-hour ceasefires. But on 10 August 2016, Russia announced daily 3-hour ceasefires in Aleppo, beginning on 11 Aug, to allow trucks to deliver humanitarian aid. The ceasefires are scheduled to begin at 10:00 and expire at 13:00 each day. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). Strangely, neither RIA-Novosti nor the Syrian Arab News Agency reported this important story on 10 August. The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic did *not* mention the new ceasefire in their bulletin posted at night on [10 Aug](#). A 3-hour ceasefires will be mostly consumed in slowly moving trucks in and out of Aleppo on damaged roads. Reports from Aleppo on the first day of the ceasefire showed "no letup to the fighting between rebels and government forces in the contested city of Aleppo despite a three-hour ceasefire declared by the Russian military". [Associated Press](#). The Russian bulletins for [11 Aug](#) and [12 Aug](#) also fail to mention the three-hour ceasefire in Aleppo. It appears that the so-called three-hour ceasefires in Aleppo never happened.

On the afternoon of 11 August, both de Mistura and his humanitarian adviser, Jan Egeland, rejected the Russian offer of 3-hour ceasefires, and insisted on one 48-hour ceasefire each week. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 15 August, Lavrov admitted that three-hour ceasefires were too short, but Lavrov also said that a longer ceasefire would allow insurgents to resupply and bring more soldiers into Aleppo. [TASS](#); [dpa](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [NY Times](#).

On 16 August 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Office, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, issued a Statement on the urgent need to protect civilians living amidst on-going attacks on Aleppo city.

The Commission is gravely concerned for the safety of civilians, including a reported 100,000 children, living in eastern Aleppo city, where violence has reached new heights in recent weeks as asymmetric warfare intensifies over control of armed group-held neighbourhoods and their principal remaining supply lines, currently the Castello road and access through Ramouseh neighbourhood. These attacks appear to form the prelude to a siege, designed to force the capture of the city through an already-documented strategy of 'surrender or starve'. The situation of civilians in Aleppo city is critical and demands immediate attention and response.

Neighbourhoods of Aleppo city are now being pounded daily by aerial bombardments by Government and pro-Government forces, causing mass civilian casualties. Civilians have been killed by the strikes, while others have died after being trapped under rubble

of collapsed buildings surrounding impact sites. Subsequent strikes have killed first responders, including members of the Syrian Civil Defence, as they attempted to rescue survivors.

Over twenty-five hospitals and clinics have been destroyed in aerial bombardments since January 2016. Attacks have killed patients and much-needed medical staff. Among the healthcare facilities destroyed are maternity hospitals, paediatric units and emergency wards. Earlier in the year, airstrikes and barrel bombs destroyed markets, bakeries, and water pumping stations. Two million civilians in Aleppo currently lack access to running water. Those inside the armed group-held neighbourhoods describe lives of horror, under near-constant threat of death from airstrikes. There is limited food, water, and supplies for babies and infants. Access to medical care in these areas is largely non-existent.

....

Scores of civilians in Government-held areas of Aleppo city are being killed by the indiscriminate ground shelling of armed groups, as coalitions including Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh al-Islam, and the terrorist group Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (previously Jabhat al-Nusra) mount their counteroffensive against Government attack.

The situation in Aleppo city has been catastrophic for many years. As unthinkable as it is, the current attacks suggest the agony of its civilians is about to deepen.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, "Statement on the urgent need to protect civilians living amidst on-going attacks on Aleppo city," [Statement](#), 16 August 2016.

The above-quoted Statement was mentioned by the Secretary General's Deputy Spokesman at the United Nations Daily Press Briefing in New York City.

Deputy Spokesman: The Commission of Inquiry dealing with Syria said today [16 August] that it is gravely concerned for the safety of civilians, including a reported 100,000 children, living in eastern Aleppo city, saying that the situation there is critical and demands immediate attention and response. The Commission says that neighbourhoods of Aleppo City are now being pounded daily by aerial bombardments by Government and pro-Government forces, causing mass civilian casualties. It adds that more than 25 hospitals and clinics have been destroyed in aerial bombardments since January.

It adds that humanitarian corridors, if put in place, must be set up and implemented in a manner that complies with key humanitarian principles. Civilians who choose to remain must have unhindered access to life-saving humanitarian assistance. Regardless of the existence of humanitarian corridors, the warring parties still have a legal obligation not to direct attacks against civilians and civilian targets. The Commission urges the warring parties to conduct themselves in accordance with international law. The Commission emphasizes, however, that the attacks on Aleppo City, even if in accordance with the laws of war, will only further devastate the civilian population.

....

Question: According to some media reports originating apparently from Moscow, the Russians are said to be in contact with the Americans to try and arrange some humanitarian joint operation. So, the question: is Mr. [Staffan] de Mistura aware of this development, and what is his comments, if any?

Deputy Spokesman: Yes, I'd refer you back to what Staffan de Mistura, the Special Envoy for Syria, told the press in Geneva at the end of last week. Last Thursday [11 August], he spoke to the press. He has been in touch with representatives from the Russian Federation and from the United States, and they've been working to see what sort of cessation of hostilities [or pause] could be brought into effect. And he laid out what our basic minimum conditions are for an effective cessation of hostilities in that area, in terms of something that would allow for a pause, potentially of 48 hours or more, to allow aid to go in and out of Aleppo.

"Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [Daily Press Briefing](#), 16 August 2016.

On the morning of 18 August, de Mistura threw a snit and cancelled the meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva, because the continued fighting in Syria had prevented deliveries of humanitarian aid during August. De Mistura again specifically demanded 48 hour ceasefires in Aleppo for the delivery of humanitarian aid. (See [above](#).)

On the evening of 18 August, Russia announced it would support de Mistura's call for weekly 48 hour ceasefires, beginning "next week" (i.e., sometime during 22-26 August). [RIA-Novosti](#)(14:07 GMT); [Reuters](#)(14:23 GMT).

Then de Mistura issued a statement on the night of 18 August 2016:

The Special Envoy for Syria, this morning, cut short the regular International Syria Support Group (ISSG) Humanitarian Taskforce meeting, and made, on behalf of the Secretary-General, a strong appeal for a pause of at least 48-hours to deliver UN humanitarian aid to the whole city of Aleppo — a pause in fighting that has become ever more urgent as the horrific images emerging from the ground attest to.

Mr. de Mistura has since received the communication from the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, stating its readiness to support his proposal of a 48-hour humanitarian pause in Aleppo.

The Special Envoy welcomes the Russian Federation statement, and the United Nations humanitarian team is now set to mobilize itself to respond to this challenge, as stated recently by Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien. Our plan is to collectively work out the operational details, and be ready for delivery as soon as possible.

The United Nations counts on the Russian Federation to deliver their part, regarding, in particular, the adherence of the Syrian armed forces to the pause, once it comes into effect.

The United Nations further counts on all those with access to or influence on the armed opposition, in particular the United States, as ISSG co-chair, as well as other relevant

ISSG members, to ensure that the armed opposition also respects the 48-hour humanitarian pause.

"Note to Correspondents — Media Statement by The Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), 18 August 2016. [Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

On Friday, 19 August at 14:25 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported that the HNC welcomed the proposed weekly 48-hour ceasefire in Aleppo, with the condition that the United Nations monitor and enforce the ceasefire. Reuters said: "Syria's government has not yet commented on the idea."

On 19 August at 20:30 GMT, I checked the website of the Syrian Arab News Agency, but there was still *no* comment from the Syrian government on the proposed ceasefire in Aleppo. I checked again on 20 August at 22:00 GMT, but there was still *no* comment. This absence of acceptance — or lack of enthusiasm — for deliveries of humanitarian aid to Aleppo may indicate that Assad is opposed to the U.N. proposal. It is *not* surprising that Assad would oppose the U.N. proposal, because the U.N. intends to frustrate Assad's plan to starve the insurgents in Aleppo into submission.

On Saturday, 27 August, de Mistura asked that all parties agree on 28 August to allow deliveries of humanitarian aid into Aleppo: "The Special Envoy calls for all concerned to exert every effort so that, by this Sunday, 28 August 2016, we know where we stand." [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#). I looked at the Syrian Arab News Agency website at 23:00 GMT on 28 August, but there was *no* news report about humanitarian aid to Aleppo or whether Assad had agreed to allow the U.N. to deliver aid.

On 29 August, Russia reported that the insurgents had agreed to allow delivery of humanitarian aid in Aleppo, but with "unacceptable and unrealistic conditions". The Russian Foreign Ministry did *not* specify the conditions that disrupted the delivery of humanitarian aid. [RIA-Novosti](#); [SANA](#). While the Syrian government news agency (SANA) blames the insurgents, apparently Assad has also *not* agreed to allow delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo.

Siege of Aleppo

Beginning 7 July 2016, fighting near Castello Road effectively began the siege of Aleppo. On 17 July, Assad's military captured Castello Road.

Diplomats have been frantically trying to arrange deliveries of humanitarian aid to people in Aleppo. But Assad wants to starve the insurgents into submission, and so the diplomatic discussions were fruitless.

On 7 August 2016, insurgents claimed they had broken the siege of Aleppo by seizing a thin strip of land formerly controlled by Assad. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). The Associated Press reports on 7 August that approximately "700 fighters from the government and the insurgent side were killed in the week of fighting." As part of the fighting to break the siege, the insurgents captured a Syrian military college in Ramousah, where artillery ammunition was stored. The artillery ammunition will enable the insurgents to destroy more buildings and

kill more people.

On 14 August 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights ([SOHR](#)) "documented the death of" 102 civilians killed by "aerial bombardment and explosive barrels" by Assad and his allies in Aleppo city, and the death of 126 civilians killed by insurgents in Aleppo city, during the first 13 days of August 2016.

On 18 August, while de Mistura and the Russians were discussing weekly 24-hour ceasefires in Aleppo, the Syrian Arab News Agency ([SANA](#)) was boasting that Assad's military had conducted 74 sorties in Aleppo — "39 combat sorties by bombers and 35 sorties by helicopters" — during the past 24 hours, killing more than 70 terrorists.

On 20 August 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights ([SOHR](#)) reported 162 civilians dead from "aerial bombardment" by Assad and his allies in Aleppo city, and 163 civilians dead from "rebels shells targeted [at] regime-controlled areas of Aleppo" in the three weeks since 31 July.

On 22 August 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights ([SOHR](#)) documented a total of 1396 civilians killed in Aleppo city "since the 22nd of April 2016 until the dawn of today the 22th of August 2016". Of those,

- 730 killed by Russian or Assad's airstrikes,
- 538 killed by insurgents,
- 89 killed by Assad's artillery,
- 39 killed in other ways.

A quick calculation shows Assad and Russia are responsible for about 60% of the civilian deaths in Aleppo.

Airstrikes on Hospitals in Syria and airstrikes on other prohibited targets

There is a long history of airstrikes by Russia or Assad on hospitals in Syria:

- My essay for [October 2015](#) says "Médecins Sans Frontières complained that airstrikes in Syria during October had hit at least 12 hospitals, killing at least 35 people, including hospital staff."
- My essay for [February 2016](#) mentions Russian airstrikes on two hospitals in Aleppo and one school on 15 February. My essay for [March 2016](#) cited the United Nations for saying four hospitals and one school were bombed in Syria on 15 February.
- My essay for [April 2016](#) mentions bombing of a hospital in Aleppo on 28 April, killing 50 people.
- My essay for [June 2016](#) mentions bombing of three hospitals in Aleppo on 8 June.
- My essay for [July 2016](#) mentions Assad's airplanes bombed five hospitals in Aleppo

province on 24 July. Then on 29 July a maternity hospital in Idlib province was bombed.

On 3 August 2016, [Reuters](#) reported Assad's military attacked six hospitals in Aleppo province during 23-31 July 2016. Further: "[Physicians for Human Rights] said it has documented more than 370 attacks on 265 medical facilities during the war, and the deaths of 750 medical personnel."

Above, I quote Jan Egeland who said on 4 August: "We received reports of 44 hospitals, clinics and health posts being attacked in the month of July alone."

On 4 August 2016, [Reuters](#) reported Russian airstrikes hit civilians in two different refugee camps in Syria.

[Reuters](#) reported that an airstrike on a hospital in Meles, in Idlib province, on 6 August, killed 10 people.

On 6 August 2016, a pediatric hospital in Millis, in Idlib province, was bombed. A total of 13 people died at the hospital that was supported by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [MSF](#).

On 12 August 2016, the [Associated Press](#) tells us that airstrikes "hit the only hospital for women and children in the town of Kafr Hamra" in the city of Aleppo, killing a nurse and an anesthetic technician. Then "airstrikes hit a market in the nearby town of Urem al-Kubra", where at least 6 people died.

On 19 August, [Reuters](#) reported: "Local communities in Syria are refusing aid agencies permission to open new hospitals out of fear the facilities will draw more bombings to the area, [Mazen Kewara of the Syrian American Medical Society] said on Friday [19 Aug]."

My comments: There can be *no* doubt that a military attack on a hospital is an atrocity. It is a clear violation of international law, and a war crime. After some of the larger attacks on hospitals in Syria, the diplomats at the United Nations issue a statement condemning the attack and reminding the perpetrators that they just committed another war crime. But because there are *no* adverse consequences for the perpetrators, the military attacks on hospitals in Syria continue again and again. This lack of consequences exposes not only Assad's willingness to commit more atrocities, but also the impotence of the diplomats who fail to enforce international law.

On the morning of 9 August 2016, I searched for the United Nations Secretary General's statements on bombing of hospitals in Syria. Since 1 October 2015, the only time the Secretary General condemned a bombing of a hospital in Syria was on 28 April 2016, when he [condemned](#) the bombing of the Al Quds hospital in Aleppo that killed at least 20 people, "including three children and the area's last paediatrician." Maybe the Secretary General has become tired of condemning atrocities in Syria. But the atrocities continue to occur, even if the Secretary General chooses to ignore them. One might say the atrocities continue to occur, because the Secretary General is powerless to stop the atrocities.

Idlib clobbered

On Sunday, 14 August 2016, *Al-Arabiya* has a news article with the headline: "Jets pound Syria's Idlib as battles rage in Aleppo".

Syria's rebel-held, northwestern Idlib province came under heavy bombardment Sunday [14 August], activists reported, as rebels and pro-government forces battled for control of the nearby city of Aleppo.

Much of the fighting has been marked by indiscriminate shelling, missile attacks, and aerial bombardment, killing scores of civilians across Idlib and Aleppo. The rebels do not have an air force.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 26 airstrikes on Sunday across Idlib, one of the last remaining opposition bastions. Observatory head Rami Abdurrahman said Russian and government airstrikes on the province have intensified since rebels launched a campaign from Idlib to break a government siege of Aleppo's opposition districts on July 31. The strikes have killed 122 civilians, he said. "Jets pound Syria's Idlib as battles rage in Aleppo," *Al-Arabiya*, 21:22 GMT, 14 August 2016.

Daraya surrenders

On 25 August 2016, the town of Daraya (also spelled Darayya) surrendered to Assad's government, after being besieged since November 2012. Approximately 700 insurgents with their rifles will be allowed to go to Idlib province. Approximately 4000 to 6000 residents of Daraya — the entire population of Daraya — will be transported to other locations near Damascus. It was *not* explained why Assad wanted a complete evacuation of the entire town of Daraya. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [NY Times](#).

On Friday, 26 August, the evacuation of Daraya began. [Reuters](#) reported: "Two Free Syria Army rebel groups from Daraya, the Shuhada al-Islam and Ajnad al-Sham, would travel to Idlib...." An early version of the [Associated Press](#) article said: "At least 48 green and white buses, eight ambulances and several Red Crescent and U.N. vehicles were lined up at the entrance of Daraya earlier Friday, waiting for the green light." The final version of that [Associated Press](#) article said: "Daraya was the last remaining rebel holdout in the region known as western Ghouta — and the closest to the capital [Damascus]." The [Associated Press](#) also explained: "The mass relocation of the suburb's residents reflects the government's ongoing military strategy to break up Sunni population areas, weakening the rebellion against it."

On Saturday, 27 August, all of the insurgents were removed to Idlib, and all of the civilians were removed from Daraya, which completed the surrender. [Associated Press](#). [SANA](#) says: "... during the coming days, service infrastructure which was destroyed in the city by terrorism will be gradually rehabilitated in preparation for the return of locals to their houses." Of course, SANA has the facts wrong: it was Assad's bombing that destroyed Daraya. And it is doubtful that Daraya will be soon rebuilt.

On Friday, 26 August, de Mistura — who had *not* been involved in the negotiation of the surrender agreement — issued a statement that said:

The situation regarding Darayya is extremely grave. It is tragic that repeated appeals to lift the siege of Darayya, besieged since November 2012, and cease the fighting, have never been heeded.

The Special Envoy has been made aware overnight of an agreement to evacuate residents, both civilians and fighters, starting today. The UN was not consulted or involved in the negotiation of this agreement.

It is imperative that people of Darayya are protected in any evacuation that takes place, and that this takes place voluntarily.

The Special Envoy strongly appeals to the Co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and co-sponsors of the Cessation of Hostilities and other ISSG members to ensure that the implementation of this agreement and its aftermath is in full compliance with international humanitarian law and protection standards.

A UN humanitarian team is reaching out to all parties, including the local population.

The world is watching.

"Media Statement by the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 26 August 2016.

My comment is that the United Nations is increasingly irrelevant in Syria. Not only was the United Nations *not* involved in negotiating the surrender in Daraya, but also the U.N. is *not* involved in the evacuation of Daraya. De Mistura objects to the involuntary removal of residents from Daraya, but he is absolutely powerless to protect those residents. De Mistura "strongly appeals" to the ISSG to do something, but the ISSG has *not* met in the past three months and is equally powerless. As for his final paragraph, Reuters and the Associated Press may be watching, but the world — including diplomats and politicians — is going to enjoy its weekend without worrying about people in Daraya. The reality is that the residents of Daraya could have avoided their suffering — and the destruction of their town — by surrendering in 2013, but the insurgents continued a futile fight against Assad.

Later on Friday, 26 August, the Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary General spoke briefly about Daraya at his noon press briefing. Here is all of what he said about Daraya:

The situation in Darayya in Syria: there was a statement issued by Staffan de Mistura on the situation in Darayya. The Special Envoy said today it is imperative that people of Darayya are protected in any evacuation that takes place, and [that this] takes place voluntarily. He strongly appeals to the Co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group and co-sponsors of the cessation of hostilities and other Support Group members to ensure that the implementation of this agreement and its aftermath is in full compliance with international humanitarian law and protection standards.

He said that he had been made aware overnight of the agreement to evacuate residents, both civilians and fighters, starting today. The UN was not consulted or involved in the

negotiation of this agreement. A UN humanitarian team is reaching out to all parties, including the local population. He said it is tragic that repeated appeals to lift the siege of the city, besieged since November 2012, and cease the fighting, have never been heeded. There is also a statement online of the Emergency Relief Coordinator expressing his deep concern at the situation in the town.

....

Question: Going back to the situation in Darayya. During the evacuation of the civilians and the militants, some UN vehicles went into Darayya and then came out, in parallel with the Syrian Red Crescent. What were they doing there?

Spokesman: Sure. They were... as I've said, we were not directly involved in negotiation of this... of this deal, nor are we escorting the evacuations. However, as you mentioned, a small team from the UN and the Red Cross was going to Darayya today to meet with all parties and identify the key issues for the civilians. Obviously, we are using this lull in the fighting to try to get in and see what we can do and obviously see for ourselves what the situation is inside the city.

Question: Sorry. A follow-up on that. Why is the United Nations trying to distance itself from this deal?

Spokesman: It's not a matter... it's not a matter of distancing ourselves. I think it's a matter of... if we are involved in cessation of hostilities deals and pauses, there are standards having to do with how civilians are — especially civilians — are treated, how all people are treated. We always need to ensure that there's no forced evacuation, that people are not being moved against their will. So, we're not saying this is the case in this particular situation. We're just saying we were not involved, and we just hope that even if we're not involved, that the international norms and standards are respected. Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 26 August 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 (ICC). 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.

My essay for [May 2016](#) revised my discussion in March and added some new material.

In his monthly report on Syria issued on 20 July 2016, Ban Ki-moon noted:

The plight of those in Aleppo and elsewhere across the country underscores that civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic are as much at risk as they have ever been owing to the continued blatant disregard for humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. Ongoing sieges are depriving civilians of the most basic items necessary for their survival, such as water and food, and strikes are launched on heavily populated areas from both air and ground, without regard for civilian presence. Parties to the conflict must immediately abide by international humanitarian law and individuals who fail to do so should be brought to account. Civilians must not and cannot ever be a target and all efforts should be made to protect civilian lives, including at the expense of gaining a military advantage.

"Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/631 at ¶62 (20 July 2016).

But Ban did *not* call for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. *Who* is going to bring the parties "to account" for many past, and continuing, war crimes?

In his monthly report on Syria issued on 16 August 2016, Ban Ki-moon noted:

In blatant disregard for the special protected status of health-care facilities under international humanitarian law and Security Council resolution 2286 (2016), adopted on 3 May, medical facilities continued to be damaged or destroyed as a result of fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations and health partners received credible reports, which are in the process of being verified by the United Nations and partner organizations, of 44 attacks against health facilities in July alone.

"Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/714 at ¶42 (16 Aug 2016).

The conduct of hostilities [in Aleppo] continues to be characterized by a prevailing disrespect for the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law. All parties to the conflict are failing to uphold their obligation to protect civilians. The fight for territory and resources is being undertaken through indiscriminate attacks on residential areas,

....

S/2016/714 at ¶51 (16 Aug 2016).

In his August report, Ban did *not* call for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. Ban did *not* call for any punishment for the violators of international law. Ban simply wanted the fighting to stop.

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 691 Iraqis killed in terrorism, violence, and armed conflict during August 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.

August 2016: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

In reading the English-language edition of *Iraqi News*, I saw a steady stream of reports of bombings in and near Baghdad during August 2016, but only 1 or 2 people were killed in each bombing.

On 25 August 2016, the Associated Press reported at the bottom of a news article on a different topic:

Separately, Iraqi officials say a series of bombings and shootings across the Iraqi capital has killed 13 people and wounded 24. No group immediately claimed

responsibility for the attacks.

The police say separate roadside bombings on busy commercial streets and two sticky bombs attached to cars in neighborhoods across Baghdad killed seven and wounded 24 on Thursday [25 August]. Additionally, three shootings in different Baghdad neighborhoods killed six people.

Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraqi defense minister gets no-confidence vote," [Associated Press](#), 17:19 GMT, 25 August 2016.

On 29 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a wedding in Ein Tamr, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#).

The United Nations reports 231 dead civilians in Baghdad province from "terrorism, violence and armed conflict" during the month of August 2016. [UNAMI](#). Because neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported bombings with large numbers of fatalities in Baghdad during August, there must be a large number (e.g., 115) of terrorist attacks with only a few fatalities (e.g., average of 2 dead) in each attack.

On 30 August, the [Associated Press](#) published a news article saying they had documented 72 mass graves created by ISIL in Iraq. The graves contain at least 5200 bodies, and possibly "more than 15,000." [Reuters](#) published a commentary that asked why there was no outrage over the genocide of Yazidis by ISIL.

Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

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

No Criminal Prosecution of Iraqi Army Officers

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

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

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

On 18 June 2014, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdistan reports that the four dismissed officers are "Lt. Gen. Mahdi al-Gharawi, his deputy Maj. Gen. Abdul Rahman al-Handal Mahdi, and chief of staff Brigadier General Hassan Abdul Razzaq Ghazi", along with one Kurdish officer, Brigadier General Hidayat Abdul Karim. Rudaw reports that only the Kurd will be charged in military court, the other three were dismissed but not criminally charged.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2006 and 2013, the high command of the Iraqi military became a political football — with loyalty to al-Maliki prized above competence.");

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No Prosecution for Fall of Mosul

My essay for [August 2015](#) explained that on 17 Aug 2015, the Iraqi parliament quickly approved the Mosul Report, then referred the Report to the Judiciary, for investigation and

criminal trial of 36 people. The Report recommends criminal prosecution of:

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

On 1 Sep 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 has "forgotten" 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 Sep 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 2014 to May 2015. As the following quotation from *The Guardian*, makes clear, the "ghost soldier" problem still existed in February 2016, more than 14 months after it was first publicly revealed.

On 19 February 2016, *The Guardian* newspaper in England reported on corruption in Iraq's government and noted the "ghost soldier" problem:

Iraq has one of the biggest per capita public payrolls in the world, roughly 7 million people from a population of just over 21 million, and it is here that Zebari believes much of the systemic corruption is hidden. "Our biggest issue is ghost soldiers," he said. "There are maybe \$500-\$600m in salaries being paid to soldiers who don't exist. There are so many outlets for this money to go without any accountability."

In such cases, the salaries are instead collected by officers. In other cases, soldiers pay officers half their salaries so they don't have to show up for duty.

....

Hoshyar Zebari estimates that there as many as 30,000 ghost soldiers in Iraq's military and that corrupt officers are pocketing their salaries. The impact is even more significant than the bottom line. The fall of Mosul, Iraq's second city, in mid-2014 was in part blamed on there being far fewer soldiers in position to defend the city than there were on the books. Generals and other senior officers accused of running the scam have yet to be brought to account.

Martin Chulov, "Post-war Iraq: 'Everybody is corrupt, from top to bottom. Including me'," [Guardian](#), 15:10 GMT, 19 Feb 2016.

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.

My essay for [May 2016](#) mentioned that, on 30 April 2016, Iraqi protesters from cleric al-Sadr stormed the Iraqi parliament building. In response, the Iraqi parliament did *not* meet during May. On 20 May, Iraqi security forces violently repelled demonstrators, killing at least four.

The Iraqi parliament also did *not* meet during June 2016, the second consecutive month of vacation for the dysfunctional parliament.

My essay for [July 2016](#) mentioned Abadi finally banned the use of bogus bomb-detector wands, and a protest demonstration in Baghdad on 15 July. Apparently, the dysfunctional Iraqi parliament failed to meet during July, the third consecutive month of no meetings.

August 2016

On 1 August 2016, there was some excitement in Baghdad as Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi testified in parliament about alleged corruption of some members of parliament. Hours later, prime minister Abadi ordered the six suspects to remain in Iraq, while an investigation was conducted by a parliament committee. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 9 August, a court in Baghdad dismissed corruption charges against the speaker of parliament, citing "insufficient evidence". [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is that it is unlikely that the Iraqi defense minister would risk his career to accuse some of the most powerful legislators of corruption if there were really "insufficient evidence".

On 10 August, there was a fire in a maternity ward of the Yarmuk Hospital in Baghdad that killed 12 babies. The fire was initially blamed on faulty electrical wires. The Associated Press commented: "Electrical fires are common in the Iraqi capital and elsewhere across the country because of shoddy maintenance and poor wiring." Reuters commented: "Thirteen years after the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein, the oil-rich Arab state still suffers a shortage of electricity, water, schools and hospitals." Reuters also thinks it is important that you know that cockroaches run along plastic tubing to oxygen masks in another part of the Yarmuk Hospital. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 14 August, the Iraqi health ministry said the fire was caused by arson, and the total number of dead babies had risen to 13. Agence France-Press comments: "Many of Baghdad's public hospitals are poorly maintained and offer sub-standard healthcare, forcing a number of Iraqis to seek private treatment or travel abroad. The lack of adequate public services, such as quality medical care, electricity and water supply, as well as widespread corruption in the country, has angered the public...." [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Daily Star](#)(AFP). I find it interesting that in a news article about a fire in a hospital, journalists include gratuitous remarks about corruption and incompetence in Iraq. On 20 August, [Al-Arabiya](#) reported that Iraq had arrested a gang of eight for stealing "100 million Iraqi dinars (US\$ 84,602)" from the contracts room of the hospital, then setting a fire to conceal the theft. The fire then spread to the adjacent premature babies' room.

On 15 August 2016, the Iraqi parliament approved new ministers for (1) oil, (2) water

resources, (3) higher education, (4) transportation, and (5) housing and construction. Prime Minister Abadi had proposed the new ministers on 31 March 2016, more than four months ago. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#).

On 21 August 2016, Iraq was slightly improved when the government hung 36 criminals who had participated in the kidnapping and execution of as many as 1700 Iraqi soldiers at Speicher Air Base near Tikrit in June 2014. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). These criminals were arrested in April 2015 when the Iraqi army liberated Tikrit from ISIL. They were found guilty by an Iraqi judge in February 2016.

On 25 August 2016 Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi received a vote of no confidence from the Iraqi parliament (142 to 102), which sacked Obeidi. On 1 Aug, Obeidi had accused five members of parliament and the speaker of parliament of corruption. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). Revenge by the Iraqi parliament was swift.

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 11 July 2016, the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced that an additional 560 U.S. troops would be sent to Iraq. The additional 560 soldiers makes a total of at least 4647 U.S. military personnel in Iraq. (I say "at least" because the Pentagon does *not* count personnel deployed to Iraq for fewer than four months.) [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

Future liberation of Mosul

More Empty Promises

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."

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, [U.S. 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](#).)

August 2016: Mosul

The operation to liberate Mosul officially began on 24 March 2016. About two weeks later, on 6 April, the operation stalled at the village of al-Nasr, near Makhmour, on the road to Mosul. Reuters reports that "The faltering start has cast renewed doubt on the capabilities of the Iraqi army," [Reuters](#); [Wall Street Journal](#).

On 9 July 2016, the Iraqi army captured the air base at Qayara (also spelled Qaiyara, Qayyara, or Qayyarah). The liberation of this air base from ISIL is significant, because the air base can be used to launch attacks on Mosul, which is 40 km north of Qayara. *The New York Times* reports that, before ISIL fled from the Qayara air base, ISIL "badly damaged" two runways and some buildings. [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#).

When ISIL fled from the town of Qayara on 23 August, ISIL set more than four oil wells on fire. On 29 August, Iraq extinguished the fires at four oil wells. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#). On 30 Aug the Iraqi government announced the Qayara oil field will *not* return to production until after Mosul is liberated from ISIL. [Reuters](#).

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.

August 2016

[Above](#) I mention that Assad and Russia are continuing to bomb hospitals in Syria. On 15 August 2016, the Saudi-coalition bombed a MSF-supported hospital in Yemen, the latest in a series of attacks on more than 70 hospitals and clinics in Yemen. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [U.N.](#) These airstrikes on hospitals are *not* perpetrated by Islamic terrorists in Al-Qaeda or ISIL, although those terrorist groups do sometimes attack a hospital. These bombings of hospitals in Syria and Yemen are being perpetrated by mainstream Muslims. Islamic clerics are *not* condemning bombing of hospitals. It appears that bombing hospitals is an approved Islamic activity. So instead of saying that a hospital was bombed, should we say a hospital was *muslimated* or *islamified*, with a lower-case M or I to denote our contempt for such values?

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](#).

- On 4 August 2016, an Egyptian military airstrike killed the leader of ISIL in Egypt, Abu Doaa al-Ansari. [Ahram](#); [Associated Press](#); [Ahram](#)(18 Aug confirmation); [Al-Arabiya](#)(19 Aug).
- On 30 August 2016, a U.S. airstrike near Al Bab, Syria, splatted Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani. He is said to be the head of external operations of ISIL (i.e., in charge of attacks in Europe, etc.), a tactician, and their chief spokesman. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#)(31Aug); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

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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).

Indeed, the following section [section](#) of this essay gives examples of major attacks by ISIL after May 2015, to show that ISIL has *not* been defeated.

Mullah Omar was the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan since 1996. Omar was reclusive and not seen in public since 2001. On 29 July 2015, there were unconfirmed reports that Omar had died in a hospital in Karachi, Pakistan in April 2013. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 30 July 2015, the reports were confirmed and the Taliban appointed a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Express Tribune](#) in Pakistan; [Associated Press](#). This example shows us how unimportant a leader is to a terrorist organization. The Taliban functioned successfully with a dead leader for more than two years! Journalists report that Omar's death may make peace negotiations more difficult, because some Taliban want to continue fighting. But — regardless of who leads the Taliban — there will be some Taliban who want to continue fighting, in the hope for a total victory.

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

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

ISIL is *not* defeated

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

For example:

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but the Iraqis have been unable to begin the liberation of Mosul.
2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.
5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at a Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [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. On 12 June 2016, an Islamic terrorist perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando Florida. The terrorist pledged allegiance to ISIL, although there is *no* evidence that ISIL communicated with him. See my essay for [June 2016](#).
26. On 16 June 2016, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, testified before a committee of the U.S. Senate that “Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach.” [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#).
27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) (“... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered diners in a restaurant.”); [Reuters](#) (“... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State.”). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).
29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).
31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 85 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
32. On 18, 24, and 26 July 2016, there were ISIL terrorist attacks in Würzburg in Germany, Ansbach in Germany, and Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in France. See my essay for [July 2016](#).

33. On 2 August 2016, [NBC News](#) published an exclusive report of a classified National Counterterrorism Center briefing to the White House, that showed a "fully operational" ISIL had spread to 18 nations during Obama's presidency. ISIL is "aspiring" in six additional nations.
34. On 6 August 2016, an Islamic terrorist — and illegal immigrant from Algeria — used a machete to slash the faces of two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium.
35. On 20 August, ISIL sent a suicide bomber to a wedding party in Gaziantep, Turkey, where at least 54 people were killed. Early reports said the suicide bomber was between 12 and 14 years old. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(21Aug); [Associated Press](#)(22Aug).
- 36.

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.

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](#).

In June 2016, I began a new concluding [section](#) about how the U.S. War on Terror has decreased security in Europe and the USA.

Cost of U.S. War Against ISIL

In August 2016, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of July 31, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$8.7 billion and the average daily cost is \$12.1 million for 724 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 30 Aug 2016.

Note that the numbers 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 12 July 2016, the U.S. Government has spent a total of US\$ 5.6 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 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On July 31, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, eight strikes struck eight separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, and ISIL-used engineering equipment.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fueling station.

- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and suppressed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed four ISIL vehicles, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL-used road, and two ISIL assembly areas.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle.

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

Additionally, due to an administrative error, one strike was misreported near Ar Raqqa on the July 31 release. The correct assessment reads:

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes destroyed six ISIL excavators.

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

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

2 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On August 1, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, ground-attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, seven strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket cache.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL foreign fighter meeting facility and an ISIL training site.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicle borne improvised devices, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL mortar position, and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL heavy machine gun position.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 2 August 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 2 August 2016.

3 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On August 2, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL mortar system, two ISIL vehicles, and an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device, five ISIL vehicles, and four ISIL tactical vehicles.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fuel tanker.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike struck an ISIL headquarters.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 3 August 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 3 August 2016.

4 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 3, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using fighter and remotely

piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Near At Tanf, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Manbij, five strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, four ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL command and control node.

Iraq

- Near Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL storage facility, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device facility.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL VBIEDs and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and two ISIL fighting positions and suppressed ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL supply caches, two ISIL tunnel entrances, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

5 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 4, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed 14 ISIL oil tankers.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL command and control node.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL ammunition cache.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed 12 ISIL oil tankers, an ISIL staging facility, and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device factory.
- Near Mosul, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar system, and an ISIL command and control node.

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

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

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

6 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 5, 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 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL pump jack and damaged an ISIL oil tanker.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL wellhead.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL supply cache.

Iraq

- Near Abu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL fighting position, and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL weapons facility, and an ISIL cement plant.
- Near Qayyarah, five strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 46 ISIL rockets, 40 ISIL rocket rail systems, nine ISIL boats, two ISIL mortar systems, an ISIL recruiting station, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device facility, an ISIL assembly area, and an ISIL vehicle storage facility and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL rocket position and an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket propelled grenade system and an ISIL light machine gun.

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

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

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

7 August 2016: airstrikes

Beginning 7 August, CENTCOM stopped posting press releases about airstrikes at the CENTCOM website for four days.

On Sunday, 7 August 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted eight strikes in **Syria**:

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil tanker.
- Near Manbij, seven strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL improvised explosive device.

Attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery conducted eight strikes in **Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government**:

- Near Abu Hayat, a strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Fallujah, a strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed an ISIL vehicle bomb facility and an ISIL training camp.
- Near Ramadi, a strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, two ISIL vehicle staging areas, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL fighting position.

[Pentagon](#), 7 August 2016.

On 6 August, [Reuters](#) reported that the U.S.-supported Kurdish and Arab rebels "took 'almost complete control' of" Manbij, mentioning 90% control.

8 August 2016: airstrikes

On Monday, 8 August 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria: Attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted six strikes in **Syria**:

- Near Abu Kamal, a strike destroyed 83 ISIL oil tankers.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL fighting position.

Fighter, remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery conducted eight strikes in **Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government**:

- Near Kisik, a strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and degraded an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL rocket systems, three ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL tactical vehicle and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Ramadi, a strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL supply cache and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, a strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, a strike destroyed two ISIL weapons facilities, an ISIL headquarters and an ISIL vehicle bomb storage facility.

[Pentagon](#), 8 August 2016.

9 August 2016: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 9 August 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria: Attack and remotely piloted aircraft conducted seven strikes in **Syria**:

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, a strike destroyed nine ISIL oil tankers.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL vehicle and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Mara, a strike destroyed an ISIL front-end loader.
- Near Palmyra, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery conducted eight strikes in **Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government**:

- Near Baghdadi, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed 30 ISIL rocket rails and 10 ISIL rockets and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL vehicles, an ISIL mortar system and an ISIL assembly area and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Qayyarah, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, a strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL weapons cache and an ISIL vehicle.

[Pentagon](#), 9 August 2016.

10 August 2016: airstrikes

On Wednesday, 10 August 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria: Attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 14 strikes in **Syria**:

- Near Abu Kamal, a strike struck two ISIL crude oil collection points.
- Near Ayn Isa, a strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, a strike struck two ISIL crude oil collection points.
- Near Manbij, 11 strikes struck 11 separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL vehicles.

Fighter aircraft and rocket artillery conducted 11 strikes in **Iraq, coordinated with and in support of Iraq's government**:

- Near Baghdadi, a strike destroyed an ISIL rocket cache and damaged an ISIL rocket rail.
- Near Hit, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL refueling point.
- Near Kisik, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle and three ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Mosul, a strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed four ISIL generators, 17 ISIL oil tankers, five ISIL rocket rails, five ISIL rockets, an ISIL excavator and an ISIL mortar system and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL weapons caches, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle storage area and seven ISIL rocket rails and damaged an ISIL fighting position and an ISIL tunnel entrance.
- Near Sinjar, a strike struck an ISIL bomb factory.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, a strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed seven ISIL assembly areas and three ISIL vehicles and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.
- Near Tal Afar, a strike struck an ISIL vehicle bomb factory.

[Pentagon](#), 10 August 2016.

11 August 2016: airstrikes

On Thursday, 11 August, CENTCOM posted its first press release about airstrikes since Saturday, 6 August.

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

On Aug. 10, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes using bomber, fighter, attack, ground 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 rocket artillery and fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed 15 ISIL oil tankers.
- Near Manbij, 15 strikes struck 14 separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, six ISIL vehicles, an ISIL heavy machine gun, and an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, two strikes destroyed five ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL rocket cache, two ISIL used tunnels, and two ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles, an ISIL vehicle storage area, and an ISIL mortar cache and damaged an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL artillery piece, an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle, five ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL-used tunnels, two ISIL VBIEDs, 22 ISIL rocket rails, and 22 ISIL rockets and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system and damaged an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons cache.

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

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

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

12 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 11, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted six strikes using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL excavator.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed eight ISIL oil tankers.
- Near Manbij, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL assembly area and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL-used solar panels, two ISIL-used roads, an ISIL headquarters, and an ISIL artillery system and damaged a separate ISIL headquarters.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL vehicles and three ISIL rocket systems.
- Sultan Abdallah, two strikes struck an ISIL improvised weapons cache and destroyed an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device storage facility.

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

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

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

On 12 August, the [Pentagon](#) reported that "ISIL has lost the city center and has lost control of Manbij, ... noting that there are still pockets of opposition" As ISIL flees from Manbij, there are unconfirmed reports that ISIL is taking civilians with them to use as human shields.

13 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 12, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack and fighter

aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL pump jack.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed 12 ISIL oil tankers and an ISIL oil storage tank.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL communication towers.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device factory and three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL observation post, seven ISIL weapons caches, two ISIL command and control nodes, and four ISIL vehicles.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL command and control nodes and an ISIL VBIED factory.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL weapons caches, and an ISIL mortar system and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

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

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

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

On 13 August, journalists reported that Kurdish and Arab fighters supported by the USA had liberated Manbij from ISIL. Reuters says 2000 human shields were also freed. Manbij had been controlled by ISIL since January 2014. The liberation of Manbij interrupts a supply route from Turkey to the ISIL headquarters in Raqqa. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

14 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 13, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted six strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed eight ISIL oil tankers and two ISIL oil fields.

- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL front-end loader.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes damaged three ISIL fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL headquarters and a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions, four ISIL assembly areas, three ISIL command and control nodes, an ISIL-used observation post, an ISIL rocket rail, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device, and an ISIL supply cache.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two separate ISIL fighting positions and three ISIL vehicles.
- Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed seven ISIL vehicles and an ISIL fighting position and suppressed two ISIL mortar positions and denied ISIL to terrain.

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

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

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

15 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 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 seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil wellhead and an ISIL-used oil equipment.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes struck an ISIL staging area and an ISIL weapons storage facility.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and damaged four separate ISIL fighting positions.
- Near Tal Abyad, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL vehicles.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, three strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL improvised explosive device assembly area and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, six ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL command and control nodes, and one ISIL

vehicle borne IED and suppressed an ISIL heavy machine gun position and denied ISIL access to terrain.

- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL vehicles, five ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL mortar system, an ISIL rocket rail, four ISIL rocket systems, three ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL command and control node, and an ISIL heavy machine gun and disabled an ISIL VBIED and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL headquarters.

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

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

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

16 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 15, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using bomber, ground-attack, attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed 10 ISIL oil tankers.
- Near Manbij, three strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed six ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mar'a, 10 strikes struck seven separate ISIL tactical units and an ISIL headquarters and destroyed nine ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL heavy machine gun, an ISIL rocket propelled grenade system, and an ISIL weapons cache.

Iraq

- Near Hit, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL weapons cache, and an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mosul, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system and degraded an ISIL tunnel.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system and damaged an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL assembly areas, two ISIL heavy machine guns, five ISIL fighting positions, three ISIL mortar systems, and an ISIL vehicle and suppressed an ISIL tactical

unit.

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

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

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

On 16 August, the [Pentagon](#) reported that the U.S.-supported Kurds and Arabs had seized control of Manbij.

17 August 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes struck an ISIL gas oil separation plant and a crude oil collection point.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil wellhead.
- Near Manbij, five strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device, an ISIL mortar system, two ISIL artillery system, and an ISIL munitions cache.
- Near Mar'a, seven strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL command and control node, and one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Palmyra, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle, and an ISIL anti-air artillery system.

Iraq

- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and two ISIL mortar systems.
- Near Mosul, four strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL oil black market and destroyed 15 ISIL petroleum, oil, and lubricant trucks, six ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL assembly areas, 10 ISIL vehicles, two ISIL mortar systems, five ISIL heavy machine guns, and an ISIL tunnel and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed an ISIL mortar firing position.

Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 17 August 2016.

18 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 17, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using bomber, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted five strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL oil wellhead.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL oil wellheads and three ISIL vehicles.
- Near Manbij, three strikes destroyed two ISIL artillery systems and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL mortar system, and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Tal Abyad, one strike struck a large ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL propaganda billboard.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, four strikes struck three ISIL tactical units and destroyed 38 ISIL oil tanker trucks, five ISIL vehicles, and six ISIL assembly areas and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL shelter.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 18 August 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 18 August 2016.

19 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 18, coalition military forces continued to attack ISIL terrorists in Syria and

Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using bomber, ground-attack, attack, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted six strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed two ISIL pump jacks, two ISIL oil tanker trucks, two ISIL oil tanks, and two ISIL wellheads.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed six ISIL oil tanker trucks and two ISIL wellheads.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck two ISIL tactical units and destroyed five ISIL fighting positions, and an ISIL tactical vehicle and suppressed two ISIL tactical units.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed two ISIL communication towers.
- Near Mosul, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, an ISIL finance storage center, and an ISIL finance distribution center and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, two ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive devices, two ISIL mortar systems, four ISIL assembly areas, and an ISIL tunnel and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit and denied ISIL access to terrain.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

20 August 2016: airstrikes

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

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

Syria

- Near Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed an ISIL oil workover rig and five ISIL oil tankers.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil crane and an ISIL oil tanker.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed two ISIL pump jacks.

- Near Manbij, six strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, nine strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three ISIL fighting positions, an ISIL vehicle, an ISIL vehicle borne improvised explosive device, seven ISIL IEDs, and two ISIL mortar systems.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Kisik, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed two ISIL mortar firing positions.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL beddown location and destroyed 39 ISIL oil tanker trucks and two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL mortar systems, five ISIL assembly areas, an ISIL bulldozer, two ISIL rocket rails, an ISIL rocket system and suppressed an ISIL mortar firing position and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL assembly area.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

The CENTCOM URL does *not* contain a date, in another display of government incompetence. It is essential that each press release have a unique URL.

21 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 20th, Coalition military forces conducted 23 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes using bomber, ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck three ISIL wellheads and a crude oil collection point.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes struck three ISIL wellheads and three crude oil collection points and destroyed a pump jack.

Near Manbij, nine strikes struck eight separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions, a vehicle, an artillery system, a supply cache, and a rocket launcher.

- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and five improvised explosive devices and damaged two fighting positions.
- Near Tamakh, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and a tactical vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Bashir, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed a fighting position and a vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two rocket rails, two rocket systems, and two vehicle-borne improvised explosive device storage facilities and denied access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle checkpoint and a vehicle and suppressed two mortar positions.

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

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

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

22 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 21st, Coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using ground-attack, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and bomber, attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL weapons facility.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike struck seven ISIL wellheads and a crude oil collection point.
- Near Manbij, six strikes struck five separate ISIL tactical units, destroyed a fighting position, one tactical vehicle, and an anti-air artillery system.
- Near Tamakh, one strike destroyed an ISIL tank.

Iraq

- Near Bashir, one strike destroyed an ISIL checkpoint.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed three vehicles and a mortar position.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a mortar system, a vehicle, five assembly areas, a supply cache, a front-end loader and denied access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, a vehicle, a boat and damaged a fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike struck an ISIL security headquarters.

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

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

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

23 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 22, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using bomber 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 rocket artillery and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike struck an ISIL wellhead.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL workover rig, a pump jack, and an oil tanker truck.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck an ISIL wellhead and a staging area.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck four ISIL tactical units, and destroyed a fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL repeater tower.
- Near Haditha, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a fighting position, and damaged a tunnel entrance.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and a tunnel entrance.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes struck an ISIL training camp, destroyed two rocket rails, a fighting position, two mortar positions, a tunnel entrance, two assembly areas, an anti-air artillery system, six repeater tower generators, a communications tower, suppressed a rocket firing position, two mortar firing

positions and denied access to terrain.

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

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

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

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

24 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 23, coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes using bomber, attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted four strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery, fighter aircraft, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadadi, 10 strikes struck 10 separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed six fighting positions, a tactical vehicle, three vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, four mortar positions, an anti-air artillery system and an armored personnel carrier.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck an ISIL improvised weapons assembly area.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed two ISIL oil tanker trucks, two cranes, three bulldozers, and damaged another bulldozer.
- Near Manbij, four strikes struck three separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed a vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Hit, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a fighting position, and damaged another fighting position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a fighting position, and a mortar system.
- Near Sinjar, one strike struck an ISIL tactical unit.

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

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

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

25 August 2016: airstrikes

On Thursday, 25 August 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq

and Syria:

On Aug. 24, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes using bomber, attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted one strike coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, three strikes struck an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed a fighting position, a tactical vehicle, and a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike struck two ISIL pump jacks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes struck three ISIL wellheads.
- Near Manbij, seven strikes struck six separate ISIL tactical units, destroyed a fighting position, a vehicle, a command and control node, three mortar systems and damaged a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed four rocket systems and four rocket rails.

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

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

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

26 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 25, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted 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, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, five strikes engaged five separate ISIL tactical units, destroyed five fighting positions, a tactical vehicle, and another vehicle.
- Near Manbij, four strikes engaged four separate ISIL tactical units, destroyed three fighting positions, four vehicles, an artillery system, and a weapons cache.

Iraq

- Near Kisik, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar position.

- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a fighting position, and suppressed a tactical unit.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike engaged an ISIL vehicle-borne improvised explosive device factory.
- Near Ramadi, three strikes destroyed an ISIL mortar position, a vehicle, and damaged a fighting position.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL rocket position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.

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

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

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

27 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 26, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes against 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 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using ground-attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Manbij, five strikes engaged four separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device and another vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes engaged two separate ISIL tactical units, destroyed two fighting positions and an artillery system, and damaged another fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Fallujah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Hit, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed a mortar position.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL communications facility.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes engaged an ISIL VBIED factory, a training camp, and a large tactical unit; destroyed two vehicles and an assembly area; and suppressed two tactical units.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged two separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed three fighting positions, a vehicle, and a weapons cache.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike engaged an ISIL safe house.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 27 August 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 27 August 2016.

28 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 27, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using bomber, attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed two ISIL pump jacks.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position.
- Near Ar Raqqah, one strike destroyed two ISIL pump jacks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed five ISIL tanker trucks.
- Near Manbij, two strikes engaged two separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed a bed down location and a vehicle.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes engaged two separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed two fighting positions and a vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed a fighting position and an ammunitions cache.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device factory, and a vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes engaged two separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed an assembly area, a front-end loader, and denied access to terrain.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED factory.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position, a vehicle, six rocket systems, seven rocket rails, and suppressed a mortar position and denied access to terrain.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 28 August 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 28 August 2016.

29 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 28, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted two strikes using fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using ground-attack, attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL wellhead.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL pump jack.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed four ISIL rocket systems, three rocket rails, and a building.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Hit, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three tanker trucks.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike engaged an ISIL staging area.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, five strikes engaged two ISIL headquarters building and a barracks, and destroyed two rocket systems, four rocket rails, a tunnel entrance, and 11 vehicle-borne improvised explosive device factories.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position, a mortar system, two weapons caches, and damaged three tunnel entrances.

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

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

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

30 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 29, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using bomber, fighter, attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven 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 destroyed inoperable coalition equipment.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil pump jack.

- Near Manbij, six strikes engaged four separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed a fighting position, a vehicle, a tank, and two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed 10 ISIL weapon cache bunkers.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and a medium machine gun.
- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed four rocket rails.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed two fighting positions, a vehicle, a command and control node, and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed two fighting positions.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions and a mortar system.

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

[Central Command](#), 30 August 2016.

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

31 August 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 30, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, ground-attack and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed two ISIL tanks, an ammunitions cache, and a tactical vehicle.
- Near Manbij, six strikes engaged four separate ISIL tactical units, and destroyed five fighting positions, a vehicle, a weapons cache, and two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices.
- Near Washiyah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed a vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike produced inconclusive results.

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Bashir, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed another fighting position.
- Near Hit, four strikes engaged an ISIL VBIED factory, a barracks, a headquarters building, and destroyed three fighting positions.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system, and suppressed another mortar position.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed a fighting position, a command and control node, two mortar systems, eight rocket rails, a rocket system, and a tunnel; damaged an excavator; and suppressed a mortar position.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed two fighting positions, two mortar systems, a mortar cache, two vehicles, and an artillery system; and damaged another mortar system.
- Near Rawah, one strike engaged an ISIL weapons cache.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed a vehicle.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 31 August 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.
- My essay for [June 2016](#) describes an Islamic terrorist who perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, by killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida.
- My essay for [July 2016](#) describes four ISIL attacks in Europe: 84 dead in Nice, France on 14 July; immigrant from Afghanistan or Pakistan uses axe in Würzburg, Germany on 18 July; refugee from Syria detonates bomb in Ansbach, Germany on 24 July; two ISIL attackers murder Catholic priest in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, France on 26 July.

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](#).

On 9 August 2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported that approximately 263,600 immigrants arrived in Europe between 1 January and 7 August 2016.

disenchantment & failure of assimilation

This increase in Muslim population in Europe will likely lead to an increase in Islamic terrorism in Europe for two reasons:

1. Muslim migrants do *not* speak the local language of their host nation, and the migrants have different religious values from the prevailing local Christian majority values, so the migrants will feel out of place in European society. (What Tej Parikh called a "failure in assimilation", [Reuters](#), 27 Nov 2015.) The migrants will become disenchanted with their new home, and some will become radicalized. The radicalization will most likely occur via the Internet, but could also occur from personal contact with Islamic radicals in Europe.
2. It is possible that some Islamic terrorists will enter Europe along with migrants. These could be terrorists sent to recruit more fighters for ISIL or Al-Qaeda. Or they could be Europeans returning from battle in Syria, but using a new name to avoid criminal prosecution for fighting in Syria.

This is a subject that humanitarians avoid considering, as the humanitarians welcome migrants to Europe.

In mid-September 2015, I wrote that some "migrants will become disenchanted with their new home". This has already happened. On 19 October 2015, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Syrians who arrived in Uruguay in November 2014 have complained, and "many Uruguayans ... have come to see the refugees more as rude, ungrateful guests." And on 29 October 2015, [The Guardian](#) reports that 14 migrants from Syria refused to leave a bus at their destination in Sweden because it was "too cold". On 1 January 2016, the [Washington Post](#) reported that some migrants to Europe were returning home to Iraq, more than 779 Iraqis in November 2015 alone. Reasons for returning include: "disillusioned with the lack of opportunities or homesick, while others were forced to go when their asylum claims were rejected." On 11 January 2016, [Reuters](#) reports the Iraqi embassy in Berlin issued 1400 passports for migrants to return to Iraq since the end of October 2015. On 7 March 2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iraqis were "disappointed" in Europe and were returning to Iraq.

On 1 October 2015, the [Washington Post](#) quoted the director of a migrant camp in Greiz, Germany: "I do not have any skilled workers living here. I know the labor market in this region; it is not so simple to find work here." That foreshadows the migrants being unable to find work in Germany.

On 14 April 2016, Germany demanded that immigrants learn the German language *and* seek employment, or the immigrants would lose welfare benefits. [Reuters](#). Learning the German language is difficult for native speakers of English, and must be harder for native speakers of Arabic that has a different alphabet.

some immigrants are criminals

On 27 Sep 2015, there was a riot by Albanians and Pakistanis in a migrant camp in Calden, Germany. On 30 Sep 2015 there was a brawl between Syrian and Afghans in a migrant camp in Hamburg, Germany.

See:

- "German president warns of limits to number of refugees," [Reuters](#), 28 Sep 2015.
- "Germany quells migrant mass brawl at camp in Calden," [BBC](#), 28 Sep 2015.
- "A refugee riot puts a German town on edge," [Washington Post](#), 1 Oct 2015.
- "Syrians, Afghans clash in German refugee center riot," [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP), 1 Oct 2015.
- "Clash breaks out among refugees in Hamburg," [Deutsche Welle](#), 1 Oct 2015.

If these riots continue, I would expect many Germans to regret allowing these barbarians to enter Germany, because of strong law-and-order values amongst Germans.

On the nights of 8-9-10 November 2015, there were riots in a migrant camp in Calais, France in which more than two dozen policemen were injured. [France24](#); [Globe&Mail](#)(AP). There are approximately 6000 migrants waiting in Calais to illegally enter the United Kingdom via the tunnel under the English Channel.

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

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

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

On 10 July 2016, [Süddeutsche Zeitung](#) leaked a confidential German government report that said "more than 2000 men" had sexually assaulted 1200 women on New Year's Eve, 31 Dec 2015, in Germany. Worse, the German police had arrested only 120 suspects, half of whom were recent immigrants to Germany. There have been only 4 guilty verdicts. [Washington Post](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

On 7 June 2016, Muslims set fire to housing for refugees in Düsseldorf because the staff failed to awaken the refugees before sunrise for breakfast on the first morning of Ramadan. The building was home for 280 refugees, but now is totally destroyed. [Daily Mail](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

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. But on 1 July 2016, the highest court in Austria invalidated that election and ordered a new election.

During 18-24 July 2016, there were three attacks by recent Islamic immigrants to Germany, two attacks inspired by ISIL. Angela Merkel — the Chancellor who welcomed 1,100,000 Islamic immigrants into Germany during 2015 — had the slogan "Wir schaffen das." ("We can do it.") But an opinion poll of 1017 Germans during 26-29 July showed "Those who 'slightly agree' were 18 percent and 8 percent were in total agreement, meaning little more than a quarter of respondents had confidence in Merkel's promise." [Deutsche Welle](#).

More on July 2016 attacks

On 4 August, the death toll in the truck attack in Nice, France rose from 84 to 85, after one wounded person died in a hospital. He had been on life support for 3 weeks, since the 14 July attack. [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#).

On 5 August, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* reported that the attackers in Würzburg and Ansbach each had communicated with ISIL supporters, including in Saudi Arabia.

Transcripts of chats obtained by German authorities indicate that the two men involved

in attacks in the German cities of Ansbach and Würzburg had repeated contact with suspected members of Islamic State via telephone numbers registered in Saudi Arabia, among other places, SPIEGEL has learned. Würzburg perpetrator Riaz Khan Ahmadzai, who is believed to have originated from Afghanistan and seriously injured several people on a regional train with an axe and knife on July 18, also left a goodbye message before engaging in the attack. "We'll see each other in paradise," he wrote.

....

Shortly before the attack [in Ansbach], [Daleel's] chat contact had called on him to film the detonation and the ensuing inferno and to send the video to IS. But it appears the explosive detonated prematurely, killing Daleel and injuring 15 others. There is discussion in the chats of Daleel perpetrating further attacks. Daleel's face is concealed behind a veil in the video in which he claims responsibility for the attacks, which investigators view as a sign that he may have been planning further ones. Investigators also found further bomb-making materials in the apartment where he was staying.

Andreas Ulrich, "Terror Investigation: Germany Attackers Had Contact with Suspected IS Members," [Der Spiegel](#), 5 August 2016.

On 7 August, the Saudi Arabian government disclosed that Mohammad Daleel, the Islamic terrorist who exploded in Ansbach Germany on 24 July, had been in contact with ISIL. The Associated Press did *not* mention [Der Spiegel](#) in its report:

The Saudi Interior Ministry says a member of the extremist Islamic State group was in contact through a social networking application with a Syrian asylum-seeker who blew himself up outside a bar in [Ansbach] Germany, injuring 15 people.

The Interior Ministry told The Associated Press on Sunday [7 August] that a Saudi phone line was used to communicate with the attacker in Germany, but that the number was not registered to a Saudi national. It didn't provide further details.

....

German security officials have said that until shortly before the attack Daleel was communicating with somebody in the Middle East.

Aya Batrawy, "Saudi Government: Attacker In Germany Was In Touch With IS," [Associated Press](#), 20:02 GMT, 7 Aug 2016.

On 8 August, [Reuters](#) reported that the Saudi Arabian government "confirmed on Monday [8 August] it was helping German investigators track Islamic State militants behind attacks in Germany and said one had been in contact with someone using a Saudi-registered mobile phone."

My comment is that these revelations show a deeper involvement by ISIL in the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach.

6 August 2016: Charleroi, Belgium

At 16:00 local time (14:00 GMT) on Saturday, 6 August, an Islamic terrorist screamed "Allahu Akhbar" as he used a machete to attack two policewomen outside the main police station in Charleroi, Belgium. A third policewoman shot the terrorist, who died in a hospital.

The Islamic terrorist carried *no* identification, which prevented police from promptly knowing his name. But on the morning of 7 August, police announced that the attacker was "K.B.", a 33 year old Algerian who had lived in Belgium since 2012. He has a criminal record, but he was *not* previously suspected of Islamic terrorism. Belgium twice ordered him to leave Belgium, but Algeria apparently refused to accept him.

About 24 hours after the attack, Amaq news agency said ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack in Charleroi, saying the attacker was one of the "soldiers of the caliphate". The [Associated Press](#) reported: "A statement by the IS-affiliated Amaq News Agency, posted Sunday [7 August] on an IS-linked Twitter account, said the attack on the policewomen was in response to the 'Crusader coalition's' military campaign against IS and its self-declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria."

Bibliography for attack in Charleroi

Beginning Monday, 8 August 2016, journalists reported little information on the attack in Charleroi. Apparently, Belgium government officials are being silent to avoid panicking the public about large numbers of Islamic terrorists living in Belgium, and the inability of the Belgium government to prevent Islamic terrorism.

- "Machete attack outside police station leaves two Belgian officers injured as third officer shoots assailant dead," [The Telegraph](#), 15:31 GMT and modified later, 6 August 2016.
- "The Latest: Belgian premier says attack may be terrorism," [Associated Press](#), 18:28 GMT, 6 August 2016.
- "Attacker wounds 2 police in Belgium, shouts 'Allahu Akhbar'," [Associated Press](#), 18:40 GMT, 6 August 2016.
- "Man yelling 'Allahu Akbar!' wounds two Belgian police in machete attack," [Reuters](#), 22:54 GMT, 6 August 2016.
- "Islamic state claims responsibility for an attack in Brussels — Amaq," [Reuters](#), 13:22 GMT, 7 August 2016.
- "ISIL claim machete attack on Belgian policewomen as assailant identified as Algerian with criminal record," [The Telegraph](#), 13:40 GMT, 7 August 2016.
- "Belgian machete wielder identified; Islamic State claims attack," [dpa](#), 16:30 GMT, 7 August 2016. ("Both officers sustained serious injuries to the face and neck, the state prosecution said in a statement. The police had previously said that one officer was

taken to hospital with serious cuts, while the other was only slightly injured." "[The perpetrator] was staying illegally in [Belgium] at the time of the attack, having twice ignored orders to leave the country, the office of State Secretary for Migration Theo Francken later said in a statement, according to the Belga news agency.")

- "IS claims Belgium machete attack that wounded 2 policewomen," [Associated Press](#), 17:54 GMT, 7 August 2016. (Belgian police identify machete attacker as an Algerian criminal who was an illegal immigrant in Belgium. "Broadcast media including state-owned RTBF said K.B. was in Belgium illegally despite receiving two separate orders from government authorities to leave.")
- "Belgian prosecutors say machete-wielding attacker may have been inspired by terrorism," [Reuters](#), 18:06 GMT, 7 August 2016.
- "Belgian official says machete attacker known for petty crime," [Associated Press](#), 09:53 GMT, 8 August 2016. ("Migration State Secretary Theo Francken said the man, identified by Belgian media as Khaled Babouri, 'was not known for terrorist reasons.' Francken told Belgian Radio 1 that Babouri was 'was caught in possession of hashish and other drugs and got a ticket because he switched his bus card with his brother.' ")

10 August 2016: Canada

On 10 August 2016 at 08:30, the FBI showed a "martyrdom video" to the RCMP in Canada. The video promised an "imminent" (within 72 hours) suicide bomb attack in Canada. By 11:00 the RCMP had identified Aaron Driver as the person in the video. The RCMP surrounded the house in Strathroy, Ontario where Aaron was living. At 16:30 on 10 August, Aaron called a taxi cab to take him to the bombing location in a shopping mall in London, Ontario. As police were about to arrest Aaron, the driver of the taxi cab fled from the cab, and Aaron detonated a bomb. To prevent Aaron from detonating a second bomb, police shot Aaron. It was not initially clear whether Aaron died from his bomb or from police bullets.

The relatively minor damage to the taxi cab — compared to the total destruction in vehicle bombings in Baghdad — suggests to me that Aaron was *not* competent to design and build a large bomb. On 16 August, police announced an autopsy showed that Aaron died from a RCMP bullet, *not* from the detonation of the bomb next to him. Again, that shows the bomb was weak.

Aaron was 24 years old when he died. Aaron had converted to Islam in 2008, at the age of 16 years. The RCMP had known of Aaron's radical Islamic beliefs since December 2014. In June 2015, the RCMP applied to a court for a peace bond for Aaron, but the stringent initial conditions were later relaxed because of protests by civil liberties organizations. The peace bond to which Aaron agreed on 2 February 2016 specifically prohibits Aaron from possessing explosives, a condition he violated by building a bomb to detonate in a shopping mall. Expecting an Islamic terrorist to obey the law is just stupid.

Aaron pledged allegiance to the leader of ISIL in Aaron's martyrdom video. On 11 August,

ISIL's Amaq news agency called Aaron a "soldier of Islamic State". So there is mutual admiration between Aaron and ISIL.

Aaron was *not* a typical Islamic terrorist. Aaron was born in Canada, and lived all of his life in Canada. His father was a farmer and later served in the Canadian military. His parents were Christian. But Aaron was a difficult child, beginning when his mother died when Aaron was 7 years old. By age 14 years, he was a petty criminal. But converting to Islam at age 16 years, seems to have improved Aaron, except for Aaron's public endorsement of Islamic terrorism at age 22 years.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported:

At 16 [years of age in 2008], the father said [Aaron] Driver left their Ontario home and "went and lived with social services at some halfway house, and they finished raising him." Four years later, [Aaron] Driver returned home and told his father he had cleaned up his act and converted to Islam.

....

The home life didn't last long; in 2015, both men told CBC their communication was sparse and strained. "He's gone, he's lost, I can't help him," the father said.

"Aaron Driver: Troubled childhood, ISIS supporter, terror threat suspect," [CBC](#), 16:26 EDT, 11 August 2016.

CTV News reported:

Wayne [Driver, father of Aaron] told CTV Edmonton that his son started as a happy child but became angry and "hated the world" after the death of his mother from brain cancer at age seven. "I don't think he truly grieved the loss," he said.

Aaron was taken to grief counselling but he "would not participate," according to Wayne, who gave an extensive interview Thursday [11 Aug] from Cold Lake, Alta.

Wayne said Aaron was a troubled teenager who moved out of their house at age 16 and lived in a "halfway house." It was around that time that he found Islam, according to his father.

"When he moved back in with us in 2012, he had stopped using drugs, stopped getting in trouble with the law, stopped drinking," Wayne said. "He was going back to school to get his Grade 12. He was working. All was well."

....

In retrospect, [Wayne] believes Aaron "had a hate on for Christians" and that his son was rebelling because he was "still angry God took his mother."

....

Wayne said he hadn't seen his son for two years, but tried to "connect" last month. "He said I'm not talking to you and he hung up the phone."

"Ontario terror suspect was 'angry God took his mother': father," [CTV News](#), 19:32 EDT, 11 August 2016.

On 12 August, the *Globe & Mail* in Toronto reported:

Wayne Driver remarried when his son was eight, but the boy wouldn't accept his stepmother. He refused to participate in counselling and at one point, he stopped eating.

....

At 16, he applied to be emancipated and his father agreed to sign the papers. The teen lived in a youth home in Ontario until he was 18, and when Wayne Driver went to visit, his son would often refuse to see him.

....

.... [Aaron had] quit school because of trouble with math, his father said, but was planning to return.

The Canadian Press, "Aaron Driver's father says he was a troubled child," [Globe&Mail](#), 17:05 EDT, 12 Aug 2016.

It is not even remotely rational for Aaron to want to kill unknown Christians because the Christian God killed Aaron's mother. But it does appear that Islamic terrorism does fill a need in some angry, disaffected young men.

A combination of good police work and luck allowed the RCMP to stop Aaron from detonating a bomb in a shopping mall.

An [opinion column](#) in the *Edmonton Sun* newspaper has the headline: "There could be dozens more jihadists like Aaron Driver". Yes, in the [conclusion](#) to this essay, I explain how the war on terror made the USA, Canada, and Europe *less* safe.

Bibliography for Aaron Driver in Canada

- "Winnipeg ISIS supporter Aaron Driver released on bail, but with 25 conditions," [CBC](#), 16:40 CDT, 15 June 2015. (The 25 conditions include: "Wear an electronic monitoring device around the clock. Take part in 'religious counselling' and forward the counsellor's name to RCMP.")
- "Aaron Driver, Winnipeg ISIS supporter, released on bail for 2nd time," [CBC](#), 18:37 CDT, 30 June 2015. ("Driver was granted bail after agreeing to abide by 19 conditions, which include wearing a GPS device at all times.")
- "Civil liberties group seeks intervener status in Aaron Driver hearing," [CBC](#), 20:08 EDT, 3 July 2015. ("The Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties wants to intervene in an upcoming court hearing for Aaron Driver to ensure the rights of the Winnipeg-based ISIS supporter are protected.")

- "Peace bond will limit activity of Aaron Driver, ISIS supporter," [CBC](#), 19:53 EDT, 2 Feb 2016. (Driver agreed to the peace bond, which means "consenting or acknowledging that there are reasonable grounds to fear that he may participate, contribute — directly or indirectly — in the activity of a terrorist group." "The peace bond does not require Driver to wear a GPS monitoring bracelet or undergo religious counselling — two conditions that Driver faced when he was released on bail in June.")

After 10 August 2016:

- "Aaron Driver lost mother at early age, moved frequently," [Toronto Star](#), 11 August 2016.
- "Aaron Driver: Troubled childhood, ISIS supporter, terror threat suspect," [CBC](#), 16:26 EDT, 11 August 2016.
- Canadian Press, "TIMELINE: Aaron Driver's history of radicalization," [CBC](#), 16:30 EDT, 11 August 2016.
- "Dead Canada attack suspect prepared martyrdom video," [Associated Press](#), 16:36 EDT, 11 August 2016.
- Canadian Press, "FBI tip led RCMP to thwart possible terrorist act by Aaron Driver in Strathroy, Ontario," [CBC](#), 17:03 EDT, 11 August 2016. (10 August news story, updated on 11 Aug)
- "Islamic State says Canadian Aaron Driver was 'soldier' of group: SITE," [Reuters](#), 17:24 EDT, 11 August 2016. (" 'The executor of the attack targeting police in Canada was a soldier of the Islamic State and carried out the operation in response to calls to target coalition countries,' SITE quoted Amaq as saying.")
- "Ontario terror suspect was 'angry God took his mother': father," [CTV News](#), 19:32 EDT, 11 August 2016.
- "Timeline — Canadian man who planned attack had been arrested, released," [Reuters](#), 19:48 EDT, 11 August 2016.
- Canadian Press, "Full text of slain terror suspect Aaron Driver's pro-ISIL video," [National Post](#), 21:06 EDT, 11 August 2016. (transcript of audio of martyrdom video)
- "Terror suspect was headed to mall located near bus, train stations: cab company," [CTV News](#), 21:11 EDT, 11 August 2016. ("According to the son of the owner of Leo's Taxi [in Strathroy], ... [Aaron] Driver said his destination was the Citi Plaza mall in London, Ontario." "The taxi company said that Driver entered the cab upon its arrival, and as the taxi began to pull out of the driveway, the driver heard the sound of gunfire and someone yelling to get out of the car and lay on the ground.")
- "Aaron Driver, who pledged allegiance to ISIS, was planning 'imminent' attack, police

say," [CBC](#), 22:50 EDT, 11 August 2016. ("... the RCMP said that Aaron Driver ... had made a 'martyrdom video' and was planning an attack within 72 hours in an urban centre during morning or afternoon rush hour." "The video, which the RCMP aired at the news conference, shows a man wearing a balaclava speaking directly to the camera pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and railing against Western 'enemies of Islam.' " "Islamic State's Amaq news agency said Driver was a 'soldier' of ISIS, the SITE monitoring service said on Thursday [11 Aug].")

- "Taxi driver dove from cab moments before Aaron Driver detonated bomb," [CBC](#), 08:55 EDT, 12 August 2016.
- "Who was Aaron Driver? What we know so far about the man killed in Strathroy," [Globe&Mail](#), 12:33 EDT, 16 August 2016. ("Police intercepted Mr. Driver as he was boarding a taxi bound for a shopping mall in London, Ontario.")
- "Terrorist suspect killed by RCMP bullet, family says," [Toronto Star](#), 16 August 2016.
- "Aaron Driver autopsy shows RCMP bullet killed ISIS sympathizer," [CBC](#), 18:39 EDT, 16 August 2016.
- "Terror suspect Aaron Driver left remorseful note for family, father says," [Globe&Mail](#), 07:48 EDT, 19 August 2016. ("... authorities apparently discovered that the 'crude' bomb he devised was not likely sufficiently powerful to kill.")
- "Aaron Driver's 'more powerful' bomb never exploded, RCMP says, revealing new details of tense confrontation," [National Post](#), 12:15 EDT, 20 August 2016. (RCMP says it appears that only the homemade detonator exploded, *not* the bomb itself.)

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. But the glimmer was extinguished on 18 April 2016 when the main opposition delegation walked out of the negotiations in Geneva.

1. Western View of Insurgency in Syria *Before 10 June 2014*

In February 2012, Hillary Clinton created the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations to attend meetings and denounce Assad. This group disappeared after November 2014, having accomplished nothing except wasting travel expense money.

Before 10 June 2014, the conventional wisdom in the "Friends of the Syrian People" nations — including the USA — was that Assad was Evil, and the removal of Assad was the Nr. 1 goal in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition has a consistent and intransigent demand that Assad resign. The intransigence of the Syrian National Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Hillary Clinton, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian government.

Obama's foreign policy on Syria is essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. (See my [document](#) that collects quotations from Obama and two U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and John Kerry.) When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012 or 2013, Obama's foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality.

The following series of events exposed the futility of the plans of the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations and the Syrian National Coalition at the negotiations in Geneva during Jan/Feb 2014:

1. The reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, Assad is winning the civil war in heavily populated western Syria, and the insurgents are unable to force Assad to resign.
2. Assad did *not* resign, and the Geneva peace negotiations ended in failure on 15 Feb 2014. The Coalition's intransigent demand that Assad resign, and Assad's insistence on remaining in power, are *impossible* for compromise.
3. Not only are there no plans to resume Syrian peace negotiations in the foreseeable future, but also the United Nations negotiator (Brahimi) resigned in frustration on 13 May 2014.
4. Assad was re-elected for another seven-year term on 3 June 2014.
5. It is now obvious that neither side in the Geneva negotiations during Jan/Feb 2014 genuinely wanted to negotiate. The U.S. Government essentially forced the Coalition to attend the Geneva negotiations, and Russia forced Assad's government to attend.

A more detailed analysis of the failure of the Geneva negotiations is found in my separate [review](#). I suggest that the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations — and the Syrian National Coalition — were so obsessed with deposing Assad that they did not recognize that their demand that Assad resign would cause the Geneva negotiations to fail. Not only was much diplomatic effort and expense wasted on Geneva, but also the frustration caused the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resign on 13 May 2014.

In January 2014, ISIL invaded Iraq. The Iraqi government begged for help from Obama, but Obama ignored the Iraqi requests, as ISIL quickly captured about 1/3 of Iraq. During an interview published on 27 Jan 2014, Obama made a now famous remark about ISIL being "junior varsity" terrorists. See my essays for [July 2014](#) and [August 2015](#). Clearly, Obama seriously underestimated ISIL in early 2014.

2. Western View of Insurgency in Syria ***After 10 June 2014***

After the capture of Mosul by ISIL on 10 June 2014, it was obvious that the big enemy in Iraq was ISIL. Because ISIL actively operated in *both* Syria and Iraq, the problems in the two nations were suddenly recognized to be intertwined. The U.S. Government's view was that terrorists in Syria had spilled into Iraq. The Truth is that ISIL was created in Iraq in 2004 under the name "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" and entered Syria in May 2013, when these terrorists took the name "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL).

An important point to recognize is that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL) was essentially defeated when the USA pulled its combat troops out of Iraq in Dec 2011. The weak and ineffective government of Maliki in Iraq allowed ISIL to capture much of western and northern Iraq from January 2014 through June 2014. There is an obvious lesson here. If the weak and ineffective Syrian National Coalition were to control Syria, ISIL would exploit that weakness. The result would be that ISIL would quickly seize control of Syria. In other words, we *need* a strong, decisive, experienced leader (e.g., Assad) in control of Syria, to limit the expansion of terrorists like ISIL, because ISIL is worse than Assad.

My conclusions for [August 2014](#) through [June 2015](#) contained a list of citations to some commentators who recognized that we should be cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL and other terrorist organizations. In the interest of brevity, I have deleted those citations from current and future essays.

On 23 Sep 2014 there was a change in U.S. strategy in Syria from (1) defeating Assad to (2) defeating ISIL. This change occurred when the U.S.-led airstrikes in Syria began. However, the USA, Europe, and Arab nations were unable to cooperate with Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorism.

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

in Syria is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

In my essays for [August 2015](#) to [December 2015](#), I observed that the Syrian National Coalition was "fading".

3. Glimmer of Hope for End to Syrian Civil War

On 29 January 2016, peace negotiations began in Geneva.

However, peace negotiations in Geneva were scuttled by an obstructionist opposition delegation. From its creation on 11 December 2015, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) — the main opposition delegation — insisted on pre-conditions (i.e., demands) *before* the HNC 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 HNC made slightly different demands, but the above-mentioned five demands were commonly made. The 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 HNC arrived late, de Mistura first met with the HNC on 31 Jan 2016, two days after the negotiations formally began. The HNC refused to negotiate with the delegation from Assad's government, because none of the HNC'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 HNC 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 HNC 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 HNC'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. The HNC scuttled the negotiations during May and June 2016. Then, on 28 June 2016, many opposition groups who were also participating in the Geneva negotiations threatened to quit the negotiations, unless their four demands were met.

Blame for Failure in Geneva

In my essay for December 2015, I wrote:

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).

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

I wrote "von nichts, kommt nichts" in response to unrealistic expectations by delusional diplomats. By choosing the HNC as the main opposition delegation, the negotiations in Geneva were doomed from the beginning.

By 1 August, 214 days have elapsed in 2016 without any progress toward a new government for Syria. There was a brief cessation of hostilities in March and April, and some deliveries of humanitarian aid, but overall very little progress in ending the Syrian civil war. *Why* so little progress? I see five reasons:

1. Since the HNC was created in December 2015, the HNC has consistently demanded its pre-conditions be satisfied *before* they would negotiate. In March 2016, Assad proposed a so-called "national unity government", but the HNC refused to consider the proposal. The HNC walked out of negotiations on 18 April 2016. It is clear that the HNC *never* wanted to negotiate.
2. On 18 April 2016, the jihadist group Ahrar al-Sham began a military offensive in Latakia province. In June 2016, Jaysh al-Islam, another jihadist group, conducted a military offensive in Damascus province. My previous essays chronicle other violations of the cessation of hostilities by rebels and jihadist groups.
3. Assad is now clearly pursuing a military solution, as he declared in his 7 June 2016 speech.
4. The foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, USA) continue to pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military victory. Convincing these foreign meddlers to stop supporting the Syrian civil war currently appears impossible. My essay for [May 2016](#) cites repeated calls during 2013 and 2014 by the United Nations Secretary General for nations to stop the flow of weapons to

Syria, but those calls were ignored by *all* of foreign meddlers.

5. The USA and Russia, as co-chairs of the ISSG Ceasefire Task Force, failed to recommend frequent violators of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for punishment. In particular, on 11 May 2016, the USA blocked Russia's attempt at the United Nations to declare Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam as terrorist organizations, which would exclude them the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. And Russian airstrikes are supporting Assad's military campaign against rebels and jihadists. Neither Assad nor Russia are being punished for violating the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Back on 2 August 2012 — four years ago — Kofi Annan resigned as the first U.N. Envoy for Syria. In the ninth paragraph of his resignation [speech](#) he said: “You have to understand: as an Envoy, I can’t want peace more than the protagonists, more than the Security Council or the international community for that matter.” It is still true that the participants in negotiations must want the negotiations to succeed. Unfortunately for the people of Syria, the so-called Syrian opposition — a bunch of self-appointed expatriates in the Syrian National Coalition in Turkey and the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) — is focused only on grabbing power from Assad. On the other side, Assad's number one priority is to cling to power.

Why don't the foreign meddlers — who are members of the ISSG — force their proxy armies in Syria to negotiate? Well, the foreign meddlers — like the protagonists in the Geneva negotiations — are obsessed with the issue of whether Assad remains or resigns. Russia needs Assad to remain in power, so Russia can continue to use the naval base at Tartus. Iran needs Assad (a Shiite) to remain in power, so the Shiite government in Iran can have influence in Syria, where the majority of the Syrians are Sunnis. Obama is under the delusion that if Assad resigns, then the terrorists (i.e., ISIL and Nusra) and the jihadists will all magically disappear.

In summary, Syria is a complicated mess with too many rebel and jihadist groups, acting in a fragmented and disorganized way, supported by foreign meddlers. Politicians and diplomats seem to *assume* that the leaders in Syria (i.e., Assad, the HNC, other Syrian groups) *sincerely desire* peace. But struggles for political power have apparently overwhelmed peace negotiations.

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.

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 297,000 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than four million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

The Syrian government — regardless of who leads it — does *not* have the resources to repair buildings, electricity supply, and other infrastructure that was destroyed during the five years of civil war in Syria.

Conclusion for Iraq

The Syrians have an effective government and an effective military. In contrast, Iraq — only slightly better than Yemen, Somalia, and Libya — is now a failed nation. These facts make the Iraqi government weaker than the Syrian government.

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

1. The Iraqi government is corrupt. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [January 2016](#))
2. The Iraqi government is dysfunctional. During July-October 2014, the Iraqi Parliament *slowly* formed a new government — during an existential crisis. My essays for July 2014 through February 2015 summarized the infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. (See the summary for July through October 2014 in my [webpage](#).)
3. The Iraqi army was unable to stop the ISIL invasion during the first six months of 2014. In June 2014, the Iraqi army was exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout in Ramadi.
4. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable or unwilling to prosecute:
 - A. corrupt politicians or corrupt government officials,
 - B. army officers who hired ghost soldiers (see [above](#)),
 - C. desertion at Mosul on 10 June 2014 (see [above](#)),
 - D. fleeing from Ramadi on 17 May 2015 (see [above](#)), and
 - E. terrorists who kill innocent civilians in frequent bombings in or near Baghdad.
5. Beginning in August 2014, my essays each month have chronicled suicide bombings, car bombs, kidnappings, and other horrible crimes in Iraq. Such attacks have become an almost routine part of life in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. These continuing attacks are an indication that civilization has collapsed in Iraq.

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

It will take years to fix the defects in the Iraqi army, while effective troops on the ground are needed *now* — truly were needed back in January 2014 — to prevent ISIL from capturing more cities and infrastructure. 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.

U.S. War on Terror

Al-Qaeda attacked two U.S. embassies in Africa in August 1998. Then, on 11 Sep 2001, Al-Qaeda flew airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon. The response of the U.S. Government to these unprovoked attacks by Al-Qaeda was to begin a war against Islamic terrorists.

The phrase "war against terrorism" was first used by U.S. President George W. Bush in a [speech](#) to the nation hours after the attacks on 11 Sep 2001. In his speech to the U.S. Congress on 20 Sep 2001, Bush said: "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."

On 7 October 2001, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations notified the U.N. Secretary General that the U.S. would attack Islamic terrorists in Afghanistan, invoking the legal right of "self-defense" after the terror attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 11 Sep 2001. Note that most of the hijackers on 11 Sep 2001 came from Saudi Arabia and *none*

came from Afghanistan. Further, Osama bin Laden, who ordered the attacks on the USA, was in Pakistan, *not* Afghanistan.

On 23 Sep 2014, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations notified the U.N. Secretary General that the U.S. was bombing ISIL in Syria. The U.S. Government invoked the legal right of "self-defense" to justify the U.S. bombing of ISIL in Syria, despite the fact that ISIL had *not* attacked the USA.

The premise behind the U.S. war on terrorism seems to be that if the U.S. Military kills Islamic terrorists in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, etc., then there will be no Islamic terror attacks inside the USA.

The U.S. war against terrorism began in Afghanistan in 2001. Fifteen years later, the U.S. Military is still fighting against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, with *no* end in sight. 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). On 6 July 2016, in response to an apparently worsening situation in Afghanistan, Obama decided to leave 8400 U.S. Military personnel in Afghanistan in January 2017. [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

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. 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.

By May 2016, the U.S. airstrikes on ISIL had significantly limited ISIL's finances. In response, ISIL began inviting Islamic terrorists to attack targets in their local nation in Western Europe, USA, etc. (See, e.g., [Associated Press](#)(22May); [Reuters](#).) Encouraging local, lone-wolf attacks on the Internet will be cheaper for ISIL than training terrorists in Syria.

Examples of such lone-wolf Islamic terrorist attacks in the USA include:

- the Boston Marathon on 15 April 2013,
- Chattanooga (see my essay for [July 2015](#)),
- San Bernardino ([December 2015](#)), and
- Orlando ([June 2016](#)).

The recent conventional wisdom is that, as ISIL is defeated in Iraq and Syria, ISIL will sponsor — or encourage — more Islamic terrorist attacks in Europe and the USA. See, e.g.,

- "Are airstrikes successfully weakening ISIS?," [PBS](#), 1 May 2016. (Doug Ollivant interviewed by Soledad O'Brien. "We are hearing some reports, that actually now is what ISIL is telling people that they're talking to on social media: Don't come here [to Iraq or Syria]. Stay home. But that's obviously something we're just as concerned

about, if not more so, are these radical jihadists in their home countries doing these lone wolf or very small group attacks. This is bad news particularly for Europe, where a much larger percentage of these foreign fighters come from....")

- Colin P. Clarke & Chad C. Serena, "Commentary: Islamic State may be down, but it's far from out," [Reuters](#), 25 May 2016. ("... Islamic State leaders could instruct would-be jihadists to remain home and launch attacks there.")
- "CIA chief: IS working to send operatives to the West," [Associated Press](#) 15 June 2016. ("CIA Director John Brennan will tell Congress on Thursday [16 June] that Islamic State militants are training and attempting to deploy operatives for further attacks on the West and will rely more on guerrilla-style tactics to compensate for their territorial losses." "Brennan also noted the group's call for followers to conduct so-called lone-wolf attacks in their home countries.")
- "White House says Baghdad attacks strengthen U.S. resolve in Iraq," [Reuters](#), 3 July 2016. (Brennan told Congress in June: "To compensate for territorial losses [in Iraq and Syria], ISIL (Islamic State) will probably rely more on guerrilla tactics, including high-profile attacks outside territory it holds.")
- "US official says anti-Islamic State forces gaining momentum," [Associated Press](#), 28 June 2016. (Brett McGurk told the U.S. the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "more 'lone wolf' style attacks such as the one in Orlando are possible as the Islamic State loses territory,")
- "Islamic State's 'lone wolf' attacks to persist in West despite territorial losses in Middle East," [Washington Times](#), 28 June 2016. (Brett McGurk: "Islamic State officials are telling recruits in the West to stay put and conduct attacks at home rather than travel to the Salafist group's base in Syria, where its control is increasingly under threat.")
- "Germany girds for potential spike in Islamic State attacks in Europe," [Reuters](#), 28 June 2016. (German Interior Minister Thomas De Maiziere: "... we fear that Islamic State will externalise, transfer its activities to Europe, especially because of military losses in the region [Syria and Iraq].")
- "As ISIS Loses Land, It Gains Ground in Overseas Terror," [NY Times](#), 3 July 2016.
- "Islamic State's ambitions and allure grow as territory shrinks," [Washington Post](#), 3 July 2016. ("U.S. intelligence officials say battlefield setbacks in Iraq and Syria appear to have driven the Islamic State's leaders to speed up their timeline for attacks abroad.")
- "More than 140 killed in Islamic State's worst ever bomb attack in the Iraqi capital," [Washington Post](#), 4 July 2016. ("U.S. officials have warned that the [Islamic State] group is likely to intensify its attacks overseas as it loses ground in Iraq and Syria, but civilians in the Middle East continue to bear the brunt of the campaign of bombings.")

- "Inside ISIS: Quietly preparing for the loss of the 'caliphate'," [Associated Press](#), 13 July 2016. ("U.S. counterterrorism experts believe the mass-casualty attacks in Istanbul and Baghdad in the past month were largely a response to [ISIL's] military reversals in Iraq and Syria." "... [ISIL]'s highly decentralized nature ensures that it will remain dangerous for some time to come, according to current and former U.S. officials and terrorism experts.")
- "As 'caliphate' shrinks, Islamic State looks to global attacks," [Reuters](#), 13:08 GMT, 31 July 2016.
- President Obama 4 Aug 2016 press conference at Pentagon: "In fact, the decline of ISIL in Syria and Iraq appears to be causing it to shift to tactics that we've seen before — an even greater emphasis on encouraging high-profile terrorist attacks, including in the United States." [Pentagon](#). See also [Associated Press](#).

It appears that the U.S. may have spent huge amounts of money to fight Islamic terrorists, but with the counter-intuitive result that the USA is now *less* secure than previously. The glaring error in U.S. policy was to neglect fighting the *ideology* of Islamic terrorism.

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begun 1 August 2016, revised 1 September 2016.

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