

Syria & Iraq: September 2016

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 34 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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. Furthermore, I post each of my essays at least a few days — typically a week — after the end of the month described in that essay, so I am *not* distributing "hot news", but only creating a scholarly historical record.

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. Beirut and Damascus are +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 calls itself "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 calls itself "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.

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.

September 2016

On 6 Sep 2016, there were reports from Aleppo that Assad's airplanes had again dropped

poison gas — probably chlorine — on a civilian neighborhood in Aleppo. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [BBC](#). On 7 Sep it was reported that two people — a 13 year old girl and a 29 year old man — had died from this exposure to the poison gas. [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Associated Press](#).

After two chemical weapons attacks in August 2016 and one attack on 6 September, new chemical weapons attacks in Syria are accumulating faster than OPCW can investigate them.

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.

Fourth JIM Report

The fourth report of the JIM was due at the end of September, but the U.N. Security Council extended the deadline until 21 October. [Reuters](#).

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.

My comment is the United Nations and OPCW has little enthusiasm for investigating use of chemical weapons in Iraq.

On 13 September 2016, the Pentagon reported that a U.S. airstrike had destroyed a major ISIL chemical weapons production plant near Mosul, Iraq. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#).

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. 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. On 5 September 2016, North Korea launched three missiles that landed in the ocean near Japan. And on 9 Sep 2016, North Korea detonated a fifth nuclear weapon, which was more energetic than any of their previous weapon tests. Each time, the United Nations Security Council condemns the violations by the North Korean government, but these condemnations are clearly *not* effective in stopping the belligerent behavior of the North Koreans.

Deaths in Syria

On 13 September 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a cumulative death toll since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in March 2011 to the dawn of 14 August 2016.

Where the Syrian Observatory for human rights was able to document 301781 human losses since the fall of the first casualty in Daraa at the 18th of March 2011, until the dawn of the 14th of August 2016, and they were as follows:

- 86692 civilian casualties, including at least 15099 persons under the age of 18, and 10018 females over the age of eighteen.
- Number of fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions and The Syrian Democratic Forces: 48766
- Defected from the regime forces 3593
- Regime soldiers and officers: 59006
- Members from Popular Committees, NDF, al-Baath battalions, Jaysh al-Tahrir al-Filastini, Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the National Arab Guard, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Iskenderun, Shabiha and regime's informers: 41564
- Militiamen from Hezbollah: 1321
- Shiite fighters loyal to the regime of Iranian and Afghan and other Asian and Arab nationalities and al-Quds al-Filastini Brigade and gunmen of Arab nationalities loyal to the regime forces: 5163
- Casualties from fighters of Lebanese, Iraqi, Palestinian, Jordanian, Arab Gulf, North African, Egyptian, Yemeni, Sudanese and other Arab nationalities, in

addition to fighters of Russian, Chinese, European, Indian, Afghan, Chechen, Caucasian, American, Australian and Turkestan nationalities; who are fighting in the ranks the “Islamic State”, Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic Turkestan Party, Jund al-Aqsa organization, Jund al-Sham, al-Khadra’a battalion, Junud al-Sham al-Shishan and Islamic movements: 52031

- Unidentified casualties documented by pictures and videos: 3645

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights received confirmed information from reliable sources within the regime’s security branches, most importantly the Air Force Intelligence and State Security, in addition to reliable sources in Sednaya military prison, they reported that at least 60,000 prisoners died within these branches and Sednaya prison during the five past years, either due to direct physical torture, or by privation of food and medicine, where the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 14464 detainees, including 110 teenagers under the age of eighteen, and 53 citizen women over the age of eighteen years, since the start of the Syrian revolution in the 18th of March 2011, until the dawn of the 14th of August 2016.

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

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

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

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of those who were killed by the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them from Syria, Arab and Asian nationalities, and fighters of the rebel and Islamic Factions, the “Islamic state” organization and the organizations of Jund al-Sham, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Jund al-Aqsa, al-Umma Brigade, al-Battar battalion, Jaysh al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar, the Islamic Turkestan Party and Junud al-Sham al-Shishan to be about 75,000 more from the numbers that the Syrian Observatory for human rights was able to document, because of the extreme secrecy about casualties by all parties, and because there is information about civilians casualties the Observatory was not able to authenticate, because of the difficulty to get to some remote areas in Syria.

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights renews its call to all international sides — despite the horrifying silence by the international community — to work more seriously

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

"About 430 thousands were killed since the beginning of the Syrian revolution," [SOHR](#), 13 Sep 2016. [Formatting as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

Although the above-quoted press release says — in two places — the reporting period ends at the dawn of 14 August 2016, I suspect the Observatory intended to say 14 September. However, [Reuters](#) reported the new cumulative total at 10:32 GMT on 13 Sep, about 20 hours *before* dawn of 14 September.

In May 2016, SOHR estimated that the actual death toll was approximately 148,000 greater than 282,000 dead that they documented. (See my essay for [May 2016](#).) That suggests a correction factor of $(148 + 282)/282 = 1.5$ to be multiplied times the documented number of deaths.

Now, SOHR estimates the actual death toll is approximately 75,000 greater than 301,800 dead that they documented. That suggests a correction factor of $(75 + 302)/302 = 1.25$ to be multiplied times the documented number of deaths.

But the SOHR's headline claims "430,000" killed, which suggests a correction factor of $430/302 = 1.4$ to be multiplied times the documented number of deaths.

On 26 September 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll for the interval since 22 April 2016 (the date the SOHR says the first Cessation of Hostilities Agreement collapsed) and ending on 26 September 2016.

... the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 25472 people since the 22nd of April 2016, which is the truce collapse date, until today the 26th of September 2016, the casualties were distributed as follows:

- Civilians: 6920 civilians, including at least 1341 boys and girls under the age of eighteen, and 1136 female citizens over the age of 18
- Rebel and Islamic fighters and the Syrian Democratic Forces in which the Kurdish Unites are its backbone: 4105
- Defected soldiers and officers: 32
- Regime soldiers and officers: 3024
- Members from Popular Committees, NDF, al-Baath battalions, Jaysh al-Tahrir al-Filastini, Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the National Arab Guard, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Iskenderun, Shabiha and regime's informers: 2907
- Militiamen from the Lebanese Hezbollah: 262

- Non-Syrian Pro-regime mostly Shia militiamen: 1180
- Non-Syrian nationality fighters from the rebel and Islamic factions, the “Islamic State”, Fath al-Sham Front, the Islamic Turkistan Party, Jund al-Aqsa organization, Jund al-Sham, Junud al-Sham al-Shishan and Islamic Movements: 6903
- Unidentified casualties documented by pictures and video: 139

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of those who were killed to be about 5 thousand more than the documented number, because of the extreme secrecy about casualties by all parties, and because of information about civilian casualties the Observatory was not able to authenticate due to the difficulty of getting to some remote areas in Syria.

Also these statistics do not include the information received by Syrian Observatory for Human Rights about thousands of casualties killed under torture in the prisons of the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them and the observatory was not able to document.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights renews its call to all international sides — despite the horrifying silence by the international community — to work more seriously for immediate stop of the Syrian people’s blood shedding and to put more pressure on the countries members of the members of the UN Security Council so these war crimes and the crimes against humanity are handled by the International Criminal Court.

We in the Syrian Observatory demand the punishment of all perpetrators, instigators, collaborators and all individuals and sides who used the Syrian blood as a political card and as means to carry out their personal agendas, as well as those who transformed a revolution for dignity to a sectarian and ethnic civil war.

"More than 30 thousand people killed in 5 months on the collapse of the ceasefire and the escalation of military operations," [SOHR](#), 26 Sep 2016. [Formatting as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

Note that the 30,000 number in their headline comes from adding 25,472 deaths that they documented plus 5,000 estimated deaths.

Dividing 25,472 by 5 months, gives an average of 5094 deaths/month, which is *greater* than the monthly death tolls reported by SOHR for the months of April, May, June, July, August, and September. Looking at the monthly death tolls for the months of May through September, the average is only 4341 deaths/month. There is an inconsistency here that I can not resolve.

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 3686 persons in the month of September 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilian casualties: 1228 civilians, including 276 children under the age of

eighteen, and 158 female citizens over the age of 18, they were killed as follows:

- 841 citizens including 206 children and 109 citizen women killed in raids by Russian and Syrian warplanes' bombing and helicopters' barrel bombs,
- 34 persons were executed by the "Islamic State" organization,
- 94 people including 11 children and 14 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,
- 23 including a woman were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons and dungeons of its intelligence branches,
- 86 persons including 27 children and 21 citizen women killed by the fall of shells and targeting by the rebel and Islamic Factions and the "Islamic State" organization,
- 6 people were killed in a booby trapped vehicles and explosive belts detonation,
- [one] citizen killed by the Jordanian border guards,
- 2 children died due to poor health conditions and the bad living conditions and the lack of medication,
- 1 person was killed in the shelling and the gunshots of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Aleppo province,
- 57 including 10 children and 5 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: 511
- Defected soldiers and officers: 4
- The regime forces: 525
- Members from Popular Committees, NDF and militiamen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 377
- Militiamen from the Lebanese Hezbollah: 10
- Non-Syrian Pro-regime mostly Shia militiamen: 75
- Unidentified casualties: 169
- 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: 787

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.

"1200 civilian casualties are among about 3700 killed in September 2016," [SOHR](#), 1 Oct 2016. [Formatting as indented list by Standler.]

When I add the list of civilian deaths, I get a total of 1145, not 1228. There may be an

omitted line in the doubly indented list, as the text at the SOHR website contains two commas separated by a blank space.

The SOHR includes its stock phrase "horrifying silence by the international community" in this press release, but the Truth is that United Nations officials and diplomats of many nations have been very vocal during 19-30 September 2016 about the killings in Syria. The problem is that both Assad and the insurgents *want* to pursue a military victory, and Russian airstrikes are helping Assad slaughter civilians and insurgents.

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* 301,000.

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 October 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 15 months to choose a leader for the Free Syrian Army, during an existential war.

On 12 September 2016, *The Telegraph* in London England published a [list](#) of nine major insurgent organizations in Syria. *The Telegraph* said the Free Syrian Army was the least radical insurgent group, but is "now existing in name only".

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.

My essay for [August 2016](#) chronicles the beginning of the Turkish invasion of Syria during 24-31 August.

September 2016: Turkish invasion of Syria

On 2-3 September, the Turkish military pushed west in an attack on ISIL, thereby avoiding a southern push towards Manbij. Also, the USA claims that the Kurds have withdrawn from areas west of the Euphrates River, while Turkey claims the Kurds remain west of the Euphrates. On 3 September, Turkey sent more tanks into Syria. [Reuters](#)(2Sep); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#)(4Sep).

On 4 September, the Turks declared that they had pushed ISIL out of the region in north-eastern Syria, near the Turkish border. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

I have neglected the Turkish invasion of Syria, in order to chronicle the 9 Sep new agreements on Syria and the prompt collapse of that ceasefire in Syria.

On 28 September 2016, the Associated Press reported that Turkey is scheduled in February 2017 to finish the wall along the Turkey-Syria border.

An official says Turkey is set to complete the construction of a concrete wall along the 911-kilometer (566-mile) Turkey-Syria border by the end of February.

The Housing Development Administration of Turkey will be building the remaining 700-kilometers of the border wall, according to an official at the administration. The wall construction has been ongoing for at least two years and was led by the Ministry of National Defense.

The official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity according to government protocol, said the walls are two meters (6½ feet) wide and three meters (10 feet) high. The construction will be completed in five months but delays may be

caused by weather conditions, according to the official.

Turkey has long been pressured by its NATO allies as well as by security threats to seal its porous border with Syria.

Zeynep Bilginsoy, "The Latest:", [Associated Press](#), 18:50 Beirut time, 28 Sep 2016.

See also [Reuters](#).

My comment is that the wall was needed since mid-2013, to keep fighters and supplies from reaching Nusra and ISIL, so Turkey is four years late.

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 2016, 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.

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 13 September 2016, in an exclusive interview with the [Associated Press](#) Ban Ki-moon again said he "can't understand why Syria is being held hostage to 'the destiny' of one man, President Bashar Assad." That is because who rules Syria is more important to world leaders than whether 600,000 besieged persons are hungry.

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 essays prior to April 2016.) 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 the 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.

My essay for [August 2016](#) chronicled the continuation of efforts to restore the cessation of hostilities and to begin routine deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria. I concluded that the Syrian peace negotiations in Geneva during 2016 have *failed*.

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.

On 1 September, [Reuters](#) reported an HNC delegate revealed that "Syria's opposition plans to unveil its plans for a political transition to help end the country's five-year war at a meeting of ministers in London next week". The plan was unveiled on 7 Sep at a meeting of the Friends of Syria, as described [below](#).

1-7 September 2016

On Thursday, 1 September 2016, de Mistura held a press briefing in Geneva after the meeting of the humanitarian task force. I have boldfaced a few important points.

de Mistura: Good evening. We had a very intense and long meeting as you can see on humanitarian side, of the Humanitarian Task Force. There was a lot to be discussed and I think Jan will be able to elaborate further on that, particularly because developments in various locations inside Syria at the moment.

So let me first of all try to give you an idea on where we are on the political process. The discussions are ongoing at the very senior military, security and diplomatic level between the Russian Federation officers, and American officers and representatives. They are taking place since yesterday [31 Aug] and they are ongoing until probably Friday or Saturday [3 Sep] morning. They are important, they are the follow up to what John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov indicated to all of you late on Friday, as you remember, after their own meeting. And they are important in the sense that they are part of these ongoing discussions between the Russians and the Americans on the follow up of what was the so called understanding which took place in Moscow between Sergey Lavrov, President Putin and John Kerry on how to bring a renewed and solid momentum to the cessation of hostilities.

So in that context, I think we should be wishing them good luck and hard work. We are supporting those discussions because we are very keen, as you can imagine, in ensuring that type of cessation of hostilities being renewed. Everything else is marginal comparing to that because even aid is being stopped or not reaching places because the intensified fighting.

Eyes probably are going to be very much focused on what maybe happening at the G-20 meeting in Beijing, which is just next Sunday. So we are all connected on that.

So taking into account what would be the outcome of what I just mentioned to you, **we are planning to indicate quite clear political initiative** during the week preceding the General Assembly [meeting that begins on 13 September]. That is the right time to do it because the next real appointment is going to be the 21 of September when in the UN New Zealand has already, as president of the Security Council, indicated its intention, and the Secretary-General will be attending and present there, to have a high level meeting on Syria. So that is the target date for making sure that everyone is actively involved in producing some positive outcome on this conflict.

Regarding Aleppo, the 48-hour pause, the position is as indicated by me on the 27th of

August and the message still stands: we are ready, we said it today, and we are ready to move any time as possibly indicated through the various sides, but Jan may want to indicate more about it.

Regarding other subjects, I just want to raise one thing, I hope that *The Guardian* will be generous enough and kind enough to actually publish on its own pages, and hopefully on its front pages, with equal relevance, the request that Stephen O'Brien has made for a reply to what is considered a very unfair analysis, without the opportunity for UN Staff in Damascus, who are risking their lives, to actually present their position. So I hope that will be happening, that's an appeal to *The Guardian* on behalf of all of us. Thank you.

Jan Egeland: Today is the first of September, so this was a stock-taking meeting in many ways, what we achieved in August, and we were only able to reach three of the 18 besieged areas in August, Deir-ez-Zor by air drops and then Al-Waer with two convoys and east Harasta with one. It is around one third or less of the population in besieged areas.

We also were expecting today to get an answer back from the government on our request to reach 1.2 million people in September, which we are able and willing to reach including the population in all of the besieged areas in the course of September. It is the first of September and we haven't even gotten an answer back on that yet.

....

The task force failed the people of Darayya, we all failed the people of Darayya, I failed them and it is really sad to think of what they went through over these years. There are now urgent fears of communities in Al-Waer in Moadameya, in Madaya and in Foah and Kefraya. They all fear for their future, and we need to break the sieges. A siege is not broken by the population giving up after starvation and after bombing, a siege is lifted by humanitarian access and freedom of movement, in and out, by the civilian population.

....

.... Aleppo is one of the areas where we are ready to go immediately when there is a 48-hour pause, but we are still negotiating the access road and the modalities of this, including with the armed opposition groups. It is urgent that we get an agreement, we were informed today that there is now 4000 food rations left that could be enough to feed 20,000 people and the population of Aleppo is quarter of a million. I am hopeful that we will have a breakthrough, it is not a failure of willingness and ability to go there, we have volunteers to go, always, even to the most dangerous places.

....

QUESTION: Mr. de Mistura you mentioned this political initiative in September, you have just missed a second deadline to resume the peace talks, you had aimed for the end of August, you had previously wanted to have it at the start of August, and now it

sounds like you are just going back to the General Assembly to take up the matter. When we can possibly imagine a resumption of these talks, given this, and if you can please address, what I thought was a very frank comment from Mr. Egeland just a moment ago, about the failure in Darayya, the failure of the task force, we have all failed, I think it was the way that you phrased it. How much are you concerned that the ceasefire is dead, more or less dead, the talks are stalled, the humanitarian aid was slim to none in the last month and you showed very great anger about it, how concerned are you that your role is still relevant? And that maybe these failures need some sort of a jolt?

SdeM: First of all let me give you a feeling here. While you are seeing in both Jan and me and my colleagues in Damascus and in New York and elsewhere and in Geneva a strong feeling of outrage, and of disappointment. The more we see that happening, the more determined we are in not abandoning or letting the Syrian people down. So don't interpret please any of those events which are terrible and are sad, as an indication that the UN, ourselves, are by any way saying we are giving up on the Syrian people and on a solution. But at the same time, let's be frank, it would be naïve, not even logical if we were coming up with any type of initiative that will be out of context or out of timing. Should we be ignoring the fact that there is clearly a strategy at the moment to move from Darayya to Al-Waer to Moadameya in a similar pattern? Should we be ignoring the fact that while we are all agreeing that there is a political solution there is at this very moment a militarization of the conflict? Should we be ignoring the fact that while this is happening there is a genuine, otherwise I would have said the different, there is a genuine serious attempt still between the two co-Chairs to come up to an agreement and me prejudging that one instead of using it as an opportunity for a political process? So you have an answer there. **It is not about deadlines, about dates, about the first of August, it is about realities.**

[Mr. Egeland did *not* respond to the question about failing people of Darayya.]

....

Can we give a chance to Jan to explain a little bit more about Aleppo?

Jan Egeland: I have asked myself many times is it worth it this work? You would feel that we are making so little progress. The reason I continue is that the only way we have to unlock the bars between us and women and children in these places is that we get the men in suit and tie, and uniform or with Kalashnikov to be convinced by members around that table that they need to unlock the doors so we are able to get in to those women and children and wounded and others who need us the most.

We are routinely blocked and we as humanitarian workers cannot unlock that door. The Russians, Americans, Iranians, Saudis, Turkish, other members of the task force can, and we made that happen, especially I would say, in the February, March and April period. We went to places we hadn't been in years, that will happen again, I think, that's why I continue. **We would fail them even more if we now said it is hopeless and turn our backs to the whole thing. It is not hopeless, we can get back there, but then we need these countries, sponsors of the actors on the ground, to help us**

more.

....

QUESTION: I got the impression from your remarks that you are concerned that Darayya is just the first in a whole series of potential [inaudible] and the opposition seem to fear that it is kind of the way things are going now. Is it your understanding that some people have reported that population of Aleppo is also calling for an evacuation from Aleppo? Do you see this trend gathering steam? And secondly, opposition negotiators say that while this situation develops militarization, there is really nothing on the table could persuade them to come to Geneva at this stage. How do you see the way forward?

SdeM: First of all I concur with your fear and the indication that **after Darayya we may have other Darayyas** and that could be a strategy taking place at the moment on one side and that's why I think that it is very important to notice what Stephen O'Brien did as a statement about what are the implications of other Darayyas. And frankly even my own statement on Darayya, a few days ago.

Regarding the outcome of all this, well I do not to prejudge obviously what I cannot control, in other words, the militarization of this conflict, that is clearly taking place and there is acceleration, no doubt on that, but I do maintain the fact, and I think many others concur, that whatever is the militarization of the conflict and whatever are this Darayya or the next Darayyas, god forbid, we will not have a solution to this conflict unless there is a genuine political process. You can take over a city, we already said it, you can actually destroy a city, empty a city, but then, what is the next step. That is why I am still quite hopeful that all this has a logic, why the Russian and American sides are still discussing intensely, and why a UN proposal for political talks, in spite of this, particularly if we do have some original ideas, may still be quite an indication of what way to go. Militarization will lead no way, it will lead to pyrric victories and no end of the conflict.

For Aleppo, I have not heard of any discussions and there is no discussion on it.
"Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura And UN Senior Adviser, Mr. Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 1 Sep 2016. [Boldface and brackets added by Standler.]

I have several comments.

1. After de Mistura missed three of his own deadlines to restart the negotiations in Geneva (i.e., end of July, 1 Aug, end of August), and also missed the 1 August target to agree on a Transitional Governing Body, de Mistura now says that deadlines are *not* important. De Mistura now says "it is about realities". I interpret that to mean de Mistura would like to see concrete results from negotiations as soon as possible, but the reality is that negotiations are not currently possible.
2. On 1 September, de Mistura is no longer talking about a date for resuming negotiations. Now he is focused on the 21 September meeting of the United Nations

Security Council. But the Security Council is the group that has passed so many meaningless Resolutions, all of which are unenforceable. The Security Council condemns something bad and demands something good — all ignored by Assad, the insurgents, and the foreign meddlers in Syria. Asking the Security Council to solve a problem is like asking the Easter Bunny to solve a problem.

3. Mr. Egeland was very blunt in saying "The task force failed the people of Darayya, we all failed the people of Darayya". There is no doubt that there has been a spectacular failure in delivery of humanitarian aid to people in besieged towns in Syria. For example, Darayya was besieged since November 2012, but had only *one* delivery of humanitarian aid before Darayya surrendered on 25 August 2016. It was very gracious of Mr. Egeland to blame himself, but the real blame lies on the barbarians (i.e., Assad and insurgents) who are besieging towns and preventing deliveries of humanitarian aid.
4. Mr. Egeland was eloquent that the real motivation here is to help the *people* of Syria, who are suffering from a war managed by foreign meddlers.
5. I chronicled the surrender of Darayya in my essay for [August 2016](#), and the surrender of Moadamiyeh [below](#). Because the United Nations has failed to end sieges and failed to deliver humanitarian aid, the only way inhabitants of besieged towns can obtain relief is by surrendering to Assad.
6. In regard to the de Mistura's remark about *The Guardian*, on 29 August that newspaper published an [article](#) with the headline: "UN pays tens of millions to Assad regime under Syria aid programme". Their first sentence says: "The UN has awarded contracts worth tens of millions of dollars to people closely associated with the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, as part of an aid programme that critics fear is increasingly at the whim of the government in Damascus, a Guardian investigation has found." On 30 August *The Guardian* published an [article](#) with the headline: "UN under pressure to set up inquiry into Syria aid programme". On 1 Sep at 17:15 GMT, *The Guardian* published a [letter](#) from O'Brien. Tersely, the U.N. uses local contractors for the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the choice of government-approved contractors in Syria is extremely limited. The choices made by the U.N. reflect the current realities of doing business in Syria, where some unsavory people are in power.

There was very little published commentary in the news media on de Mistura's 1 Sep announcement. On 3 September, the Associated Press published an article about the dismal prospects for resuming negotiations in Geneva.

With war trumping peace efforts in recent weeks in Syria, U.N.-mediated talks sputtered over another missed deadline to resume this past week. Analysts say patience is waning and prospects for a deal brokered by the United Nations are wearing increasingly thin.

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On Aug. 26, de Mistura briefly dropped in on 12 hours of bilateral of talks in Geneva

between U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. In their final news conference, they referred to de Mistura only once and Kerry canceled plans for a private meeting with him. Kerry did find time for dinner with Geneva's mayor, though.

Critics have accused the U.N. of enabling Assad's government, either by bolstering it with humanitarian aid that goes to his supporters or naively thinking he and his backers will accept a political transition when the war has recently been going their way. U.N. officials say their job is to help all civilians in such war zones, whether in areas Assad controls or outside them.

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"No one will question Staffan de Mistura's well-intentioned efforts, but one can certainly question the strategy adopted," said Emile Hokayem of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Some of de Mistura's questionable assumptions, Hokayem said, include believing that Russia and the U.S. could have sway with key regional players Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran, or that Moscow had the leverage or the will to steer Assad toward an accord. He noted how Russia has been both a participant, helping Assad's fight, as well as an arbiter in the war.

"The U.N. is in an extremely difficult place right now ... It largely has relied on the U.S.-Russia track," said Hokayem from Beirut. "It is basically a hostage to battlefield developments, great-power politics and regional preferences."

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Hokayem said de Mistura should resign "as a 'big bang' and lay it all on the table." "If, on the mere issue of humanitarian access, nothing significant can happen, then it is time to ask the question: What is this process for?"

Jamey Keaten, "Stalled Talks, Rising Violence Jeopardize UN Syria Mediation," [Associated Press](#), 10:16 GMT, 3 Sep 2016.

Again, the negotiations in Geneva are currently hopeless because neither Assad nor the insurgents want to negotiate peace, instead all of them are pursuing a military victory, aided by foreign meddlers who supply weapons, ammunition, and money. There is nothing that de Mistura can do to stop the foreign meddlers. And there is nothing that de Mistura can do to make Assad and the HNC sincerely desire peace, through compromise in negotiations.

I have a comment on Hokayem's suggestion that de Mistura resign to create a "big bang". I can understand if de Mistura is so frustrated that he wants to resign as the Secretary General's Special Envoy for Syria. I can understand if the new Secretary General in 2017 wants to appoint a different Special Envoy for Syria, to make a fresh start. But I see *no* indication that someone else could do a better job than de Mistura. Also, I think few people really care about what is happening in Syria, so "big bang" would be more likely to be a "small poof". If de Mistura resigns, he will be quickly forgotten, just like his two predecessors. I think de

Mistura should continue until at least until the end of 2016, because his personal experience and his knowledge of the players are very valuable.

On 4 September, Obama spoke to journalists at the G-20 summit in China, where Obama said he was "skeptical" of a deal with Russia about Syria.

QUESTION [by Andrew Beatty of AFP]: I had a question on Syria, first of all. It seems like there is a deal with the Russians within reach. I was wondering, do you not think there's a risk that there's another short-lived agreement that doesn't end the war, but which allows the Russians to deflect criticism at the G20 here and at the U.N. General Assembly?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: With respect to Syria, we have long been interested in finding a way to reduce the violence, improve humanitarian access on the ground as a precursor for a political transition inside of Syria.

Now, it is a very complicated piece of business. You have the Assad regime, which has been killing its own citizens with impunity, supported by the Russians and the Iranians. You have a moderate opposition that has continuously tried to consolidate a position that would lead to an inclusive and representative government, but is often out-gunned. Then you have ISIL and you have al Qaeda in the form of Nusra on the ground as well, and a range of other players from the Turks and the Gulf states to the Kurds — trying to corral all of those different forces into a coherent structure for negotiations is difficult.

But our conversations with the Russians are key, because if it were not for the Russians, then Assad and the regime would not be able to sustain its offensive. And these are difficult negotiations. We have grave differences with the Russians in terms of both the parties we support, but also the process that's required to bring about peace in Syria. But if we do not get some buy-in from the Russians on reducing the violence and easing the humanitarian crisis, then it's difficult to see how we get to the next phase.

So John Kerry and his counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, have been working around the clock, as well as a number of other negotiators, to see what would a real cessation of hostilities look like that could provide that humanitarian access and provide people in places like Aleppo relief. We're not there yet. And, understandably, given the previous failures of cessations of hostilities to hold, we approach it with some skepticism. But it is worth trying.

To the extent that there are children and women and innocent civilians who can get food and medical supplies and get some relief from the constant terror of bombings, that's worth the effort. And I think it's premature for us to say that there is a clear path forward, but there is the possibility at least for us to make some progress on that front.

In addition, I should point out that the U.N. Special Rep, Staffan de Mistura, has been also coming up with a longer-term structure for a political transition. We are supporting his efforts as well. And those two things hopefully can operate in tandem.

"Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister May of the United Kingdom After

Bilateral Meeting at the G20 Summit," [White House](#), 4 Sep 2016.

My comment is that Obama is being euphemistic when he says "... and a range of other players from the Turks and the Gulf states to the Kurds — trying to corral all of those different forces into a coherent structure for negotiations is difficult." A translation into plain English is that there are too many foreign meddlers and too many insurgent groups in Syria. Obama is correct that there are too many players in the game, and *no* solution will satisfy all of the players.

Obama has less optimism than de Mistura, but Obama is still willing to negotiate with the Russians with the remote hope of some success for the people of Syria: "... given the previous failures of cessations of hostilities to hold, we approach it with some skepticism. But it is worth trying."

On Monday, 5 September, Russian President Putin and U.S. President Obama met for 90 minutes. After that meeting, here is what Obama said about Syria:

As you'll recall, we had initiated a Cessation of Hostilities a while back. Initially, it did lessen some of the violence, and then slowly it unwound. And we're back into a situation in which Assad's regime is bombing with impunity. That, in turn, we think is actually strengthening the capacity of Nusra to recruit people who might not have initially been sympathetic to terrorism but now view anyone who's fighting against Assad as legitimized. And that is a very dangerous dynamic.

And so we have had some productive conversations about what a real Cessation of Hostilities would look like that would allow us both, the United States and Russia, to focus our attention on common enemies, like ISIL and Nusra. But given the gaps of trust that exist, that's a tough negotiation, and we haven't yet closed the gaps in a way where we think it would actually work. But my instructions to Secretary Kerry, and Mr. Putin's instructions to Mr. Lavrov was to keep working at it over the next several days — because the faster we can provide some relief to folks on the ground, the better off we're going to be.

And that, then, is a predicate for us to be able to transition into a serious conversation about a political solution to this problem that would involve all the parties that have either directly or indirectly involved themselves in the Syrian conflict.

Barack Obama, "Press Conference by President Obama after G20 Summit," [White House](#), 5 Sep 2016.

See reports by journalists of Obama's 5 Sep remarks at, e.g., [Associated Press](#); [Wall Street Journal](#); [Fox News](#).

On 5 September, at 06:12 GMT, [Reuters](#) tersely reported on the recent Lavrov-Kerry meeting: "A senior State Department official, who declined to be named, said Russia had walked back on some of issues that the sides had already agreed on, which was why both sides needed to continue talking." The [Washington Post](#) reported: "On Monday [5 Sep], though the White House official said there had been some 'backsliding' since the discussions in Geneva [26 August]." That renegotiation of previously decided issues adds to the difficulty of reaching an agreement.

On 4 September, Assad began a new siege of Aleppo, as discussed [below](#). It is simply astounding that Russia is negotiating a ceasefire in Syria and negotiating delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, while simultaneously supporting Assad in increasing the siege of Aleppo.

The Washington Post suggested why the Russians want to renegotiate parts of the agreement and why the Russians supported Assad's new siege of Aleppo.

Late on Sunday [4 Sep], Syrian forces, backed by Russian airstrikes, seized control of the area, known as the Ramouseh corridor, and fully laid siege to Aleppo.

Russian support for the offensive prompted U.S. officials to raise questions over whether the Russians could be relied upon to implement an agreement to freeze battle lines and ground the Syrian air force.

The Russians “must have known that if Ramouseh falls, the deal would have to be scrapped and started over,” said Faysal Itani of the Washington-based Atlantic Council. “The deal was not a good deal for the Russians.... If they have a chance to make gains on the ground and start over, it’s not bad for them.”

William Wan, Karen DeYoung, and Liz Sly, "U.S., Russia not yet eye-to-eye on possible resumption of Syrian cease-fire," [Washington Post](#), 18:05 GMT, 4 Sep 2016.

On 5 September, [Reuters](#) and the [Washington Post](#) both quoted an anonymous U.S. Government official as saying about the Lavrov-Kerry negotiations on Syria: "If we cannot get the type of agreement we want, we will walk away from that effort." There are two parts to this statement. First, the patience of Kerry is limited, and he is about to walk away from further negotiations. Second, Kerry is *not* compromising on some issues.

On 7 September, [CNN](#) reported: “ ‘I think this is the last card that is going to be played,’ one senior administration official said. ‘I can't imagine there is going to be much patience for Kerry to do more horse trading if this doesn't work.’ ” Also on 7 Sep, the [Washington Post](#) reported: "The Obama administration has told Russia that it is at the end of its patience in trying to arrange a cease-fire in Syria, along with proposed joint U.S.-Russia counterterrorism operations, and that it expects a decision from Moscow in the next several days."

8-9 September 2016

The cooperation between the United Nations and the Assad regime in the distribution of humanitarian aid in Syria — first revealed by *The Guardian* newspaper on 29 August and mentioned by de Mistura in his 1 September press briefing — burst into the news again on 8 September. A group of 73 nongovernmental organizations released a letter to the United Nations on 8 September, in which the organizations suspended their cooperation with the United Nations. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On Friday, 9 September, there was a meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force (HTF) in Geneva. Afterwards, de Mistura and the U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, held a press briefing:

SdeM: Good afternoon. Let me warmly welcome Stephen O'Brien, who is very well known to all of you, as you know he is the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and is our UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and is in fact representing the neutral, independent UN humanitarian actions in Syria and will take advantage, definitely, of this opportunity for being able to also address in a very comprehensive way issues regarding humanitarian actions in Syria. Stephen O'Brien was with us during the whole HTF.

Before doing so, let me focus for a moment on the political aspect. You know that the two co-chairs at the senior level, both the US and Russia, Sergey Lavrov on the Russian Federation side and John Kerry on the US side, are meeting and are constantly meeting. We are all hoping for positive conclusions, let's be frank, the discussions are addressing complex, delicate, difficult issues and they have just been resuming again, about 25 minutes ago, but if they do succeed, and the UN has been actively involved in supporting those discussions, and hopefully also in supporting their conclusions, those conclusions could make a major difference on the renewal or the relaunching of the cessation of hostilities, which in turn unavoidably, would have a major impact on humanitarian access, and in turn would be having a positive impact on the way the political process could be relaunched. So these meetings today are important and we should be waiting for that outcome to be heard today.

So I give the floor now to you Stephen, for whatever you feel is important to say, including what we discussed today at the HTF. Thank you.

O'Brien: I am very pleased to have this opportunity to be here in Geneva and be able to take part in the HTF meeting and I am deeply grateful to you, Staffan, for your hosting and the facilitation of that. In terms of the Syria crisis, a man-made humanitarian crisis, we have to now see our way forward to try and to meet the needs, the incredibly large-scale, deep, long-term needs of human suffering brought about by the continuing conflict circumstances. It was very clear that as the demands of humanitarians, under the humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence, and neutrality, we discuss how the UN, and its implementing humanitarian partners are ready to be able to deliver for the people who have life-saving, life-supporting and protection needs and continue to suffer under the current circumstances.

So the readiness of the UN was affirmed, the detailed plans are in place, with just the usual short-term notice of getting a green light, and then the reality of having trucks getting loaded, and making sure that the truck drivers feel safe enough to be able to get into their cabs and drive along secure routes to deliver to the people in need was affirmed, and a very important point, as we approach the solemn religious holidays of Eid, that the readiness was not affected by that and of course some adjustments will have to be made but that we would make sure that the readiness was equally in place as the Eid holidays and certain arrangements are made for people to be able to make their proper celebration of that period.

What is also clear from the HTF meeting, with all those engaged, and from all the briefings, it was absolutely clear that the needs of the people in Syria, wherever these needs arise, however they arise, whoever it affects, on whichever side of any line, or

none at all, have become even more severe, not only over the five years, but actually even in the last three weeks, and therefore the hope and wish for a comprehensive approach to the fight in Syria that would enable us to have the total humanitarian access was the paramount and necessary conditions that we need to get access.

But also to recognize that in eastern Aleppo the current situation remains extremely severe, to the point of it being de facto besiegement, so much so that we need to make sure that we continue to demand — whatever the circumstances of the larger discussions — we need to make sure that we continue to press for and to demand a 48-hour weekly humanitarian pause to reach the people in need by whichever route can be secured for those very brave and courageous aid workers, both from within the UN and our implementing humanitarian partners to reach the people in need.

As a result of the HTF this morning, I was able to look at these issues in some detail and I was strongly encouraged by not only the continuing level of commitment to meet humanitarian needs, but also the readiness to do so if the circumstances permit.

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QUESTION: My question is primarily for Mr. O'Brien. We know that August was very difficult for delivering aid anywhere in Syria. How things have been going in September so far? Anything at all?

O'Brien: Thank you for the question, you're absolute right, not just August, but actually July was also extremely disappointing, when you compare what was delivered to the agreed plan with the Government of Syria, and then as you know once we have an agreed plan however it may be partially agreed compared to what we submitted as the UN. We need to do a lot better in September than was ever achieved either in August or July.

SdeM: I can add one more point, if I may. We did hear from our field colleagues their genuine concern about eastern Aleppo, because among all places which have been of course isolated, there has been one or two now not reached for more than 180 days, there is a growing concern for eastern Aleppo. The issue about food, the issue about the possibility that within perhaps the next few days it will turn out to be dark because there is no fuel, problems of water. Everywhere is important, but eastern Aleppo is becoming an urgent issue even more than before.

QUESTION: A similar question, I want to ask a bit more about how the humanitarian access to besieged areas was going, I get the sense that you are not delivering aid anywhere, you are [inaudible] in all kinds of bureaucratic administrative stuff right now, so are any convoys moving to any of the besieged areas? Are medical evacuations not going on as far as you know? Are people dying in some of these areas because you cannot get the aid or cannot move them out of their areas? I think you wanted to reach about a million people this month, how far away are you from that goal? Is that totally unrealistic?

SdeM: I will just jump in one second to qualify one point, when you are referring to

bureaucratic aspects, I don't think you are fair on that, but it is part of the question. All our difficulties at the moment are related to one single word: war, increase in fighting, militarization of the conflict.

O'Brien: The straight answer to your question which I think I just made clear is that the convoys are not going, are not rolling at the moment in Syria, other than there is an air bridge [into Hasakeh], but we did get confirmation of evacuations yesterday, medical evacuations, from Foah and Madaya, 11 from Foah and I think it was 15 from Madaya. They are related to a meningitis outbreak. And we are now looking to get a date and to get an agreement as to how we pursue the further deliveries and evacuations under the 4-Towns agreements, but hopefully that can be put into a broader context as we move forward. That is why I make an absolute plea, that we both have a cessation of the fighting, that the guns fall silent, because that is the best form of access that is what is going to engage the confidence of all those who very bravely, as I referred to earlier from the UN and our implementing partners, including NGOs, who are very bravely seeking to make the journey to reach the people in need, but until we have the necessary assurances of that safety, which includes of course working with the Government and indeed other parties to the current conflict, it is absolutely vital that we push as hard as we can in order to deliver in September what has been agreed that we should deliver. But no, at the moment there is very little rolling.

"Note to correspondents: Transcript of joint stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and UN Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, following the Humanitarian Access Task Force," [U.N.](#), 9 Sep 2016.

My comment is that is really difficult to read these transcripts, with the *long* run-on sentences, and very little substantive content.

On the night of 7 September, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that the Russian Foreign Ministry announced that Kerry and Lavrov would meet again in Geneva sometime on 8 or 9 September. However, the U.S. State Department refused to confirm this meeting.

On 8 September, Lavrov arrived in Geneva and had a brief meeting with de Mistura. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 8 September, the U.S. State Department [confirmed](#) that Kerry would travel to Geneva on the night of 8 Sep, and then meet with Lavrov on 9 September. [Reuters](#) reports that Kerry did *not* intend to travel to Geneva, but suddenly decided to go. Reuters: "It was unclear what led to the change of plan." I speculate that Kerry suddenly decided to fly to Geneva when Kerry realized that Lavrov was already in Geneva and on 9 Sep Lavrov could hold a press conference in Geneva and ask "Where is John Kerry?"

[Reuters](#) reports an anonymous U.S. official said "patience is not infinite" and the negotiations would end "if a conclusion was not reached 'relatively soon.' "

10 September 2016: Russia/USA Agreement

After Kerry and Lavrov reached a preliminary agreement in Geneva, Kerry asked the U.S. Government in Washington DC for approval. Washington made Lavrov (and journalists) wait *five hours* for approval. During that time Kerry purchased pizza for the journalists and then Lavrov provided two bottles of vodka. [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#); [CNN](#); [Russia Today](#); [Associated Press](#).

I admit that I did *not* expect Kerry and Lavrov to come to an agreement about Syria. But around 20:30 on 9 September, Friday night in Boston, I was surprised when journalists reported that Russia and the USA had reached a historic agreement.

Early on Saturday morning, 10 September in Geneva, the Associated Press reported:
The United States and Russia early Saturday [10 Sep] announced a breakthrough agreement on Syria that foresees a nationwide cease-fire starting on Monday [12 Sep], followed a week later by an unlikely new military partnership targeting the Islamic State and al-Qaida as well as new limits on President Bashar Assad's forces.

After a daylong final negotiating session in Geneva, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said shortly after midnight Saturday that the plan could reduce violence in Syria and lead to a long-sought political transition, ending more than five years of bloodshed. He called the deal a potential "turning point" in a conflict that has killed as many as 500,000 people, if complied with by Syria's Russian-backed government and U.S.-supported rebel groups.

The cease-fire begins at sundown Sept. 12, Kerry said, coinciding with the Muslim Eid al-Adha holiday.

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The arrangement hinges on Moscow pressuring Assad's government to halt all offensive operations against Syria's armed opposition in specific areas, which were not detailed. Washington must persuade "moderate" rebels to break ranks with the Nusra Front, al-Qaida's Syria affiliate, and other extremist groups.

The military deal would go into effect after both sides abide by the truce for a week and allow unimpeded humanitarian deliveries. Then, the U.S. and Russia would begin intelligence sharing and targeting coordination, while Assad's air and ground forces would no longer be permitted to target Nusra any longer; they would be restricted to operations against the Islamic State.

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Kerry said it would be "wise" for opposition forces to separate completely from Nusra, a statement Lavrov hailed.

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The Geneva negotiating session, which lasted more than 13 hours, underscored the complexity of a conflict that includes myriad militant groups, shifting alliances and the

rival interests of the U.S. and Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Turkey and the Kurds.

Bradley Klapper & Jamey Keaten, "US, Russia seal Syria cease-fire, new military partnership," [Associated Press](#), 00:27 GMT, 10 Sep 2016 (20:27 EDT on 9 Sep).

Reuters reported:

The United States and Russia hailed a breakthrough deal on Saturday to put Syria's peace process back on track, including a nationwide ceasefire effective from sundown on Monday, improved aid access and joint targeting of banned militant Islamist groups.

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that despite continuing mistrust, the two sides had developed five documents that would enable coordination of the fight against terrorism and a revival of Syria's failed truce in an enhanced form.

"This all creates the necessary conditions for resumption of the political process which has been stalling for a long time," Lavrov told a news conference.

The deal came after marathon talks in Geneva, and several failed attempts to hammer out the details in recent weeks. Kerry, wary of getting the guarantees to make the deal work, had postponed his departure for Geneva for a day.

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Kerry said the "bedrock" of the deal was an agreement that the Syrian government would not fly combat missions in an agreed area, on the pretext of hunting fighters from the banned Nusra Front, an al Qaeda affiliate in Syria. "That should put an end to the barrel bombs, and an end to the indiscriminate bombing, and it has the potential to change the nature of the conflict."

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All sides in the conflict would need to adhere to the nationwide truce, Kerry said. "This requires halting all attacks, including aerial bombardments, and any attempts to gain additional territory at the expense of the parties to the cessation. It requires unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all of the besieged and hard-to-reach areas including Aleppo."

David Brunnstrom and Tom Miles, "U.S., Russia clinch Syria deal, aim for truce from Monday," [Reuters](#), 01:01 GMT, 10 Sep 2016.

The U.S. State Department posted a transcript of Kerry's press briefing in Geneva. I have boldfaced the names of speakers, and also boldfaced some important words.

Kerry: So thank you all for tremendous patience during the course of a very long day which obviously has required a lot of detail work, and we appreciate everybody's patience in hanging in there.

Today, the United States and Russia are announcing a plan which we hope will reduce

violence, ease suffering, and resume movement towards a negotiated peace and a political transition in Syria. And we believe that the plan as it is set forth — if implemented, if followed — has the ability to provide a turning point, a moment of change.

[Delete Kerry's paragraph containing the self-serving remark about how "the Obama Administration, the United States is going the extra mile here".]

Working together, Russia and the United States and our teams have devised what we think is a more proscriptive and far-reaching approach than we have been able to put together to date. And if — and I again want to emphasize the “if” — if the plan is implemented in good faith, if the stakeholders do the things that are available to them to do and are being called on to do, this can be a moment where the multilateral efforts at the diplomatic table, the negotiations could take hold, and you could really provide the people of Syria with a transition.

Now, Foreign Minister Lavrov and I have had frequent conversations and face-to-face meetings, most recently in Moscow in July, here in Geneva two weeks ago, in Hangzhou this past weekend. And each time, we have worked together to try to build a consensus on the broad steps and then to develop specific ideas on how those steps could be implemented. As we have both stated several times, we did not publicly spell out these measures earlier because the details of how they would be carried out were crucial to be finalized and because each had an impact on the other. And we know that, especially in Syria, plans do not implement themselves.

So today, we are announcing an arrangement that we think has the capability of sticking but is dependent on people's choices. And it has the ability to stick providing the regime and the opposition both meet their obligations, which we — and we expect other supporting countries — will strongly encourage them to do. Obviously, the Russians have an ability to be able to encourage Assad, and we have an ability together with other countries to encourage the opposition.

So what specifically have we agreed to?

First, we agreed on the steps through which the regime will come to a place where it will not fly combat missions anywhere where the opposition is present in an area that we have agreed on with very real specificity. Once this arrangement takes full effect, the regime would no longer be able to do in the future what it has been able to do so much in the past, which is go after Nusra allegedly but hit moderate opposition and mask attacks against the legitimate opposition by claiming that it's going after Nusra.

Now, I want to emphasize: This step is absolutely essential. It is a bedrock of this agreement. And by all accounts, the Assad air attacks have been the main driver of civilian casualties and migration flows and the most frequent violations of the hostilities. Halting all of the regime's military air activities in key areas, key areas that are defined — not all flights, because there are still Nusra and ISIL, but that will be managed in a different way also. **And that should put an end to the barrel bombs, an end to the indiscriminate bombing of the civilian neighborhoods**, and it has the

potential to change the nature of the conflict. Whether it does or not depends on compliance.

Second, the United States and Russia have agreed on steps which we will take, providing there is a sustained period of reduced violence. And after that sustained period of violence, we have agreed that we will then work together — providing both access and reduced violence have been provided for the period of time — we would then work together to develop military strikes against Nusrah.

Now, I want to be clear about one thing particularly on this, because I've seen reporting that somehow suggests otherwise: Going after Nusrah is not a concession to anybody. It is profoundly in the interests of the United States to target al-Qaida — to target al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria, which is Nusrah, an organization that is opposed to a peaceful transition, an organization that is an enemy of the legitimate opposition, an organization that is currently plotting attacks beyond Syria's borders, including against the United States. So we must go after these terrorists — not indiscriminately, but in a strategic, precise, and judicious manner, so that they cannot continue to use the regime's indiscriminate bombing in order to rally people to their hateful crimes. It is our belief that, in fact, Nusrah and ISIL have grown stronger because of the bombing. Now, some might disagree, but that is our belief.

Now, **third**, in Moscow we also said before we could move forward with the steps that we have identified, we would need seven days of adherence to the cessation of hostilities in order to convince the people of Syria and the opposition that the actions of the regime and its supporters will be consistent with the words that we put on paper. And I've talked to you previously about the words on paper not meaning anything unless the actions follow them up. Now, of course, the opposition will also be expected to adhere to the cessation of hostilities, and that is why today the United States and Russia together are calling on all sides to recommit to a nationwide cessation of hostilities and to honor its previous terms. This will be effective at sundown on September 12th.

Now, this — I might add also that is the beginning of the Eid holiday, and we can think of nothing more appropriate than for all the parties to come together and make Eid more meaningful to the people of Syria and the region. Now, **this requires halting all attacks, including aerial bombardments and any attempts to gain additional territory at the expense of the parties to the cessation. It requires unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all of the besieged and the hard-to-reach areas, including Aleppo.** And as we stand here, we know that Aleppo continues to be the besieged and bombarded city taken on by the regime and its allies. And if Aleppo is at peace, we believe that the prospects for a diplomatic solution will brighten; if Aleppo continues to be torn apart, the prospects for Syria and for its people are grim. Now, that is why this arrangement also requires forces from both sides to pull back from Castello Road — and we have agreed on that pullback. Castello Road is a major artery into Aleppo, and what this pullback will do is create a demilitarized zone around it, permitting as quickly as possible the resumption of humanitarian and civilian traffic along that road. And that will be achieved over a period of time by some monitoring, which is essential to the compliance.

Meanwhile, in the Ramouseh Gap area in southwest Aleppo, both pro-government and opposition groups will be required to provide safe, unhindered, and sustainable humanitarian, commercial, and civilian access to eastern and western Aleppo. Now, neither the opposition nor the government will be permitted to attack or to take territory held by the other, or, I might add, to obstruct the delivery of humanitarian goods.

Now, **finally**, beginning September 12th, we will then commence preparatory work for a Joint Implementation Center. And these preparations will include initial discussions and some sharing of information necessary for the delineation of territories controlled by Nusra and opposition groups in the area of active hostilities. And then the more comprehensive process of delineation will be conducted by experts once the joint implementation group — the center, or so-called JIC — once the center is established. Now, once it is established after seven continuous days of adherence to the cessation of hostilities and increased humanitarian access, then U.S. and Russian experts will work together to defeat Daesh and Nusra.

I want to emphasize these measures can only be implemented effectively if all the parties live up to their obligations. **If groups within the legitimate opposition want to retain their legitimacy, they need to distance themselves in every way possible from Nusra and Daesh.** And we expect that Russia will ensure that the Syrian Government will adhere to all of its requirements about its air activities and about the access for humanitarian deliveries. No one is building this based on trust. It is based on a way of providing oversight and compliance through mutual interest and other things, and we are determined to explore every single avenue possible for progress.

If this arrangement holds, then we will see a significant reduction in violence across Syria. We'll see humanitarian aid deliveries go forward in Aleppo and wherever the need is the greatest. And after a period of reduced violence, then we will see the United States and Russia taking coordinated steps to isolate and defeat the terrorist groups that have added immeasurably to Syria's suffering and misery — and we will facilitate a political transition, which is the only way to bring about a durable end to this war.

In closing, I just want to emphasize that the crisis in Syria, obviously, is enormously complex and it is still, even as it's complex, relatively simple at the same time. It's complex for reasons that we all understand — the number of stakeholders with different agendas, the wounds that have been inflicted by years of fighting, the ideological and sectarian divides, the urban and suburban war zones, the brutality of extremists, and the unhelpful actions of some outside powers. But let me be clear: out of all of this complexity there is emerging now a simple choice between war and peace; between human agony and humanitarian relief; between the continued disintegration of an ancient society and the re-birth of a united and modern nation.

So I want to thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, whom we will hear from a little later, and the many governments in the Middle East and Europe and elsewhere who have been supportive, and especially the NGOs, the medical assistance organizations, and the religious and advocacy groups that have been working for years to aid victims

and halt the fighting in Syria.

And today Sergey Lavrov and I, on behalf of our presidents and our countries, call on every Syrian stakeholder to support the plan that the United States and Russia have reached — to back its implementation in good faith — and to continue the hard work of bringing this catastrophic conflict to the quickest possible end through a political process. Our goal is to find the day when this kind of round-the-clock diplomacy isn't necessary, frankly. And I want to thank Sergey Lavrov. He has been — he and his team today have been particularly patient as we work through a very long day to make sure that the Ts were crossed and the Is were dotted and the legal standards were met. And I'm grateful to him for the efforts that he has joined me in trying to help provide this opportunity. It is an opportunity, and not more than that, until it becomes a reality. And both of us are going to do everything we can to help it become that reality. Thank you.

Lavrov: (Via interpreter) [four paragraphs omitted here]

We believe that it is the primary responsibility of the leading powers, first of all, Russia and the U.S. who are co-chairing the International Syrian Support Group, and it is our responsibility and obligation, together with our international partners inside the regime and outside the regime, to do everything to create the necessary conditions to settle this very difficult conflict. And despite all the problems that have arisen, despite all the mistrust that is still witnessed, despite their attempts to undermine our — today's arrangements, we have managed to develop a package of documents, because the — today's document is not the only one; **there are five documents in total.** It is a package of documents that allows to organize an efficient coordination in struggle against terrorism that allows to expand the humanitarian access to the population in need — first of all, in Aleppo mostly — and which allows to enhance the cessation of hostilities regime. And this all creates the conditions — necessary conditions for the resumption of the political process, which has been stalling for a lot of time.

And the main thing about these arrangements is that the first step would be the reconfirmation of the cessation of hostilities regime will do everything to — for the parties of the conflict influenced by the U.S. and Russia to take the necessary step and confirm and reconfirm their commitment to the cessation of hostilities — first for 48 hours, then it will be extended for another 48 hours — in order to achieve the permanent cessation of hostilities regime adherence.

After the regime is fully functional for seven continuous days, we, as John has said, are to create a Joint Implementation Center — JIC — where the military men and the special (inaudible) representatives from Russia and the U.S. will be engaged in practical — in solving practical matters of delimitation and separation of terrorists from the moderate opposition. And there will be strikes agreed against terrorists — the strikes of the airspace forces of Russia and the air forces of the U.S. We have agreed on the areas where such coordinated strikes would be taking place, and in those areas, on mutual agreement shared by the ... Syrian Government as well, only the air forces of Russia and the U.S. will be functional. The Syrian air forces will be functional in other areas outside those that we have singled out for Russian-American military

cooperation.

I'd like to highlight that the task of separating terrorists and moderate opposition and physical separation of them on the ground is enshrined in the document which we have agreed upon today as a key priority. Another topic is, of course, humanitarian assistance, and the document which we have agreed upon today, we — in this document, we have enshrined the mechanisms of humanitarian assistance delivery, commercial and civil cargo as well, in cooperation with the UN and the Red Crescent, mostly in Aleppo, in western and the eastern Aleppo.

We have also agreed upon the procedures of response on violations of the regime of cessation of hostilities. The Day D, as John has said, is the 12th of September. Since that moment, a number of steps will begin to be taken in the antiterrorist context and in the humanitarian assistance context and in enhancement of the cessation of hostilities as well.

John has mentioned that the most important thing is not the paper itself but how it is implemented in practice, how the agreements are fulfilled. We and the United States take the obligation to do all of our best to engage and make the stakeholders comply with the arrangements in our documents.

As I said, **the Syrian Government has been informed by us about these arrangements, and it is ready to fulfill them.** It supports the initiative on which we agreed with United States, so we will do everything which depends on us, but it is understandable that not everything depends on us. And some leaks in the mass media about which is the real views of the opponents of the regime from some groups that call themselves supreme committees, et cetera — there have been ultimatums, the refusals to cooperate, et cetera, as well as threats for humanitarian convoys that we have received from the opposition who are now in Aleppo — some of the groups.

I'd like to remind that humanitarian convoy was ready to be sent on 26 of August already when we met last time with John here. The UN was ready, the Syrian Government was ready, but the opposition said that any convoy that would be going along the Castello Road would be shot at. And this attitude is actually — lingers in them. So many groups need to be influenced, and this process has had a lot of situations when someone could just slip away from the commitments and looked for the explanations why it was impossible to fulfill these or those obligations. But today, I repeat, we have developed a significant and practical and concrete package of documents. And due to the reasons mentioned by John, **we cannot make these documents public** because they contain rather sensitive and serious information and we do not want this information to come to the hands of those who would be trying to undermine the implementation of measures dedicated to humanitarian access and other parts of our arrangements. But those documents are already entering in force efficiently — officially since the 12th of September, or the so-called Day D.

And I'm very glad that John said a very important thing. He said that the U.S. is firmly aimed to fight Nusrah and those who believe that the fighting with Nusrah is a concession to Russia are wrong. That is a very important constatation, or statement,

because a lot of people supposed that the United States are really not very desirable to fight with Nusrah; they just keeping Nusrah as Plan B for overthrowing of the regime. So today's statement of John is greatly welcomed by me.

And this is not the end of the road and the way; that is just the beginning of our new relations. And we hope that all those who dearly value peace and the integrity of the multinational and multi-confessional Syrian state will support our arrangements. We expect to have closest cooperation with our friends from the UN, Staffan de Mistura and his team, because we are convinced that since the beginning of implementation of these arrangements, there will be favorable conditions, as it has been said, to resume the inter-Syrian negotiations on the political settlement. And we will, of course, urgent promote Staffan de Mistura and his team to use this moment. Thank you.

KERRY: Sergey, thank you very much. I appreciate very much your underscoring that Russia has already talked to President Assad and he is prepared to live by these agreements, which is critical.

It's my pleasure now — we're going to just hear a word — he's not going to take any questions, but we do want — as you've heard tonight, the UN is a critical partner — critical partner — in all of this. We're very grateful for their many efforts with respect to Syria, and I'd like to introduce the UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

DE MISTURA: Thank you. Thank you very much. It's been a long day and good results, so I will read a statement which is representing the position of the UN, with your permission, rather than talking off the cuff.

The UN welcomes the understanding announced today by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and by Secretary of State John Kerry. This understanding regards reinstating the cessation of hostilities in Syria so that the parties can return to talks with humanitarian access being delivered and clear rules in place for the management of the cessation of hostilities again. We also welcome the fact that the Russian Federation and the United States of America are prepared indeed to work together to defeat Daesh and al-Nusrah.

The United Nations hopes and believes that the political will that led to this understanding is sustained. It creates a real window of opportunity — a real window of opportunity — which all relevant actors in the region and beyond should seize to put the crisis in Syria on a different path and reduce the violence and the suffering of the Syrian people.

Let me be clear — you have been asking me for that; I am ready to say it:

The United Nations stands ready to deliver and to do whatever it can to support an early restoration of the cessation of hostilities. It also expects that all parties will facilitate UN efforts to indeed deliver humanitarian assistance to the population in need, including in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, according to our plan of September which you heard today. The UN will continue to exert all efforts to that end. It is vital that the real change is felt on the ground by the Syrian people.

And lastly, the UN hopes that the implementation of this understanding will facilitate renewed efforts to reach a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led political settlement of the conflict, as called for in the Geneva communique, Security Council Resolution 2254. I will personally now proceed to New York in the coming days to consult with the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon ahead of the ministerial meeting that, as you know, will be taking place at the level of Security Council on the 21st of September, with a view to advancing this objective and discuss the date for the renewal of the next round of intra-Syrian talks.

So let me say thank you to both of you for allowing us to restart the work. Thank you.

QUESTION [by Elise Labott from CNN.]: Thank you, Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov. You talk about implementation as being the most important thing about this agreement. The entire ISSG, along with the Syrians and the opposition, agreed to a ceasefire in February. It was endorsed by the UN Security Council. How is this different? How can you make sure your respective allies in Syria and others who support them, including Saudi Arabia and Iran, are ready to respect the terms of any agreement that you adhere to?

LAVROV: (Via interpreter) Well, as far as the implementation of this arrangement is concerned, no one can give 100 percent guarantees, as I have said. There are a lot of stakeholders involved in this puzzle and there are quite opposite interests of a whole number of them, but the fact that we have managed to create the ISSG by the joint Russian-American efforts, and this group — in this group, all the countries influencing the situation are represented, including the Saudi Arabia and Iran mentioned by you. I believe this is a great achievement in itself.

Another thing that — is that the capabilities of these group — of this group must be used in a responsible and weighted manner, and the situation when we gather all the participants and receive just an emotional discussion should be avoided. Everything should be prepared in advance, prepared thoroughly and carefully, and the documents that we have approved today — I believe we will have to inform the ISSG and the UN Security Council on their essence and nature if we want to receive the support of these organizations. But there is no other way except organizing the inclusive dialogue. We see no other way, and this inclusiveness must be extended to inter-Syrian talks and to the outside circle which is to be closely involved in assisting those talks.

KERRY: So the question was asked: What is different about this situation relative to the previously announced ceasefires? Obviously, we worked very, very hard to make sure we weren't just repeating the same thing. That doesn't mean that it's automatically going to succeed, but we've created an entirely different structure this time. What happened in the past is that, first of all, the Assad regime continued to fly and bomb, and bomb indiscriminately, and everybody knows the record of barrel bombs and hospitals and schools and children and so forth. And what happened was because of that continued bombing, those others who had signed up to the ceasefire felt compelled to fight to save their countrymen.

Number two, there was always a confusion with Nusra versus a legitimate opposition group. And in some cases they became melded together — marbled, as some people have used the term — so that the Assad regime could say, “We’re going after Nusra,” but at the same time would be attacking those who had signed up for the cessation of hostilities. And that confusion lent itself to a complete ultimate fraying of the ceasefire structure.

And so the second thing — so you have the combination of the flights, the bombs, and the confusion with Nusra. What we have just laid out to you, if it is implemented — and the implementation depends on the initial seven days of a genuine reduction in violence and calm that indicates seriousness of purpose. And when that has happened and the joint implementation group gets set up as a consequence of the increased humanitarian access and the reduction in violence, then we will be working together to be delineating and separating Nusra and defining where they are, and working together using our knowledge and technology and assets to be able to do a more pinpoint/strategic set of operations to deal with Nusra and/or ISIL.

So the warning we give to opposition groups who have up until now found it convenient to sort of work with them is it would not be wise to do so in the future. It’s wise to separate oneself. And indeed, that will be different. There is a deterrence in that. There is also a deterrence in Russia holding Assad accountable for his promise. And so this is a new equation, and we believe that this new equation offers an opportunity — again, not a certainty, an opportunity — for people to be able to find a peaceful solution because we don’t believe there is a military solution. And the current trend is simply creating more terrorists, more extremists, and destroying the country in the process.

[Delete Kerry's paragraph containing the self-serving remark about how "President Obama has gone the extra mile here". Also omit the question and answers about the crisis in North Korea.]

QUESTION [by Russian journalist live news channel]: (Via interpreter) Good evening. I have a question to Mr. Kerry. As far as the launching of the political dialogue of opposition and Damascus is concerned, when today you have agreed on the difficult issues, Russia and the U.S., will Washington now be able to fulfill its commitments to influence the opposition and return it to the negotiations table?

KERRY: We’ve had — thank you for your question. We have had discussions with the opposition. The opposition has indicated they’re prepared, providing the regime proves that it is serious and there are the days of reduced violence to meet the standards that we have established. And if that happens and they’re given access for humanitarian goods, as we have been discussing here today, then I know Staffan de Mistura, who has had conversations with them, is prepared to issue an invitation at the appropriate time for them to be able to return.

I have had personal conversations with the foreign ministers of each of the stakeholder countries. They have all indicated a readiness and willingness to go back to the table and to encourage the opposition to go back to the table. And I spoke with Dr. Hijab by

video conference from Washington just the other day [7 Sep]. He was in London and I talked to my fellow foreign ministers who had gathered there, and they all agreed that this idea of this ceasefire, if it could be implemented, would be extremely helpful, very welcome, and they all committed to try to urge all of the interested parties to be back at the table for the first really serious negotiation since this concept has existed. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV: (Via interpreter) I'd just like to add a couple of words. The beginning of negotiations as soon as possible is not a matter that Russia and the U.S. can solve. That is the demand by the UN Security Council. Resolution 2254 says that **the negotiations must be inclusive**, with participation of all the sides in Syria, in particular the groups that were formed on the meetings in Moscow, Cairo, Riyadh, and other places. Thus all the mandate from the UN Security Council is quite clear, and of course the UN must implement this mandate by providing the inclusiveness of the inter-Syrian talks which we hope will resume in the nearest future in Geneva.

There are attempts by separate countries to engage in provocations and represent or show one of the groups as the only opposition group that represents the whole opposition ready to engage in negotiations. And there have been even attempts to legalize such a group by inviting it to the UN Secretariat. We have been witnessing such attitudes and we believe that they fully contradict the agreements achieved within the ISSG co-chaired by the U.S. and Russia and the agreements enshrined in the UN Security Council resolutions.

The sponsors — countries — sponsors of these or those opposition groups should fully understand their responsibility not to pull the blanket over themselves and not to think about their own ambitions but think about the unity of the Syrian people and the Syrian state.

"Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura at a Press Availability," [U.S. State Dept](#), 9 Sep 2016. (10 Sep 2016 in Geneva)
[Boldface and text in brackets is by Standler]

De Mistura's statement, which he read into the transcript at the above-quoted press conference, was posted Saturday morning at the [U.N.](#) On Tuesday, the [U.N. Geneva](#) Office also posted a copy.

My commentary on the new agreements

It remains to be seen whether Kerry can convince:

- the U.S.-supported rebels in Syria to stop fighting;
- the anti-Assad foreign meddlers to convince their proxy armies in Syria to stop fighting;
- the rebels and jihadists to stop cooperating with Nusra; and
- the rebels and jihadists to withdraw from the new demilitarized zone around Castello Road in Aleppo.

Is three days enough time to convince the rebels and jihadists to obey these new agreements?

Similarly, there is doubt whether Assad will stop bombing civilians and hospitals, and whether Assad will allow unrestricted deliveries of humanitarian aid everywhere in Syria. Will Assad really abandon his quest to conquer Aleppo? Will Assad really abandon his sieges of Syrian towns? Will Assad stop attacking moderate rebels?

I am skeptical that Assad will continue to honor these new agreements. Surely, Assad must realize that the new agreements are the beginning of negotiations toward a Transitional Governing Body for Syria that will replace Assad's government. Once Assad is removed from power, the rebels will likely put Assad on trial for war crimes and then execute Assad. On the other hand, Assad can avoid being removed and executed simply by failing to obey the new agreements, thereby preventing negotiations in Geneva and also pursuing a military victory in Syria.

In the February 2016 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, Nusra and ISIL were specifically excluded from that Agreement. That meant that Russia and Assad could make airstrikes on Nusra without violating the Agreement. But, because Nusra has one of the most powerful armies in the insurgency, many rebel and jihadist groups cooperated with Nusra. This cooperation was often called intermingling, intertwining, or marbling. So when there were airstrikes that allegedly targeted Nusra, the airstrikes bombed U.S.-supported rebels, and other insurgent groups who were included in the ceasefire. (I say "allegedly" because one suspects that Russia and/or Assad deliberately targeted U.S.-supported rebels, civilians, and hospitals under the pretext of targeting Nusra.) The conventional wisdom is that this bombing of rebels and jihadists caused the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement to fail. Astoundingly, this known problem in the February 2016 Agreement is continued in the new Agreements of September. The U.S. continues to demand that the rebels and jihadists separate themselves from Nusra. But the rebels and jihadists *want* to continue to cooperate with Nusra, because the rebels and jihadists alone are too weak to defeat Assad's military. (See e.g., [The Telegraph](#); [WSJ](#).) One can easily foresee that the new Agreements will fail for the same reason that the February Agreement failed: the continuing attacks on rebels and jihadists who are cooperating with Nusra.

Let me comment on the problem in the previous paragraph. It is obvious that Nusra is an Al-Qaeda inspired terrorist organization that *must* be destroyed. There should be no question about that. In my opinion, when rebels and jihadist groups cooperate with Nusra, they are cooperating with Evil, and those rebels and jihadists should forfeit their status as "moderate" or "democratic". In order to win some battles in a long war, some rebels and jihadists made a pact with the Devil (i.e., Nusra) and now they are tainted by that pact. A consequence of this view is there are *few* legitimate rebel groups in western Syria, and nearly all of the insurgents — including rebels and jihadists — need to be defeated militarily, along with Nusra and ISIL. Of course, this is unpalatable to the anti-Assad foreign meddlers who need a legitimate opposition. For example, the HNC — the current main political opposition group — contains representatives of jihadist groups who cooperate with Nusra.

Under the new agreements, Assad is allowed to continue to attack both Nusra and ISIL for one week. *If* the ceasefire holds for this one week, then Assad will only be allowed to attack ISIL, and then Russia and the USA would launch airstrikes against both Nusra and ISIL. So,

if the ceasefire holds for one week, Assad's air force is forbidden from continuing to attack Nusra and any intermingled rebels/jihadists. That is a new feature that is unlike previous ceasefire agreements. But Russia and the USA will then take on Assad's old role of airstrikes on Nusra, and any intermingled rebels/jihadists. Russia will probably want to annihilate the intermingled rebels/jihadists, and the USA will surely balk at attacking rebels/jihadists.

I am disappointed that Russia and the USA have agreed *not* to make the new agreements publicly available. I can understand keeping some military details (e.g., latitude and longitude of rebel forces) confidential, but the broad agreements should be openly available and endorsed in a United Nations Security Council Resolution. Inevitably, there will be violations of these agreements and people need to read the actual agreements to decide about the violations. Further, it is a basic requirement of due process of law that laws and regulations be publicly available.

At the very end of the above-quoted press briefing in Geneva, Lavrov responded to a question by a Russian journalist by saying that the HNC should *not* be the only Syrian opposition. Lavrov specifically mentioned the Moscow and Cairo delegations, and he could have also mentioned including the Syrian Kurds. As I have said in my previous essays, removing the HNC would help make the negotiations successful. (See, e.g., [Feb 2016](#); [April 2016](#); in [May 2016](#) I wrote there was *no* reasonable expectation of satisfying any one of the HNC's four demands and I commented on Alloush's resignation; in [August 2016](#) I explained why the Geneva negotiations *failed*.)

Kerry gives *no* evidence that Nusra is planning attacks in the USA. We know ISIL has planned attacks in Western Europe, but there is no public information about Nusra planning terrorist attacks outside of Syria. Before Kerry doubles the cost of airstrikes — and gets the USA more involved in the Syrian quagmire — U.S. citizens ought to know what benefit they will receive for their expenditures.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress continues to ignore its Constitutional responsibility to declare wars. Not only is there no Congressional Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) in Syria, but also there has been no Congressional discussion of Kerry's expansion of the U.S. Military involvement in Syria.

Notice that these new agreements are *not* products of negotiations with Syrians (i.e., Assad's government and leaders of insurgent groups). These new agreements are solely the result of negotiations between Russia and the USA, and are being imposed on Syria. One might characterize Russia as a colonial power who is dominating Syria in an attempt to keep Assad in power and maintain the Russian naval base at Tartus. But a more accurate characterization would be to recognize that the Syrian civil war has continued for more than five years because foreign meddlers have sent weapons and ammunition into Syria to support their proxy armies. While Russia may be the biggest foreign meddler in Syria, it is not the only significant foreign meddler in Syria. Furthermore, the Syrians themselves can *not* negotiate a ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid for two reasons: (1) the HNC has refused to negotiate and (2) both Assad and the insurgents are committed to pursuing a military victory, including besieging towns. The fact that the new agreements are imposed on Syria by foreign meddlers suggests to me that the new agreements will soon be violated by both Assad and the insurgents. Assad and the insurgents will surely understand that Syria is *their* nation, but it is

not their ceasefire agreement. It is even more galling that the new agreements are secret, and the rebels/jihadists are given only written summaries of the new agreements that they must obey.

Reaction to the new agreements

On Saturday morning, 10 September, the fighting continued in Aleppo. See the section [below](#). While the new ceasefire does not begin until sundown on 12 Sep, it is regrettable — and additional violations of the previous Cessation of Hostilities Agreement — to attempt to capture more land.

The Syrian Arab News Agency, operated by Assad's government, published a short news article about the new agreements. Here is all that was said about Assad's acceptance of the agreements:

[Informed sources] noted that the Syrian government agreed to the agreement, and that there will be a cessation of hostilities in Aleppo city for humanitarian purposes.

....

The sources underscored that the Syrian [government] had been informed of the agreement and agreed to it.

"Russian-US plan to fight ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra according to agreement," [SANA](#), 10 Sep 2016.

I find it interesting that only anonymous sources in Assad's government are cited. Apparently, no one wants their name used in connection with Assad's consent to these new agreements.

On the night of 10 September, the Associated Press published an insightful analysis of the agreements:

Saturday's deal to renew a nationwide truce in Syria, open aid routes and establish a U.S.-Russian military partnership may be the best hope yet to end the brutal five-year civil war.

....

Yet the new blueprint appears to suffer from a fundamental imbalance common to the earlier efforts.

If U.S.-backed or other rebels fighting Syrian President Bashar Assad break the cease-fire, Russia could threaten to respond militarily or allow his forces to retaliate. But if Assad breaks the cease-fire, the U.S. has no clear enforcement stick.

....

Sustainability is another potential problem, given the Syrian opposition's rejection of any settlement that leaves Assad in power.

Kerry said the breakthrough could lead to an undefined political transition. He made no mention of Assad leaving power. Instead, Kerry stressed the importance of Assad's government living "up to its obligations and to work with us," suggesting the Syrian leader could transform himself from international pariah to potential peace partner.

After Lavrov said the Syrian government pledged to abide by the cease-fire, Kerry said Assad must be "prepared to live by these agreements, which is critical."

Bradley Klapper & Matthew Lee, "Analysis: Syria deal offers hope, but Russia calling shots," [Associated Press](#), 20:42 GMT, 10 Sep 2016.

At night on 11 September, Reuters reports insurgents have concerns about the new Russian/American agreements::

Syrian rebel groups wrote to the United States on Sunday, saying they would "cooperate positively" with a ceasefire but voicing deep concerns over details of the deal as relayed to them, the text of the letter as confirmed by two rebel officials said.

The letter said the agreement neglected besieged areas and called for aid to be taken to all such places without exception. It voiced concern that it was devoid of guarantees, monitoring mechanisms or sanctions for breaches.

It also expressed concern at clauses in the agreement indicating that Syrian government jets would not be barred from flying until up to nine days after the ceasefire had taken effect.

Tom Perry & Angus McDowall, "Syria rebels tell US they back a ceasefire, but voice concerns at deal," [Reuters](#), 19:32 GMT, 11 Sep 2016.

In the morning of 12 September at 10:00 GMT, [Reuters](#) clarified that the letter was from "Free Syrian Army groups". Reuters added: "the groups are worried by the absence of enforcement mechanisms". Also, Reuters updated that "Syria's government has not issued an official comment on the truce,...." Assad's government has now been silent on this topic for two days.

Leaders of rebel and jihadist groups are *not* enthusiastic about the new agreements. They are not happy about Russia and the USA engaging in airstrikes on Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, formerly called Nusra Front. The Associated Press reported on the night of 11 September:

Rebel factions in Syria expressed deep reservations on Sunday [11 Sep] about the terms of a U.S.-Russian deal that seeks to restart the peace process for the war-torn country, with the leader of at least one U.S.-backed rebel faction [Division 13] publicly calling the offer a "trap."

The second in command of the powerful, ultraconservative Ahrar al-Sham group condemned the superpower agreement as an effort to secure President Bashar Assad's government and drive rebel factions apart. "A rebellious people who have fought and suffered for six years cannot accept half-solutions," said Ali al-Omar in a video statement.

But the commander and other rebel leaders stopped short of fully rejecting the agreement's interim cease-fire, which is slated to come into effect in stages beginning on Monday at sunset.

....

Still, a senior official inside Ahrar al-Sham said rebels would nevertheless abide by the cease-fire to regroup after a punishing conflict with pro-government forces over Aleppo. "The Islamist factions and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham will abide by the cease-fire without publicly declaring it," said the official. "They will announce they are opposed to the U.S.-Russian agreement, but they will halt their operations on the ground because of the losses they sustained in the battles for Aleppo," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Philip Issa, "Syrian Rebels leery of cease-fire plan," [Associated Press](#), 20:52 GMT, 11 Sep 2016.

The last paragraph quoted above suggests that, after the rebels and jihadists regroup, they will begin violating the ceasefire.

On 12 September, President Assad visited a mosque in the town of Daraya. Daraya surrendered to Assad on 25 August, and the town (and mosque) is now empty of people (except for Assad's entourage during his brief visit). Assad made a defiant speech that was reported by the government's Syrian Arab News Agency:

President Bashar al-Assad performed on Monday [12 Sep] the prayers of Eid al-Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice) at Saad Ibn Muaz Mosque in Daraya city in Damascus Countryside.

....

In statements to the national media, the President said "Visiting Daraya today has plenty of meanings. They may be symbolic, but they are not addressed to the Syrian people as I and the Syrian people... have been in the same situation since the beginning of the crisis."

He added that the Syrian people have been aware of the reality of the conspiracy and the existence of traitors and agents and the external factor and share the same feelings whenever an area is taken by the terrorists, or liberated by the army or when a reconciliation agreement is achieved.

The President affirmed that the message of his visit to Daraya is addressed to those who have worked against Syria and bet on its collapse, especially those countries that got directly involved in conspiring against Syria and supporting the terrorists and the Syrian traitors and agents who chose to be part of the foreign plot.

"We as state, by coming to this area, also send a message to those [sides] that the Syrian state is determined to retake every area from the terrorists and restore security and safety," stressed the President, adding that the state is also resolved to reconstruct all that has been destroyed physically and on the human level.

....

“However, those who are determined and insist on acting as tools in return for a handful of dollars, we simply say to them ‘the armed forces will continue their work unhesitant and undaunted and regardless of any internal or external conditions until restoring security and safety to all areas in Syria,” the President said.

"Updated-President al-Assad in Daraya: We will retake all areas from the terrorists," [SANA](#), 12 Sep 2016.

While Assad may sound paranoid, remember he has numerous, powerful foreign nations (e.g., the USA, most of Western Europe, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar,) actively opposing him and actively supporting insurgents in Syria.

Reuters tersely summarized Assad's defiant speech:

The agreement comes at a time when Assad's position on the battlefield is stronger than it has been since the earliest months of the war, thanks to Russian and Iranian military support.

Hours before the truce took effect, an emboldened Assad vowed to take back all of Syria. In a gesture loaded with symbolism, state television showed him visiting Daraya, a Damascus suburb long held by rebels but recaptured last month after fighters surrendered in the face of a crushing siege.

"The Syrian state is determined to recover every area from the terrorists," Assad said in an interview broadcast by state media. Earlier he performed Muslim holiday prayers alongside other officials in a bare hall in a Daraya mosque.

He made no mention of the ceasefire agreement, but said the army would continue its work "without hesitation, regardless of any internal or external circumstances".

Tom Perry, "Syria ceasefire takes effect with Assad emboldened, opposition wary," [Reuters](#), 18:32 GMT, 12 Sep 2016.

The first official mention by Assad's government of the new agreements was in a terse statement by the Syrian army. Here is the entire statement:

The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces announced on Monday that a truce regime will be applied for seven days.

In a statement, the General Command said that the truce is applied across Syria for seven days as of 19:00 on September 12th 2016 and until 23:59 on September 18th, adding that at the same time the army has the right to respond decisively using all types of firepower to any breach by armed groups.

"Army General Command: Truce regime applied for 7 days with right to respond to breaches by armed groups," [SANA](#), 12 Sep 2016.

My comment is that Assad's defiant speech, which ignored the new ceasefire agreement, and also the Syrian Army's accepting the nationwide ceasefire for only 7 days, suggests that Assad will soon violate this new ceasefire.

Just before the Daily Press Briefing at the U.S. State Department began at 18:37 GMT on 12 September, Kerry appeared and made more verbose, rambling remarks. I quote what I

consider the important paragraphs.

Now, the key elements of the plan, just so everybody is very clear about it, are, first, the resumption of a nationwide cessation of hostilities that excludes only al-Qaida affiliate al-Nusrah and Daesh. Now, this renewed cessation of hostilities went into effect today our time — not our time, but today about noon our time; at sundown in Syria a few hours ago. And the earliest reports are that there's some reduction in violence as well as a few reports of fighting here and there, though it is far too early to draw any definitive conclusions, and I am not drawing any definitive conclusions.

I will say that there is a report that just crossed my desk from Reuters that the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that major conflict zones in Syria were calm after the ceasefire took effect at 7:00 p.m. on Monday. Their quote is, "Calm is prevailing," the director said, giving an early assessment — I repeat, early assessment. And there will undoubtedly be reports of a violation here or there, I am confident, but that's the nature of the beginning of a ceasefire almost always.

The second thing that we agreed on is that humanitarian assistance needs to begin to flow. Now, that can take a day or two or so. It depends. But the UN has indicated that they are prepared and preparing to take those deliveries in. And it is important — and a very important part of this equation — that access to humanitarian goods takes place. That includes all of the embattled neighborhoods of Aleppo over a period of time.

Now, we spent a lot of the last few weeks developing very specific arrangements to enable the passage of aid to Aleppo through the two main access points, Castello Road and the Ramouseh Gap. I don't think I have to spell out for you how urgent this assistance is — in some cases, literally the difference between life and death for tens of thousands of people.

Third, we provided a provision that as long as there is a sustained period of reduced violence — reduced violence — and increased humanitarian access, and by that we mean seven consecutive days — the United States and Russia will set up a Joint Implementation Center to facilitate coordinated military action in response to the threat posed by al-Nusrah and Daesh. Now, under that arrangement, as soon as U.S.-Russia strikes begin, then the Syrian regime will be prohibited from flying combat missions over areas in which the legitimate opposition is present or al-Nusrah present, as defined by the map that has been agreed upon between Russia and the United States with the regime's consent according to Russia.

....

Now, I want to be clear: As important as each of these measures is in their own right, they are designed not for the purpose of having a ceasefire for the purpose of having a ceasefire. They are designed in order to provide a period of calm that restores some sense of seriousness of purpose to the Russian effort and the willingness of Assad to go to the table and negotiate. This is designed to bring people to the table in Geneva in order to get under the auspices of the UN and begin to negotiate a political transition and the restoration of a peaceful and united Syria.

....

Over the weekend, I read a story that referred to the U.S.-Russia plan as, quote, “flawed and full of caveats.” And I have to say to all of you, sure, this is less than perfect. This is perhaps one of the most complicated places in the world. But let me ask you: Flawed compared to what? Compared to nothing? Compared to daily violence that absolutely guarantees a future of even more violence and possible sectarian explosion in the region? What we have been seeing in Syria day after day, week after week, month after month is a lot worse than flawed, and it has been, it remains a profound human tragedy and a stain on the international community’s ability to be able to bring people to a table to try to negotiate outcome for something where everybody knows there is no military solution. There’s just escalation if kinetic is the route people choose to go.

Now, I’ve been in public life for more than four decades now, and I have never seen a more complicated or entangled political and military, sectarian, somewhat religiously-overtone issue than what exists in Syria today. There are a bunch of wars going on, a bunch of different tensions between people, and you can cite them, whether it’s Kurd and Turkey or Kurd and Kurd or Sunni/Shia or Assad versus others versus Assad or countries that don’t get along with each other in the region. This is a very toxic mix of interests and of agenda.

....

[In response to a question about separating rebels from Nusra, Kerry said:] But first, let me just say that in terms of the separation, you’re absolutely correct that in some places there has been what people have been referring to as marbleization of opposition with al-Nusra, and yes, al-Nusra has been, quote, “effective,” but al-Nusra is al-Qaida. Al-Nusra is a sworn enemy of the United States of America and of the Western world, of the allies, and of others in the region. And they have an external plotting entity that is plotting as I speak for attacks against some of our allies, friends, and ourselves.

So we cannot abide by — and President Obama has made it very clear — we can’t somehow adopt the moral hazard of just because they fight fiercely say, oh, we’re going to have — somehow allow al-Qaida to be the tip of our spear with respect to Assad. That would be crazy, and ultimately self-destructive because you’re going to have to turn around and deal with it. And it might even get out of control and produce something where you have a level of extremism and a level of terror and of the attraction of terrorists that you actually make matters worse in Europe, in the region, and elsewhere.

So we’re not going there. That is exactly why the President thought it was worthwhile making it clear to Nusra, Jabhat al-Nusra, and making it clear to Daesh, they’re outside of this and they are outside of this cessation.

Now, it is not advisable for the opposition, who have their support from some of the countries that are threatened by Nusra, to be playing with Nusra on an ongoing basis.

That is a losing proposition. Because if we get the process moving forward adequately, it is clear that Russia and the United States are determined to take on terrorists because we both have — we have a mutual interest in doing that, and in terminating ISIL/Daesh, as fast as possible.

....

But if [the moderate opposition] joins with Nusrah in offensive action and attacks, then they've made a choice to be with Nusrah and then they clearly run the risk [of being hit with airstrikes].

John Kerry, "Remarks before the Daily Press Briefing," [U.S. State Dept](#), 12 Sep 2016.

In his answer to a question by Matt Lee of Associated Press, Kerry said after the JIC was established, then Russia and the USA would be approving airstrikes by Assad. This is *wrong*. The State Department inserted a footnote in the transcript that corrected Kerry's misstatement. The [Associated Press](#) reported on Kerry's embarrassing mistake.

On 13 September, Lavrov decided the new agreements should be made public.

Russia is pushing to make public the text of the cease-fire deal, but Lavrov told reporters on Tuesday that the U.S. opposes such a move. Lavrov said Moscow "has nothing to hide" and wants the U.N. Security Council to formally approve the Syria truce deal as well.

Bassem Mroue, "Syria cease-fire holding, with only minor violations," [Associated Press](#), 13:37 GMT, 13 Sep 2016.

On 13 September, de Mistura made his first public comment on the new ceasefire in Syria. I boldfaced some important words.

Good afternoon. Let me first of all make some general comments then of course I will take questions.

First of all, today, perhaps just now according to our timing, but you know they are referring to the Damascus timing, is almost and in fact beyond 24 hours from the 7:00 p.m. that marked yesterday the beginning of the cessation of hostilities. So regarding that, according to the agreement, it is up to the two co-chairs to actually make a formal assessment of the situation after 48 hours, so I would imagine that the status of the cessation of hostilities, phase one, will be probably assessed by the two co-chairs, if not tomorrow evening, certainly on Thursday [15 Sep] morning on the occasion of the meeting that we will have here, the HTF and the cessation of hostilities task force.

So on our side, I will be making just comments, general comments and limit myself to general comments, but based on the type of information that we have and based also on indications that we get from the field, but you should not consider this as the formal assessment of the current situation of the cessation of hostilities.

So based on that I will tell you that yesterday we did see some level of violence continue after sunset, including some allegations of air strikes and some allegation of mortar shelling near Castello road by the opposition in this case. However, let's be quite clear, **by early morning every report we have been seeing indicates a**

significant, significant drop in violence.

Today calm appears to have prevailed across Hama, Latakia, Aleppo city and rural Aleppo and Idlib, with only some allegations of sporadic and geographically isolated incidents. Sources on the ground, which do matter, including inside Aleppo city say that the situation has dramatically improved with no air strikes. Damascus and central Syria were also calm with some reports limited to some clashes around Harasta between government and armed opposition forces. And then as you do know there are some exceptions in the south, in particular related to Al Qunaitra at the moment between al-Nusra front and government forces. And there has also been some other incidents.

The bottom line, comparing to the previous days, there is, no doubt, a significant drop in violence. Of course this is only 24 hours, the 48 hours' benchmark is going to be important because that is the one which will be assessed by the two co-chairs regarding the level of health of the cessation of hostilities which they have agreed upon on Friday night. Then hopefully we have another five days of cessation of hostilities and then as you know there are other benchmarks that are expected to take place.

So what does this tell us? First of all as you have noticed both the Russian Federation of course and the USA, which are the two co-chairs, but the government of Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, Turkey, armed opposition have all voiced in one form or the other a support to the agreement.

So where is the most delicate part of it, you may ask and we will have to say, well, first of all avoid that any incident which is unavoidable in a conflict of five years, **with so many fighting and moving parts, could then move further into making the cessation of hostilities very fragile, so avoiding any type of snowball effect of any incident.** Second the issue which has always been the case, but even more so now that has been clearly specified, is how the disengagement between the armed opposition groups from al-Nusra will take place within a week, that is quite a challenge and we will have to watch that very carefully.

Now regarding humanitarian assistance, some homework needs to be done by everyone at the moment. WFP which is the main logistical and organizational organization linked to the convoys is ready with 20 trucks, you must have seen it, perhaps you have seen some pictures. They are loaded and ready. Now the homework is also on other sides. The government which does control the Castello road, until there is some further movements related to the agreement, needs to allow unhindered access to those trucks, basing itself on the agreed agreement which applying UN MM ["Monitoring Mission" in 9 Sep agreement] approach, which in jargon means what is being done already in the past a simple notification to the government about what is the content in the trucks and then no checking on UN trucks that have been sealed and then after that a report of what has been distributed inside eastern Aleppo for instance. On the receiving side, the Aleppo provincial council needs to accept the fact that this aid is urgent and it is according to UN approach and according to a well-recognized agreement. In other words no conditions or preconditions in order to make sure that this aid can reach the vert people where needed.

And on the Russian side of course, helping this unhindered convoys' approach which we are understanding is being worked on.

Now all that in order to say that the UN is ready, there is some little homework that still needs to be done, by others as well. But there is no reason to not believe that the UN access should be taking place very very soon.

What is our priority? Eastern Aleppo, no doubt because they have been isolated long enough, they have been isolated also due to the circumstances of the conflict. West Aleppo is being reached, is regularly being reached through even commercial convoys and the UN is ready through the warehouses to distribute to the large population which is there. And then all the besieged areas listed in the September plan. Now trucks are ready for that and as you know we conveyed to you publicly what has been announced by the government that they had given permission **but what is missing still is the famous authorization letters from the government.** We are asking them to issue them very quickly so that we can always, all of us take advantage of this reduction of violence in order to be able to make sure that not only eastern Aleppo, western Aleppo but everywhere else convoys can start moving. We have not yet received those authorization letters, but we are eagerly hoping and expecting the government to issue them very soon.

Regarding monitoring, which is an issue that you may want to raise, well at the moment the mechanism is the one which has been already quite well established in this building between the Russians and the Americans presence into one operations center and I am sure that additional complements for that monitoring of this cessation of hostilities are being established through other technological means, but I think that is an issue for them to answer to.

Timing: well, if 48 hours work out and we are able to have also humanitarian access as we have agreed, in other words unhindered and without conditionality, neither by the government nor frankly by the opposition then people will be seeing a reduction of violence and increase of humanitarian aid, **in other words, no bombs and more trucks** followed by what could be the creation of this joint center between Russians and the Americans and **then a possible ISSG meeting which could take place in New York during the General Assembly**, followed by the 21 September Security Council meeting specially on Syria which then could be followed by the indication of the nature and the **invitations for the political process** because we all know and we are the first ones to know, that all this is important and needs to be established but once it takes place to be sustains needs also the political process to be on the horizon.

That's basically where we are at the moment.

....

QUESTION: I just want to go over the issue of permission again, this morning OCHA told us that as of September 6th the government granted permission for eastern Aleppo, the Four Towns and another place, the name of which is currently escaping me. Is this

currently where we are or you are still waiting for subsequent permissions from Damascus, specifically for eastern Aleppo and the Four Towns?

SdeM: For eastern Aleppo and western Aleppo the agreement between the Russian Federation and the US is clearly indicating unhindered access, in other words the method which needs to be applied is what is called the UN MM which is different from the one which has been applied to Darayya, Moadameya and other places, which says that the government of Syria, rightly, should be notified simply about the fact that 20 trucks are moving with the following items and then notify through a report what is being distributed into them, that is what applies to eastern Aleppo.

....

QUESTION: And secondly what about the detainees, this word has not been mentioned in this plan, is there any mention in the plan about detainees?

SdeM: Regarding detainees, I can tell you that there is no reference in this agreement on the detainees issues, which remains a very important issue and I think needs to be addressed in a different context but needs to be addressed.

"Transcript of stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura,"
[U.N. Geneva](#), 13 Sep 2016. [Boldface and text in brackets added by Standler.]

On 14 September, Reuters reported on more delays in delivering humanitarian aid and more violations of the ceasefire:

However, a prominent opposition politician, George Sabra, said the many violations which marked a previous truce had undermined confidence in this one and it was too early to talk about a resumption of peace talks that were abandoned in April. Speaking to Reuters, he lamented a lack of mechanisms to enforce the ceasefire and accused the government and its allies of committing minor violations "to impede the other goals of the truce, such as delivering necessary aid to besieged areas".

Osman Orsal & John Davison, "Aid for Syria waits on Turkish border as warring sides bicker," [Reuters](#), 18:04 GMT, 14 Sep 2016.

On 14 September, Russia publicly urged the USA to separate the so-called moderate opposition from Nusra Front (now called "Jabhat Fatah al-Sham"). [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Associated Press](#)(18:48 GMT); [Reuters](#)(09:50 GMT); [Reuters](#)(15:07 GMT).

As I explained above, the rebels and jihadists in western Syria are too weak to successfully fight Assad's forces, so those rebels and jihadists cooperate with the much stronger Nusra group. But then when Russia or Assad had airstrikes on Nusra (which airstrikes were permitted under all previous versions of the ceasefire), the so-called moderate rebels and jihadists were killed. Previous attempts to separate the rebels from Nusra have failed, because the rebels *want* to cooperate with Nusra in the fight against Assad. It remains to be seen whether the U.S. and other anti-Assad foreign meddlers can persuade the rebels to separate from Nusra in September 2016.

On 14 September, two Associated Press journalists who are based in Cairo and Beirut, wrote an interesting news article about how the civil war in Syria might end.

Syrian President Bashar Assad is deeply entrenched in Damascus and seems willing to do whatever it takes to stay in power. He enjoys support not only among his fellow Alawites, followers of an offshoot of Shia Islam, but from Christians and other minority groups. Many fear his authoritarian rule less than a scenario in which security services collapse and the country falls into the hands of Islamist Sunnis.

Meanwhile, the factions fighting Assad are beset by competing agendas and visions for a future Syria. Gradually Sunni Islamists have overshadowed the original "moderates" of the Free Syria Army and its splinter groups. That lends some resonance to Assad's message that, in effect, he is the least bad option.

....

Every previous peace effort has foundered over the insistence by the Syrian opposition, backed by much of the world, that Assad must go — and yet no party has been willing or able to do what it takes to remove him. There are signs, however, that the demand is looser now.

Turkey conceded last month that it would accept a role for Assad in a transition period. The U.S. has also quietly walked back its call for his immediate departure. None of the discourse around the current cease-fire addressed Assad's future — only a "peace process" to follow the cessation of hostilities. That may be a reason why some U.S. officials seem unhappy with the deal and have apparently balked at releasing its precise text.

One possible avenue might be to hold genuinely free, internationally supervised elections in which Assad would be able to run. The United Nations has said it wants elections to be held next year. A future with a democratically legitimate Assad may seem improbable, but optimists may see such a vote as a way to finesse an end to the conflict.

....

And after more than 300,000 fatalities, the displacing of half the country's population, the ruination of major cities like Aleppo and Homs, world impatience is certainly there, especially with social media and the internet delivering images of the horror as never before.

Dan Perry & Philip Issa, "In Long And Bloody Syria War, This Truce May Be Different," [Associated Press](#), 21:26 GMT, 14 Sep 2016.

Copy at [NY Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [ABC News](#). This news article was *not* posted at the Associated Press's *Big Story* website.

My comment is that on 3 December 2013, former U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker publicly said: "But bad as Assad is, he is not as bad as the jihadis who would take over in his absence." [NY Times](#). Then on 21 Dec 2013, Crocker wrote an opinion in the [NY Times](#) with the title: "Assad Is the Least Worst Option in Syria". Slowly, Crocker's wisdom is now being accepted, as the so-called moderate rebels (e.g., the Free Syrian Army) are *much weaker* than the Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL and Nusra) and major jihadist groups (e.g., Ahrar al-Sham

and Jaish al-Islam). Also, the major political opposition groups (e.g., the Syrian National Coalition in Turkey, and the HNC in Saudi Arabia) refuse to negotiate with Assad's government. As the civil war in Syria continues for more than five years the moderate rebels and pro-democracy political movement have faded into insignificance, as their revolt was hijacked by various Islamic extremists in 2013, and by expatriate political groups who are eager to be the next Syrian government after Assad is ousted.

As the above-quoted Associated Press article suggests, having a national election in which Assad is a candidate would allow the USA and Western Europe to walk away from the problem of the government in Syria — rendering unnecessary both peace negotiations in Geneva and a Transitional Governing Body. But there would still be a need for international aid to annihilate ISIL, Nusra, and jihadist groups in Syria. And there would be a severe need for international aid to rebuild damaged buildings and infrastructure in Syria.

On 14 September, the Associated Press reported some details of the secret new agreements from anonymous "U.S. officials".

- As of Monday [9 Sep 2016], Assad's government and opposition forces should have ceased all attacks with any weapons, including aerial bombardments, rockets, mortars and anti-tank guided missiles.
- Sides cannot seek to acquire territory.
- They should allow rapid, safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to all people in need.
- In cases when self-defense is required, proportionate force should be used.
- Two checkpoints will be established on the key Aleppo artery of Castello Road. The Syrian Red Crescent will initially operate the checkpoints, with security of no more than 20 armed personnel. Security will be determined by mutual consent of government and opposition forces. The UN will monitor the personnel, physically or remotely.
- Government forces must withdraw personnel, heavy weapons and other arms to different points away from Castello Road. In some places, tanks, artillery and mortars must be pulled back at least 3.5 kilometers, or just more than 2 miles. Elsewhere, soldiers with lighter weapons have to retreat at least 500 yards from the road. Other requirements concern crew-served machine guns and observation posts.
- Opposition forces also must withdraw from the road, in many places equidistant or similar to the level of pullback by government forces. East of Castello Road, their withdrawal will depend on the action of Kurdish forces. If the Kurds retreat 500 yards, the opposition forces should do likewise. Other requirements concern heavy weapons, including infantry-fighting vehicles and tanks, and crew-served

machine guns.

- Opposition must make every effort to prevent al-Qaeda-linked militants from advancing into demilitarized areas.
- All Syrians should be able to leave Aleppo on Castello Road, including opposition forces with their weapons. Fighters must coordinate with UN officials ahead of time.
- The US and Russia will address violations of cease-fire.
- The US and Russia will announce the establishment of their Joint Implementation Center after at least seven straight days of adherence to the cease-fire.
- Preparatory work for the center should have started Monday, including information-sharing to delineate territories controlled by al-Qaeda-linked militants and those controlled by opposition groups. More comprehensive delineation occurs after the center is established.
- Starting Monday, the US and Russia should have started developing actionable targets against ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked militants, so that strikes can start immediately after the center is established. Once the first strikes occur, all Syrian military air activities must be halted in agreed areas.
- The US and Russia can each withdraw from the arrangement.

Bradley Klapper & Matthew Lee, Associated Press, "New details of Syria ceasefire deal outlined," [Al-Arabiya](#), 07:37 GMT, 14 Sep 2016. Also posted at [ABC News](#). This news article was *not* posted at the Associated Press's *Big Story* website.

On 15 September, [Reuters](#) reported that the Russian Defense Ministry was criticizing the U.S. Government for not separating rebels/jihadists from Nusra. While it is probably true that the U.S. is failing to convince the rebels/jihadists to separate from Nusra, it is also true that Russia has failed to persuade Assad to authorize deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria. So this is a classic case of the pot calling the kettle black.

On 15 September, France publicly asked the U.S. for a copy of the new agreements. [Reuters](#).

On 13 September, de Mistura hinted that the ISSG would be asked to approve the agreements next week, so it would be reasonable for the ISSG member nations to see the actual agreements before approving. Also, France is a member of the U.S.-led anti-ISIL Coalition and wants to be informed of the new agreements.

On 15 September, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations says he will propose a United Nations Security Council Resolution next week (21 Sep?) that endorses the new agreements by Lavrov-Kerry. [Reuters](#). The Russian proposal could make the new agreements

public, which would irritate Kerry.

[Below](#), I describe violations of the new ceasefire in Syria and failure to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria. On 15 September at 11:00 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported that de Mistura held a press briefing and complained that Assad's government had failed to authorize deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria during September. That failure is a violation of the new agreements that require "unhindered" deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria. Here is what was said at de Mistura's press briefing, I have added boldface to important words:

SdeM: Sorry for changing hours but you can imagine there have been a lot of internal discussions and there has been a lot verification with the field as well. So I will say a few words then as usual give the floor to Jan Egeland and we will be taking some questions.

Let me start by saying that the Russian-American, American-Russian agreement last Friday [9 Sep] is and remains, and is indeed, potentially a game-changer, on three areas, three areas, let me remind ourselves about them so we can go through them.

The first one is the reduction of violence — talking about cessation of hostilities perhaps is an ambitious word after a war of five years, but reduction of violence, yes. **The reduction of violence**, and you will be having further reports we will get after we verify today, **is by and large frankly holding, in fact it has been substantial.**

Second point, the second dividend of the Russian-American, American-Russian agreement was and remains humanitarian access, that is what makes the difference for the people, apart from seeing no more bombs or mortar shelling taking place. On that one, **we have a problem** and let me explain where and then will go to more details.

One, **the government, I repeat, the government, was expected to provide facilitation letters.** It is a bureaucratic word, translated into English: permits, authorizations to go. On the 6th of September, which means before the actual cessation of hostilities agreement, they had already indicated that they were ready to allow five areas for facilitation letters, in other words, authorization for the UN to go. The UN is ready to go. **These facilitation letters, i.e., final permissions for the UN to actually reach those areas[,] have not been received. That's a fact.** It is particularly regrettable because during these days we are losing time. These are days which we should have used for convoys to move with the permit to go because there is no fighting. The Russian Federation is agreeing with us about this, so are the two co-chairs. **This is something that needs to take place immediately. We cannot let days of this reduction of violence to be wasted by not moving forward on that.**

Second point, Castello road. Let me tell you something that we have not been elaborating so far because the Russian-American, American-Russian agreement has not been officially given in details, but there is something that I think we can tell you and that we are aware of. The Castello road in the Russian-American agreement has a special status, a very special status. So the agreement says reduction of violence and unimpeded access, which means the five letters we mentioned. Castello road: special

status, due to what has happened recently. What does it mean? Well the special status is that the two co-chairs are expected and, in my opinion, are working hard on this, to actually produce a disengagement along that short road of the government forces, those AOGs who are still in the area, and other armed groups. I won't go into details how many meters, how many kilometers, that's something for the Russian and American co-chairs to explain. Once this is taking place — and it is urgently needed to take place according to the agreement — then there will be a new form of checkpoints on that road, different from the ones we have at the moment, and which would be having a special status, sufficient by the two co-chairs, to actually reassure the unimpeded movement of UN convoys. So that's what we are now waiting for.

Next point, what do we mean by special status? Special status is that while, for the rest of the country, we are going through this painful, very slow, facilitation letter process with the government, with Castello road and based on the Russian-American agreement, a special status means also that they would be only applying in that case what we call the UN MM approach, according to resolution 2165. Bottom line, the convoys are ready, 40 trucks, 20 - 20. They are ready and sealed and once they move, they will not be harassed, they will not be investigated, and they will be moving through that road all the way to eastern Aleppo. According to the UN MM, the government, rightfully so, according to the resolution, will be receiving a notification, simple notification — how much food, how many kilos of wheat, flour, milk or medicines there are on board, but no saying, you will take away that medicine or you will take out that food, and then a notification of what has been distributed in eastern Aleppo. That is what is called a UN MM approach.

That was agreed between Russia and America, that is what we are expecting the government, based on that, to actually apply for Castello road. In addition, we don't need obviously any politicization of the receiving end or anywhere on the aid, that's why I understand, in eastern Aleppo there currently a lot of discussions among the so-called local councils, AOGs in order to make sure that when the aid comes, according to this new approach, the aid will be welcomed.

Bottom line, Russia and the US are now expected, by themselves, and by us, to deliver the Castello road new arrangement. We heard today from the Russians that it is already beginning. If that is taking place and the AOGs are convinced by the US to do the same, disengage, then the next step quite rapidly would be this new form of checkpoints, and then, the UN MM approach, the 20 trucks are ready, notification has already been sent to the government, we heard it, through a note verbale, the trucks are expected to move without harassment and need to be welcomed without harassment as well. In that case, we are then moving, on Aleppo, eastern Aleppo which is in need.

What about the rest of the country? You heard it, facilitation letters to actually authorize the aid. If this happens, we are addressing the second aspect of the US-Russian agreement, or dividend, I would call it the humanitarian dividend.

The next one, as you know, is related to the so-called al-Nusra and the grounding of the Syrian air force. That is something that I am not going to talk about at this stage we go step by step.

I will stop there and give the floor to Jan Egeland.

Egeland: Thank you Staffan. We had a number of field reports to this humanitarian task force and indeed the good news is that our people on the ground confirmed that the cessation of hostilities is largely holding, the killing has been greatly reduced, in fact no reports on civilian killings the last 24 hours. Attacks on schools, attacks on hospitals have stopped.

The bad news is that we are not using this window of opportunity so far to reach all of these places with humanitarian assistance, like we did when this humanitarian task force was born out of the February agreement on the cessation of hostilities. We are ready, we can go today, we could go today, we are not. We hope to go tomorrow, to eastern Aleppo, we are ready to go before the end of the week to the other places that we asked for permission to serve in August, that were approved in the September plan by the government but the facilitation letters, the permits, have not been given yet, not a single permit is in hand for our people and if they don't have that, they cannot load and they cannot go, they will be blocked.

With these letters we will go to places like Moadameya, to Al-Waer, to Talbiseh to Douma, to all of the besieged areas, close to Damascus, close to Homs and elsewhere.

So our deal is the following, it is a simple one, **can well-fed, grown men please stop putting political, bureaucratic, and procedural roadblocks for brave humanitarian workers that are willing to go to serve women, children, wounded civilians in besieged and cross-fire areas[?]**

If they do that, we are willing and able to go to all of these places, in the next few days and we are very hopeful that we will indeed be able to do so. The co-chairs, the members of the task force promised to do all that is needed for us to get the access that is part of the Russian-US agreement.

Thank you.

SdeM: Thank you, can't be clearer than that.

QUESTION: I would like to know how much of a disappointment is it for you that after four days we still have seen no humanitarian aid into eastern Aleppo and other places? And I would also like to know, you said you wanted the trucks be able to go in without harassment, does this mean that if the government asks you to take something off the truck you will not accept it?

SdeM: As we said the Russian-American agreement, and that is based on our assumption that they have been discussing it with the other sides, is clearly saying, that once this disengagement takes place, we are going to have the UN MM approach. The UN MM approach is: notification, no picking up items, notification and then information. That is point one. Second, **are we disappointed? Of course we are, but who is particularly disappointed? The Syrian people, who have been expecting**

that when there is a reduction of violence, and the UN ready with its trucks, they cannot move because of these times of hurdles. But disappointment doesn't mean that we are not agreeing in saying we need to move on those facilitation letters and we need quickly to move into the phase of the special status of the Castello road.

QUESTION: I am not sure I quite understand, it sounds like you mentioned that there is a problem in terms of getting aid and Mr. Egeland you mentioned that you are expecting or you are hoping that aid will come in the next few days, there seems kind of expecting this to be resolved by tomorrow? Or the next day? And the second question is, you mentioned that Russia is disappointed, what has Russia told you that they are trying to do with the Syrian government to try to make this happen?

SdeM: The second point, you should ask Russia, they are [one of] the two co-chairs, they have been actively involved in very long negotiations and much of it has been on Castello road, frankly, so you should ask them. I do know and I can say, they are actively involved and today we got from them a further assurance that the issue about this facilitation letters is even for them a very major disappointment.

Point number one, regarding the impression that we are in a way having a different approach, no we are not. We are today explaining the reasons why the 20 trucks on the Castello road and the 100s of trucks that we have ready in the country have not yet moved, and that we are actively pushing for that to happen.

Egeland: And we can get the permits today actually, or they can come tomorrow morning and then it is only the time it takes to load trucks and then we will be going to all of these places and the 20 trucks are now already passed over the Turkish border in the buffer zone between the Turkish and Syrian border. They have been waiting and sleeping at the border now for 48 hours so they could go on a minute's notice and we believe that all of these hurdles will now be overcome. The Americans with the local councils in east Aleppo, the Russians with the government.

SdeM: West Aleppo is being reached because it is open road by commercial aid and even there we are ready since we have warehouses. But let me put on record one thing which has been said today, the Turkish side on the border has been extremely cooperative, even during Eid and the argument that some have been using that during Eid offices are closed, we are not taking that in Syria as a valid point, **because Syrian people are hungry**, and in that case, one reason more for going to work during Eid, for doing it like we all have done.

"Transcript of Joint Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura and UN Senior Adviser, Mr. Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 15 Sep 2016. [Boldface added by Standler.]

De Mistura made it absolutely clear that the Assad government is violating the new agreements — de Mistura did *not* mention that Assad is *also* violating numerous United Nations Security Council Resolutions — by refusing to authorize deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria during September. The failure of the Syrian army and insurgents to withdraw from Castello Road in Aleppo is another failure of the new agreements. And [below](#), I quote a Russian report on 15 Sep 2016 of a whopping 45 violations in one day by insurgents of the

new ceasefire agreement. There are additional violations of the ceasefire by Assad's army. Despite optimism by diplomats, the new agreements seem to be collapsing in their third full day.

On Friday, 16 September, the U.S. State Department — including a telephone conversation between Kerry and Lavrov — warned Russia that there will be *no* military cooperation unless there are unrestricted deliveries of humanitarian aid everywhere in Syria. This means Russia must convince Assad to issue the facilitation letters, *and* there also must be aid deliveries in Aleppo. [U.S. State Dept](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). But it seems that neither Russia nor the USA can control the insurgents in Aleppo who are blocking deliveries of humanitarian aid there.

The U.S. and Russia scheduled a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Friday afternoon, 16 September. Russia wanted to introduce a draft resolution that would endorse the 9 September Lavrov/Kerry agreements. But the U.S. refused to make the Lavrov/Kerry agreements public, so the meeting was cancelled. The [Associated Press](#) quoted Russia's Ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, as saying: "we cannot ask them to support a document which they haven't seen". The AP also quotes an anonymous U.S. official as saying: "The United States will not compromise operational security." See also [Reuters](#). One wonders why Kerry would put "operational security" details into the text of a diplomatic agreement, instead of putting the security details into a subsequent memorandum.

The situation with the secret agreements reminds me of the 1978 comedy movie, *Animal House*, about a fraternity composed of stupid slobs. The dean of the college puts the fraternity on "double secret probation", without the knowledge of the fraternity. That's the kind of procedure that John Kerry has used as a solution to the very serious problem of a five-year civil war in Syria.

As chronicled [below](#), during the first four full days of the new agreements, the Russians allege 128 violations by insurgents, there have also been many violations by Assad's army, and there have been *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid anywhere in Syria during September. On 16 September, the Associated Press characterized the new agreements as "may be starting to fray" and Reuters characterized them as "increasingly shaky".

On 15-16 September, Kerry was hosting the *Our Oceans* conference in Washington, DC ([welcome](#); [closing](#)), while the new ceasefire in Syria was collapsing. Maybe if Kerry spent more time on Syria and less time on diversions, the Syria situation would improve.

On 16 September, Obama convened his National Security Council to discuss the war against ISIL. Afterwards, the [White House](#) issued a statement that said, in part, "The President emphasized that the United States will not proceed with the next steps in the arrangement with Russia until we see seven continuous days of reduced violence and sustained humanitarian access." My comment is that, given that the United Nations has been unsuccessfully trying for more than two years to deliver humanitarian aid to Syria, one needs to wait more than 7 days — maybe wait a few months — to see if humanitarian access is really sustained.

On 17 September there was an accidental U.S. airstrike on Syrian army soldiers who were fighting against ISIL, as described [below](#). The Russians threw a snit and accused the U.S. Government of intentionally attacking the Syrian army, and attempting to derail the new agreements. In recent days, Russia has been criticizing the U.S. for failing to convince the rebels/jihadists to separate from Nusra, and the U.S. has been criticizing Russia for failing to convince Assad to authorize deliveries of humanitarian aid. Both Assad and the insurgents — as well as all of the foreign meddlers (including Russia and the USA) — are blameworthy for the failure to deliver humanitarian aid to Aleppo, which is still besieged on 17 September. The [Washington Post](#) reports: “Administration officials said Friday [16 Sep] that it was increasingly clear that Moscow did not have the influence [the U.S.] thought [Russia] had over Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.”

It also appears that the anti-Assad foreign meddlers (including the USA) have little influence — or are unwilling to exert their influence — on rebels and jihadists. The combination of lack of influence may doom *any* Russian/USA agreement. A better approach might be to try to negotiate an agreement between Assad and the insurgent groups, but currently the opposition is unwilling to negotiate. Also, there are many hundreds of rebel and jihadist groups in Syria, and it will be difficult to satisfy *all* of them in negotiations.

Although it is uncertain precisely when the ceasefire began to fail, it was clear to me on 18 Sep that the new ceasefire had failed. On 19 September, Assad's army refused to renew their acceptance of the new ceasefire. There were a huge number of violations by both Assad's army and insurgents, as well as *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria, as mentioned [below](#).

On 19 September, Kerry ignored the fact that Assad's army refused to renew the ceasefire. Instead, Kerry arrogantly said: “The Syrians didn’t make the deal; the Russians made the agreement,” meaning the ceasefire was over only when the Russians say it is over. [NY Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [CNN](#). De Mistura said: “... the only ones who can announce the cease-fire is dead are the two co-chairs and they have today not done so.” [Wall Street Journal](#); [The Guardian](#). Kerry and de Mistura may not be as arrogant as they sound — their words may be intended to keep the ceasefire on life support for a few more days, to see if a miracle will occur.

On 19 September, the spokesman for the U.S. State Department issued a terse three-paragraph statement on the situation in Syria:

We've seen reports from various parties today about the status of the situation in Syria, seven days after the Geneva arrangement went into effect. That arrangement is clear: there must be increased and sustained access for the delivery of humanitarian supplies and seven days of adherence to the cessation of hostilities before we could take next steps on this arrangement, such as establishing the Joint Implementation Center (JIC).

Despite continued attacks by the regime on opposition positions, we have witnessed a measure of reduced violence over the last week. But we have not seen a sustained flow of relief supplies. Indeed, deliveries only began today and only then in limited areas.

We are prepared to extend the cessation of hostilities, while working to strengthen it

and expand deliveries of assistance. We will be consulting with our Russian counterparts to continue to urge them to use their influence on Asad to these ends. While we have seen comments attributed to the Syrian military, our arrangement is with Russia, which is responsible for the Syrian regime's compliance, so we expect Russia to clarify their position.

John Kirby, "On the Current Situation in Syria," [State Dept](#), 19 Sep 2016.

My comments: The U.S. Government position is that the JIC (military cooperation between the U.S. and Russia) will *not* be established at this time, because of frequent violations of the new agreements. Kirby's last sentence probably refers to the Syrian army refusing to extend their recognition of the ceasefire, which expired at midnight on 18 Sep. In reality, the ceasefire was already dead, because of frequent violations by both Assad's military and the insurgents. [Below](#), I take the position that the ceasefire died on 18 September, although it is easy to argue that the ceasefire actually died a few days before 18 Sep.

After Kirby's statement, on 19 Sep either Russian or Assad's warplanes bombed a Syrian Red Crescent humanitarian aid convoy that was unloading at a warehouse, prompting outrage on 20-21 Sep 2016. On 20 Sep, Russian or Assad's warplanes destroyed another medical clinic in Syria. And then on the night of 21 Sep, Assad began heavy airstrikes on Aleppo in a new and ferocious assault. These attacks convinced even the most optimistic diplomats that the ceasefire in Syria was dead.

On 20 September 2016, there was a one-hour meeting of the ISSG, as described [below](#). The ISSG agreed to meet again later in the week.

21 September 2016: UN Security Council

On Wednesday morning, 21 September 2016, there was a three-hour meeting of the United Nations Security Council devoted to the debacle in Syria.

Kerry proposed grounding *all* warplanes in Syria in the vicinity of humanitarian aid routes. Lavrov proposed a three-day pause in the fighting in Syria. Neither Kerry nor Lavrov said how they would enforce their proposal. The Associated Press reported:

"Supposedly we all want the same goal. I've heard that again and again," a visibly angry Kerry told the council. "Everybody sits there and says we want a united Syria, secular, respecting the rights of all people, in which the people of Syria can choose their leadership. But we are proving woefully inadequate in our ability to be able to get to the table and have that conversation and make it happen."

Bradley Klapper, "US, Russia abandon diplomatic niceties in testy Syria debate," [Associated Press](#), 16:15 EDT, 21 Sep 2016.

The U.S. State Department posted a transcript of Kerry's entire speech to the Security Council. Here are a few paragraphs:

I listened to my colleague from Russia [i.e., Lavrov], and I sort of felt a little bit like they're sort of in a parallel universe here. He said that nobody should have any preconditions to come to the table. Well, we met in Vienna twice. We met here in New

York and embraced a United Nations Security Council resolution. We met again in Munich. And in each place, the International Syria Support Group, and here in the Security Council, the Security Council embraced a ceasefire applicable to all parties. That's not a precondition. That's an international agreement, four times arrived at. Four times, countries have said, "We will do this," and four times, it's been shredded by independent actors, by spoilers who don't want a ceasefire.

So this is not a precondition. How can people go sit at a table with a regime that bombs hospitals and drops chlorine gas again and again and again and again and again and again, and acts with impunity? Are you supposed to sit there and have happy talk in Geneva under those circumstances when you've signed up to a ceasefire and you don't adhere to it? What kind of credibility do you have with any of your people?

It's not a precondition; it's something we all agreed on in the United Nations and in the International Syria Support Group. And I have to say the documents which we're prepared to release — we've told people, we announced that yesterday at the International Syria Support Group, people in the support group have the documents — but you don't need to read these documents to understand it's against international law to bomb hospitals. You don't need these documents to understand that you don't drop barrel bombs on children. These are flagrant violations of international law.

So I don't want to obfuscate this process, folks. I didn't come here this morning to do that. Supposedly we all want the same goal. I've heard that again and again. Russia, Iran, the United States, Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, everybody sits there and says we want a united Syria — secular, respecting the rights of all people, in which the people of Syria can choose their leadership. But we are proving woefully inadequate in our ability to be able to get to the table and have that conversation and make it happen.

And let's face it: Everybody in this room understands that there are proxies at this table and proxies outside of this room — and we know who they are — who have the ability to have an impact on the players in this conflict that has provided the greatest humanitarian catastrophe since World War II.

....

If we allow spoilers to choose the path for us — the path of escalation — if we decide not to do what it takes to make this work, this cessation of hostilities, then make no mistake, my friends, the next time we convene here, we're going to be facing a Middle East with even more refugees, with more dead, with more displaced, with more extremists, and more suffering on an even greater scale. That is a certainty.

There is only one choice, and it's to get to that table with Staffan de Mistura and it is get to a negotiation and get a ceasefire so we stop the flow of refugees, stop the suffering, and provide the people of Syria with a chance to breathe, to live.

When this ceasefire first began a few weeks ago [on 27 Feb 2016? or on 12 Sep 2016?], guess what, it worked. People actually — months ago, people actually were out in the streets, they went to cafes again. Some people even demonstrated and felt their

political rights. Other people were able to walk from one place to another with a sense of safety. And all of that dissipated.

....

.... Our hope was that the renewal of cessation of hostilities and the resumption of aid deliveries, the isolation of al-Nusrah and Daesh, and the beginning of a Syrian-led negotiating process could provide a pathway out of the conflict and make possible the restoration of a peaceful Syria.

Now, clearly, there are some people — it includes Assad and his allies, and al-Nusrah and Daesh on the other side — who fear this very outcome. Assad is a spoiler — he doesn't believe in the ceasefire; and al-Nusrah and Daesh are spoilers — they don't want a ceasefire, they want to keep fighting Assad. So the question for us here today is whether we bend to their will or continue to pursue our agenda — as best we can and in every way that we can — a diplomatic solution to this conflict.

.... And if we could get monitoring on the ground, that would be ideal. We'd love to have monitoring on the ground, but most countries you talk to and say, "Would you go in and monitor?" are very, very quick to say, "Not on my life."

....

So I believe that to restore credibility to the process, we must move forward to try to immediately ground all aircraft flying in those key areas in order to de-escalate the situation and give a chance for humanitarian assistance to flow unimpeded. And if that happens, there is a chance of giving credibility back to this process.

John Kerry, "Remarks at the Council Session on Syria," [U.S. State Dept](#), 21 Sep 2016.

My comment is that if Kerry wants to talk about "spoilers" and "proxies", then he should specify the names of those nations or groups. Toward the end of his speech Kerry did identify Assad, Nusra, and ISIL as spoilers. But there are more spoilers: Russia, jihadist groups, nations that support either jihadists, Nusra, or ISIL, Publicly identifying all of the spoilers might shame them into proper behavior.

Kerry was confused whether the "ceasefire first began" on 27 Feb or on 12 Sep, when Kerry said it began "a few weeks ago" but then later added "months ago". Kerry should have said "27 February".

Lavrov criticized the HNC for demanding both a ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid (i.e., preconditions) before the HNC would negotiate in Geneva. Kerry retorted that the opposition would have *no* credibility with the people of Syria if the HNC negotiated with Assad who was bombing hospitals and dropping chlorine gas. Well, the people of Syria want an end to the civil war that has destroyed much of Syria, and that means negotiating with Assad. Kerry's talk about "credibility" obscures the fact that the HNC scuttled the negotiations in Geneva by refusing to negotiate.

Kerry asserts that it is *not* a precondition to obey "an international agreement" — but Kerry

twists words. It *is* a precondition for the HNC to demand compliance with "an international agreement" before the HNC will attend negotiations in Geneva.

Note that, once again, Kerry does *not* call for accountability for violations of a ceasefire, attacks on hospitals, attacks on civilians, besieging cities, attacks on humanitarian aid convoy, use of poison gas, and other possible war crimes. Because there is *no* punishment for these criminal acts, there is *no* deterrence.

De Mistura gave a speech to the Security Council. Because the ceasefire is dead, there are *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria, and *no* resumption of Geneva negotiations in the foreseeable future, I am quoting only a small part of de Mistura's speech.

Firstly, the United Nations has done its due diligence in order to understand the needs and fears of the sides, even if their own starting positions continue to be distant.

Secondly, it should be noted that, despite the horrors on the ground, we have been pleasantly surprised that points of convergence have emerged from intra-Syrian talks about what essential governing principles should frame transition and any end-state constitutional arrangement for Syria in the future. These commonalities demonstrate how potentially close the sides' visions are — at least on the following points: an open, civil, all-inclusive, non-sectarian, pluralist, democratic, unified state, based upon the rule of law, in which all components of Syrian society are recognized, respected and whose fundamental freedoms are enshrined and protected in a new constitution. At least verbally, this is what they seem to agree upon.

Third, in round three both sides accepted that the agenda was indeed political transition.

As soon as talks resume, it is my intention to put proposals to all sides as a starting point — and nothing more than a starting point — for negotiations and as a means by which to move to direct talks — not anymore just proximity talks. The Secretary-General encourages me to present a draft framework to move the sides towards transition through a negotiation.

Fourth, any proposals that I present would proceed upon the basis that the conflict in Syria cannot be resolved militarily — we say that all the time but sometimes don't practice it — but only through a Syrian-owned and [Syrian]-led political negotiating process between the Government and the Opposition, in which a framework is agreed, based upon mutual consent, capable of effecting a genuine, irreversible political transition leading to a new constitution and free and fair elections under international supervision, while preserving the continuity — we are not looking after what happened in Libya for instance — and reform of state institutions, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

Fifth, in our view any viable transition must inevitably:

(a)

(b)

(c) require the creation of collective transitional bodies to oversee a national ceasefire, humanitarian relief and the creation of a calm, neutral environment to enable free peaceful political activity to occur in relation to the adoption of a new constitution and the holding of free and fair elections under international supervision — I know Mr President it sounds like a dream, but that's the plan, and if we don't do that it won't be possible to get there;

(d) be accompanied by sustained international efforts to help reconstruct Syria — and there are already discussions on how to reconstruct Syria — as soon as genuine and verifiable transition gets underway. Therefore ideally, Mr President, the Government needs to understand that transition involves a genuine devolution of power and not just the absorption of the Opposition into the government as it currently exists. While the Opposition therefore needs to understand that transition is not solely about one person or one presidency, or about the transfer of power from one political grouping to another, but about power being exercised differently as Syria moves forward — through negotiations.

....

Let me add and finish because obviously we cannot ignore the “gorilla in the room” — and let me stress that all of this will and can be heavily affected if we cannot overcome the present situation with the restoration of the 9th of September agreement between the two co-chairs which actually gave us a lot of hope and on the basis on which we have been working even harder in order to renew the talks.

"Remarks by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to meeting of the Security Council," [U.N. Geneva](#), 21 Sep 2016.

Note that de Mistura intends to have face-to-face meetings at the next negotiations in Geneva — no more "proximity talks". De Mistura admits it is a "dream" to have a Transitional Governing Body for Syria. De Mistura's speech is difficult to read, because it is a fantasy full of idealism and lofty goals — which will be far from reality. The people of Syria will be fortunate if the civil war ends, clean drinking water is restored, and some buildings are rebuilt. The grubby leaders of Syria — regardless of whether Assad or expatriates in either the Syrian National Coalition or HNC — are *not* capable of operating a democracy with values of Western Europe, Canada, Australia, or the USA. In support of that statement, notice that *none* of the nations in the vicinity of Syria (e.g., Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen) are western-style democracies, with freedom of speech and freedom of the press (except for Israel).

The United Nations Security Council issued a lengthy [press release](#) that summarized the 21 Sep meeting.

24 Sep 2016: Syrian speech to U.N. General Assembly

To show the view of the Syrian government, I am quoting some of the speech to the United Nations General Assembly by Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid Al-Moualem. To be clear, what he says is sometimes false, and sometimes half-true. Reader discretion is advised while reading this propaganda. I have boldfaced a few of the important remarks.

Everyone knows full well that terrorism would not have spread through my country if it hadn't been for the external support of well-known countries. It is no longer a secret that Qatar and Saudi Arabia have played a part in this, promoting their Wahabist Takfirist ideology and their death fatwas that have nothing to do with Islam. They have bragged about supporting terrorism in every way, sending into Syria thousands of mercenaries, equipped with the most sophisticated weapons. Meanwhile, Turkey has opened its border to let in tens of thousands of terrorists from all around the world and has provided them with logistical support and training camps under the supervision of Turkish and western intelligence. It has even supplied these terrorists with direct military support, as was the case in Idlib, Aleppo and rural Latakia.

....

We, in Syria, are combating terrorism on behalf of the whole world. Every time the Syrian Army kills another foreign terrorist, it spares the lives of many innocent people who could have died in a terrorist act carried out by the same terrorist upon returning to his country. Anyone who seeks to distort this fact must be held responsible for the spread of terrorism and the increasing numbers of victims. Our valiant Army deserves to be commended and supported. It must never be the target of schemes and lies.

The terrorist campaign against my country is [taking] place in full view of a polarized world; There are those who have chosen to support international law and the principles of the Charter, while others have decided to turn a blind eye to the truth and to support, finance and arm terrorists, under false pretexts that depart from logic and reason. They choose, for example, to refer to these terrorists as "moderate armed opposition," even though there is irrefutable evidence that these groups have committed against Syrians crimes and massacres that are no less barbaric than those of ISIL or Al-Qaida. Some consider people who take up arms against the state and its citizens "legitimate opposition" as long as they are in Syria, while the exact same people, on any other day and in another country, would be considered terrorists, or at least outlaws.

Despite all of this, **all Syrians; the people, the army and the government, will not relent in their fight against terrorism. They are determined, more than ever before, to eliminate terrorism wherever it exists in their country** and to rebuild a better Syria, because they are well aware that their homeland will cease to exist if the terrorists and their backers emerge victorious.

Our belief in victory is even greater now that **the Syrian Arab Army is making great strides in its war against terrorism**, with the support of the true friends of the Syrian people, notably the Russian Federation, Iran, and the Lebanese national resistance. Such support has helped strengthen the resilience of Syrians and alleviate their suffering. We truly hope that other countries will wake up and realize, before it is too late, the danger that threatens us all.

....

Since the onset of the crisis in 2011, the Syrian government has declared that any solution must follow two parallel tracks; counter-terrorism track and a political track through an intra-Syrian dialogue that allows Syrians to determine the future of their country without foreign interference. All solutions dictated from the outside are categorically rejected by the Syrian people. Likewise, any political solution will not succeed in the absence of the necessary foundations and conditions for its implementation, including intensified counter-terrorism efforts and progress in the national reconciliation process, which has proven successful in a number of areas around Syria.

....

We recall our constructive position regarding the political solution. Such a solution must be based on respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and the unity of its people. It should begin by establishing a government of national unity comprising representatives from the government and the opposition, in all its factions, and tasked with creating a constitution drafting committee. Once the new constitution is approved by Syrians through a referendum, parliamentary elections would follow and a new government would be formed under the new constitution.

....

Ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake: no one is more committed than the Syrian government to ending the suffering of Syrians and providing them with a life of dignity wherever they may be and without exception. This is a duty and not a favor. We will spare no effort to that end, including in cooperation with the United Nations,

"Statement by Walid Al-Moualem at U.N. General Debate," [U.N.](#), 24 Sep 2016. [Boldface added by Standler.]

The United Nations posted a press release that [summarizes](#) this propaganda from Syria.

My comment is that the Syrian government defines *all* insurgents as "terrorists", regardless of whether they are part of the pro-democracy movement that began in 2011, or part of Nusra and ISIL that appeared in 2013. The Syrian government views *all* insurgents as part of an illegal armed insurrection that is attempting to overthrow the legitimate government of Assad. This narrow, simplistic view obscures the fact that the Syrian government might someday include the moderate rebels who want a secular government, but can never include the jihadists, Nusra, and/or ISIL who want to impose an extremist Sunni Islamic government on everyone on Syria.

The Syrian government correctly notes that it is winning the civil war (i.e., "making great strides in its war against terrorism") with help from Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. The Syrian Foreign Minister makes clear that Assad is pursuing a military victory, which Assad himself had declared on 7 June 2016 and 12 Sep 2016.

Walid Al-Moualem notes "the national reconciliation process", which is besieging towns and

bombarding civilians and hospitals until the people are starved into submission to the Syrian government.

Walid Al-Moualem veers into fantasy when he says "no one is more committed than the Syrian government to ending the suffering of Syrians". Yeah, that is why the Syrian government repeatedly refused to authorize deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria. And that is why the Syrian government bombs hospitals and pilfers medical supplies from U.N. trucks containing humanitarian aid. *<sarcastic smirk>* No one should believe this shit about the benevolence of the Syrian government.

22-25 September 2016

On 22 September 2016, there was a 150-minute meeting of the ISSG, as described [below](#). The ISSG again failed to resuscitate the dead ceasefire agreement in Syria.

On Friday, 23 September, the Syrian U.N. Ambassador said there would be no negotiations in Geneva during October 2016. [Reuters](#).

I posted at [rbs0.com](#) the full-text of the new ceasefire agreement that was completed by Lavrov and Kerry on 9 Sep. The ceasefire unraveled in a few days and had completely collapsed on 18 Sep, or maybe a few days before 18 Sep. One of the major goals of these new agreements was unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid in Aleppo. Note the great detail in §3 of the agreement, about the demilitarized zone around Castello Road in Aleppo, so that there can be unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo — something that never happened after the agreement became effective.

On Sunday, 25 September 2016, there was an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council about Syria. De Mistura said:

[¶16] If nothing else, from a humanitarian point of view, we ask this Council:
(1) to press for a cessation of the violence and protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. (2) weekly 48-hour pauses in the fighting to ensure at least that the UN and partners can reach eastern Aleppo — without preconditions neither from the government nor frankly from the opposition. (3) to press for medical evacuations, and there are several cases, for urgent cases from eastern Aleppo.

....

[¶25] I have been asked, Madam President, by many — Mr de Mistura, why don't you resign at this point? Frankly all this is leading nowhere and this will send a strong signal. No I am not. Because any sign of me resigning would be a signal that the international community is abandoning the Syrians, and we will not abandon the Syrians, and neither will you. We don't need that kind of signal that would make news for five minutes and then not only Syria would be abandoned by everyone but also the hope that the international community does believe that we want to get out of the conflict.

Staffan de Mistura, "Briefing to the Security Council on Syria by Special Envoy for Syria,

Staffan de Mistura [as delivered]," [U.N.](#), 25 Sep 2016.

As one would expect, the United Nations Security Council did *nothing*. The Associated Press reported:

An emergency session of the U.N. Security Council on Syria has ended with no action taken as Russia clashed openly with representatives from the United States, Britain and France.

All three Western powers heaped blame on Moscow Sunday [25 Sep] for supporting the offensive by its close ally, Syrian President Bashar Assad, which has been the deadliest of the 5½-year war. And when Syrian Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari was called to speak, all three ambassadors walked out of the council chamber in protest.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin blamed Syria's rebels for sabotaging the Sept. 9 cease-fire agreement by shoring up its forces. And he accused the Western coalition of failing to separate the moderate forces it backs from "terrorist" groups including the al-Qaida-linked Fatah Sham Front [formerly Nusra]. "Bringing a peace is almost an impossible task now," Churkin said.

....

France's U.N. Ambassador Francois Delattre said immediate implementation of the cease-fire agreement, hammered out by the U.S. and Russia, "is our only hope."

....

[U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Samantha] Power said the U.S. knows "that Russia has consistently said one thing, and done the opposite."

"The Latest: UN takes no action after arguments over Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 15:50 EDT, 25 Sep 2016.

The United Nations issued a detailed [summary](#) of the 25 Sep emergency meeting of the Security Council.

De Mistura's description of the damage in Syria is quoted later in this essay, in the section on the violations of the ceasefire in the continuing civil [war](#).

There is no need for de Mistura to resign, as the problems in Syria are definitely *not* his fault. With hindsight, de Mistura should *not* have relied on Russia and the USA to create a ceasefire agreement and then to manage the ceasefire. The U.S. Government has little influence with the rebels/jihadists and was unable to convince them to stop cooperating with Nusra. Russia is more complicated. The most favorable view of Russia would say that Russia has little influence with Assad and was unable to convince Assad to obey the ceasefire. The more realistic view of Russia is that the Russian government actively conspired with Assad to pursue a military victory in Syria, and Russia's discussions about a ceasefire agreement were only an insincere delaying tactic. I say "more realistic view" because Russian warplanes have been actively assisting Assad's military since September 2015, including intense bombing of Aleppo since the night of 21 Sep 2016, plus Russian diplomats defending Assad in the U.N.

Security Council.

But if de Mistura should not have relied on Russia and the USA to create and manage a ceasefire in Syria, then who should have created and managed the ceasefire? My answer is Assad and the opposition should have created the ceasefire in negotiations in Geneva, and any ceasefire should have been monitored by neutral United Nations observers. However, the reality was that the HNC was unwilling to negotiate and Assad wanted to pursue a military victory — which is probably why de Mistura relied on Russia and the USA to create the ceasefire. De Mistura had a Hobson's choice.

I sense that the Russians have been stalling for time during the past few months, certainly since Kerry's meeting in Moscow on 14-15 July and possibly before then. The Russians took advantage of the idealism of Kerry and de Mistura. On the night of 21 Sep, Assad began heavy airstrikes on Aleppo in a new and ferocious assault. The Russian agenda is now clear: to support Assad in his quest for a military victory over the insurgents, including besieging cities. The consequence is that the civil war in Syria will continue for the foreseeable future. There will be *no* peace negotiations in Geneva in the foreseeable future.

It was easy to predict that Russia would fail to perform its commitments in the new agreements on Syria. After Russia illegally annexed the Crimea in February 2014, Russia agreed to a treaty with Ukraine, but then Russia repeatedly violated that treaty. As a consequence, the European Union and the USA placed economic sanctions on Russia. More recently, Russia and the USA created a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for Syria in February 2016, but they were unable (or unwilling) to prevent repeated breaches of that agreement.

25 Sep 2016: rebels/jihadists statement

On 25 September, [Reuters](#) reported that a statement was issued "by more than 30 rebel groups including the biggest faction backed by Turkey, Gulf states and the West". The statement said they would *not* negotiate in Geneva, because the negotiations were futile. Reuters said: "The statement also said rebels could not accept 'Russia as a sponsor because it was a partner with the regime in its crimes against our people'." Reuters did not identify the groups.

The Syrian National Coalition website posted a copy of the statement:

The Assad regime, with the direct backing of its Russian ally and the Iranian militias, has escalated its criminal, barbaric onslaught against our people in Aleppo, employing a scorched-earth policy that is aimed at destroying the city and displacing its residents. This unprecedented escalation came after the Assad regime has unilaterally announced that the ceasefire agreement was over and refused to abide by the provisions of the agreement.

Hundreds of innocent civilians have so far been killed in the Assad regime's ongoing onslaught on the besieged parts of Aleppo. Internationally banned weapons, including napalm and chemical agents, have been used against civilians amid failure of the international community to take clear and concrete action in order to stop these war crimes and to force the regime abide by the UN Security Council resolutions 2042,

2118, 2165, 2209, 2235, and 2254.

We, the undersigned, out of our moral, national obligations towards our people and the revolution, affirm the following:

1. The negotiations process, on its current basis, is meaningless in light of the ongoing bombardment, killing, and destruction which must be stopped fully and immediately in line with international resolutions.
2. Russia can no longer be a sponsor of the negotiations process because it is a partner to the regime's crimes against our people.
3. Any possible UN-sponsored ceasefire or cessation of hostilities agreement must ensure and end to all bombardments, killings, and forced displacements. It is imperative that it also ensures the lifting of the sieges and the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid under the United Nations supervision. All so-called agreements that the regime extorted from residents of the besieged areas under its "kneel or starve" policy to forcibly displace them must be annulled and reversed.
4. All relevant UN Security Council resolutions must be implemented immediately and fully, especially those related to humanitarian issues which must not be subject to negotiations.
5. The Assad regime must be held accountable for using chemical weapons against civilians in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 2118 as the regime's use of chemical weapons has now been confirmed by the UN-OPCW investigative panel tasked with investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria.
6. We call on representatives of the Syrian Coalition and armed revolutionary groups in the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) to hold consultations and consider the available options.
7. We call upon the UN Security Council to establish an official investigative panel to investigate the targeting of an aid convoy by Russian and Assad regime warplanes. We stress that those responsible must be referred to the International Criminal Court and be charged with war crimes.

Finally, we call upon the United Nations, the UN Security Council, and countries of the Friends of Syria Group to assume their responsibilities and put an immediate end to the war crimes perpetrated against the Syrian people and to take urgent, concrete action to ensure civilian are protected in Syria.

"Joint Statement by the Armed Revolutionary Groups and the Syrian National Coalition," [SNC](#), 25 Sep 2016.

The signatories are 32 rebel and jihadist groups, including Jaish Al-Islam.

My comment is that most of this statement is a futile cry for help.

In point 3, there is no way that the United Nations can "ensure an end to all bombardments, killings, and forced displacements." In point 4, they demand the immediate implementation of all U.N. Resolutions, which is a fantasy. In point 7, about referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court is futile because Russia will veto any referral. In their last paragraph, they call on the United Nations Security Council to do something, but that call is futile, because Russia will veto any effective action. Their call on the Friends of Syria Group to do something is ludicrous — that group has done nothing in its entire history except issue communiqués that were forgotten a few days later.

This statement shows the rebels and jihadist groups lack an understanding of how the United Nations functions. The United Nations Secretary General does *not* have a magic wand to wave and force tyrants to conform their behavior to U.N. Resolutions. The position of these rebels and jihadists is weak, and they are poised to be annihilated by Assad and Russia.

26-30 September 2016

On Monday, 26 September 2016, the [Associated Press](#) quoted the Syrian Foreign Minister as saying the ceasefire agreement is "not dead". He is *not* credible, given Assad's continuing airstrikes on civilians in Syria. If Assad really wanted a ceasefire, Assad *could* ground his warplanes.

On Monday, 26 September, the White House press briefing contained the following on Syria. Because Earnest is verbose, I have boldfaced some important parts.

QUESTION: Wanted to ask about Aleppo as well. It seems like the news reports are indicating that it becomes more dire by the hour. And can you provide some update of what the administration is doing to try to stop the carnage? And is it warming to the prospects of expanding the sanctions regime, as some in Congress want to do?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Kevin, **the situation in Syria continues to worsen.** And the situation in Syria has been terrible and the bloodshed sickening. But we've seen that, over the weekend, it just got worse. And I think anybody who's following these news reports, whether you're an official with the United States government or just a human being reading the news, understanding the toll that this violence is taking on the lives of so many innocent people, you've got to be deeply concerned about it. And the President certainly is.

What we have seen from the Assad regime and the Russians is a concerted campaign to strike civilian targets to bomb civilians into submission. And it's taken a variety of forms. And over the weekend, we saw the specific targeting of the headquarters, or staging areas used by the White Helmets — the relief organization, the first responders in Syria — that are just trying to provide for the basic needs and safety and well-being of citizens who are caught in the crossfire.

There were also military strikes against the facilities that ensure that civilians in eastern Aleppo have access to drinking water. The idea of weaponizing access to a clean water supply for civilians is beyond the pale. And people of good conscience around the

world should speak up, and are speaking up. And I know that there was a vigorous discussion about this at the U.N. Security Council just last night [25 Sep]. And I certainly would encourage you to take a look at the remarks from Ambassador Power, where she talked about this situation and tried to make a very forceful case about the consequences of this situation for the rest of the international community, and how important it is for the international community to speak with one voice in condemning these actions and not allowing these norms to be eroded.

....

QUESTION: You've talked extensively in this room about how — on or off the table really at this point. Diplomacy is your path forward, a political decision has to be made. The situation being so acute in Aleppo, as you've described — bombing waterways, U.N. says using bunker buster bombs to blow up underground hospitals and bomb shelters — in targeting the same kind of civil society that the administration is arguing should be involved in negotiations in the future, if you're targeting and eliminating populations who would be at that table, how can you still support credibly that that's your policy diplomatically to lead to negotiations without defending those people?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Margaret, you are right that **it is very difficult to engage diplomatically, and it's very difficult to follow through on specific diplomatically negotiated solutions while what you're describing is taking place.** That's why all along, throughout the talks that we've had with the Russians, we've insisted that there be a protracted period of calm and that the steady flow of humanitarian assistance is able to move into those communities that need it the most. That has always been essentially the precondition for any sort of negotiated cooperation between the United States and Russia.

QUESTION: Didn't they provide their answer to that proposal? I mean, with the bombings that you've seen in the past few days? The French ambassador at the U.N. and the French ambassador here in Washington is basically saying the Russians have shown us they either can't or won't deliver Assad. But you disagree? You think they can and possibly will still deliver Assad?

MR. EARNEST: Well, I think the question right now, Margaret, is **are they willing to live up the commitments that they previously made. Obviously the doubt about that grows every day, particularly as we see those attacks worsen.** And, yes, there continue to be questions about whether or not Russia is capable of or willing to exercise influence over the Assad regime to reduce the violence inside of Syria. There are doubts about that, and those doubts only grow as these attacks worsen.

So, no, there's not been much that I've had to say today or even over the last several days that sound like they are defending Russia's capabilities or credibility. If anything, the doubts harbored by the administration about Russia and their intent are growing.

....

MR. EARNEST: Well, coordination is what Russia says is what they want. And it will not be provided by the United States until they deliver on the commitments that they have made. And they have not delivered on those commitments. If anything, they have walked back from them.

So the United States has not been in the position where we are providing anything to the Russians. I think the question right now on the part of the United States is, what is it that we can do to build a movement toward peace. And that search has been rather fruitless in the last few days.

....

QUESTION: You probably answered this, but I just want to understand, are you willing to cut yet another deal with the Russians? Is this the last deal they have to live up to in order for things to happen? Where are you in your negotiations with the Russians? Again, are you sitting at the table ready to do — strike yet another deal that they would potentially walk away from, as they have this last one?

MR. EARNEST: Well, Gardiner, **it is hard to imagine the United States reaching any other negotiated agreement with the Russians until they live up to the commitments that they've made to reduce the violence and allow for the free flow of humanitarian access and aid to the communities that need it most in Syria.**

So that's the state of play. The international community is awaiting a tangible sign from the Russians that they're prepared to live up to the commitments that they've made. Thus far, their credibility is increasingly flimsy and doubts are rising about whether or not they have the influence with the Assad regime that they claim to have.

And, look, if the conclusion of the international community is that Russia doesn't have the influence that they claim to have with the Assad regime, then, yes, that probably means we're going to have to pursue a different path to reaching the kind of political transition that we know is necessary to address the chaotic situation inside of Syria.

QUESTION: Does that mean this notion of sharing targeting information with the Russians -- is that off the table forever? Or is it still out there, potentially, if the Russians live up to this past deal?

MR. EARNEST: I think the way that I would say it, Gardiner, is that it is not going to be on the table until we see the Russians live up to the commitments that they've made in terms of reducing violence and allowing humanitarian aid to be delivered with some consistency. And over the last week, week and a half, we have not seen that, despite Russia's stated commitments. And that's why **it's difficult to envision any sort of military cooperation with them**, because all along that military cooperation was contingent on Russia performing the duties they committed to perform. And not only have they failed in that effort, they've actually be doubling down on the kinds of strategies that we've been trying to prevent in the first place.

"Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 9/26/16," [White House](#), began at 13:15 EDT, 26 Sep 2016. [Boldface by Standler.]

My comment is that Mr. Earnest rather verbosely and inarticulately hinted that the U.S. Government was reluctant to do more negotiations with Russia, given that the Russians had failed to perform their past commitments. Earnest does not seem to grasp that Russian warplanes are actively violating ceasefires, attacking civilians, besieging cities, etc. Not only did Russia fail to convince Assad to honor the ceasefire and allow deliveries of humanitarian aid — but also Russia itself is actively violating the ceasefire agreement by conducting airstrikes.

Because of the continuing violations of ceasefire and continuing failure to deliver humanitarian aid to Aleppo, the U.S. Military will *not* cooperate with Russia in airstrikes on Nusra, something the Russians really wanted.

I wish that Earnest had clearly said that U.S. patience with Russia had expired and there would be *no* more negotiations with the Russians about Syria, because of Russia's lies, delay, and complicity in war crimes in Syria. Negotiations with the Russians in the ISSG since 30 Oct 2015, and one-on-one negotiations about Cessation of Hostilities Agreements since 11 Feb 2016, have produced *no* results, except a partial ceasefire in March 2016 and a temporary delivery of humanitarian aid.

On Tuesday, 27 September, [Reuters](#) reported that the *al-Akhbar* newspaper in Lebanon had printed an interview with Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah. He plainly said: "There are no prospects for political solutions [for Syria] ... the final word is for the battlefield." See also [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon and [PressTV](#) in Iran. My comment is that Nasrallah, a vile anti-Semitic terrorist, is more honest than most diplomats in the ISSG.

On Wednesday, 28 September, John Kerry called Lavrov on the telephone and threatened to end all cooperation with Russia on Syria. Here is the entire U.S. State Department press release on that telephone conversation:

Secretary Kerry spoke this morning [28 Sep] via phone with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Secretary Kerry expressed grave concern over the deteriorating situation in Syria, particularly for continued Russian and Syrian regime attacks on hospitals, the water supply network, and other civilian infrastructure in Aleppo. The Secretary made clear the United States and its partners hold Russia responsible for this situation, including the use of incendiary and bunker buster bombs in an urban environment, a drastic escalation that puts civilians at great risk.

The Secretary stressed that the burden remains on Russia to stop this assault and allow humanitarian access to Aleppo and other areas in need. He informed the Foreign Minister that the United States is making preparations to suspend U.S.-Russia bilateral engagement on Syria — including on the establishment of the Joint Implementation Center — unless Russia takes immediate steps to end the assault on Aleppo and restore the cessation of hostilities.

John Kirby, "Secretary Kerry's Call With Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov," [State Dept](#), 28 Sep 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

It was unclear what effect Kerry's words would have.

....

Kerry's threat aside, the U.S. has few other options beyond engaging Moscow to end the fighting between Assad's forces and rebels.

Obama has made clear he won't authorize military action against Syria and the presence of Russian air assets alongside Syrian forces makes such a scenario all the more unlikely. The U.S. is similarly uncomfortable ramping up military support for anti-Assad rebels given the close ties even the so-called "moderate" groups maintain with al-Qaida-linked militants.

Peace efforts without Russia are unlikely to win over Assad. And green-lighting Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey or other countries to provide more weapons to the rebels could only make the war deadlier. Already, as many as 500,000 people have been killed.

Bradley Klapper, "Kerry threatens Russia with end to joint Syria diplomacy," [Associated Press](#), 12:54 EDT, 28 Sep 2016.

My comment is that the U.S. Government *should* have suspended all cooperation with Russia on 23 September, when the Russians failed to perform their duties under the 9 Sep agreements. Back on 15 June, Kerry bleated: "our patience is not infinite", a slogan he continued to repeat until it was meaningless. Discussions at the United Nations Security Council meetings on 21 and 25 Sep, and also at the ISSG meeting on 22 Sep, should have put the Russians on notice that they were expected to stop airstrikes on Aleppo, and obey other parts of the 9 Sep agreements.

The Joint Implementation Center (JIC) should be permanently canceled, as the U.S. should *not* be sharing military intelligence and planning airstrikes with the barbaric Russians. If that was not clear on 9 Sep, it should be obvious now. Not only are Russian airstrikes violating the ceasefire in Syria, but also a Dutch report on 28 Sep concluded that a Russian anti-aircraft missile fired by Russian-supported rebels in the Ukraine destroyed a commercial airliner (MH17) on 17 July 2014, killing 298 people. [State Dept](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

The Russian government was angry at the threatening tone by Kerry on 28 Sep. On 29 September at 11:57 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported that the spokesman for the Kremlin declared that Russian warplanes would continue airstrikes in Syria against "terrorists". The [Associated Press](#) had a similar report.

On 29 September, Kerry publicly declared at The Atlantic and Aspen Institute: "I think we're on the verge of suspending the discussion [with Russia], because ... it's irrational in the context of the kind of bombing taking place to be sitting there trying to take things seriously." [State Dept](#).

My comment is that Kerry reminds me of a parent with a misbehaving child, and the parent ineffectually *threatens* the child with punishment if the child continues to misbehave. Of course, the child continues to misbehave, because the child *knows* he/she will *not* be punished. On the rare occasion that the parent attempts punishment, the child puts up a fierce resistance, and the parent relents and abandons the punishment. It's a pathetic situation. In my opinion, Kerry *should* have ended all discussions with Russia on 23 Sep, when the ISSG meeting failed to resuscitate the ceasefire.

On 28 September 2016, the United Nations Security Council had a meeting to discuss attacks on hospitals in war zones. That meeting is mentioned [below](#).

On 29 September 2016, there was another United Nations Security Council meeting on Syria. The United Nations issued a detailed [summary](#) of the meeting. Here is what the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations said:

.... What Assad and Russia are doing in Aleppo is soul-shattering. Seventeen-hundred strikes — 1,700 — in just a portion of a city. Let's not forget we're talking about eastern Aleppo. More than a thousand people killed, and those are just the ones we know about. Hundreds of people buried in rubble who can't be rescued because the White Helmets have been deliberately targeted. White Helmet headquarters targeted in two different parts of town in close succession — two opposite parts of town. And an attempt to starve and bomb people in eastern Aleppo in a way, again, that is grotesque.

You saw yesterday how the Syrian ambassador feels about the death, the slaughter, of the Syrian people in Aleppo — he laughed. The Syrian regime negotiator in Geneva laughed. That's the coldness and the brutality that we're talking about, and Russia stands right alongside those individuals and those bombers and, again, is not backing the regime — is fighting alongside the regime, bombing alongside the regime, exceeding in brutality what we have seen from the regime in the life of this war.

So this is a race to the bottom, and we're at a turning point. Assad and Russia are unleashing a savagery against people they call terrorists. Children are not terrorists. Breadlines — and the individuals within breadlines — are not terrorists. Rescue workers are not terrorists. Hospital workers are not terrorists.

What they are doing is sowing not only the doom of this country and these people and this proud civilization of Syria, but it is going to generate more refugee flow, more radicalization. What they are doing is a gift to ISIL and Al-Nusrah, the groups that they claim that they want to stop.

Samantha Power, "Remarks before UN Security Council Consultations on Syria," [USUN](#), 29 Sep 2016.

Conclusion to Geneva Negotiations

Let's review the situation in Syria on 30 September 2016. A number of significant events happened during the month of September 2016:

Kerry and Lavrov negotiated a new ceasefire agreement on 9 Sep 2016.

- The new agreement became effective at sunset on 12 Sep, but within a few days there were numerous violations by both Assad, the insurgents, and Russians, as chronicled [below](#). The new ceasefire had completely collapsed by 18 Sep.
 - On 19 Sep, the Syrian army declared it would *not* renew its "observance" of the new ceasefire agreement. Also on 19 Sep, there were airstrikes on a humanitarian aid convoy that was unloading at a warehouse. On 20 Sep a medical clinic was bombed, and on 28 Sep two hospitals in Aleppo were bombed. And on the night of 21 Sep, Assad and Russia began a new assault on Aleppo. In summary, the barbarians and war criminals were really busy during the second week of the new so-called "ceasefire".
 - A major goal of the new agreements on 9 Sep was the "unhindered" delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria. The reality was there were *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid to Aleppo during September. There were deliveries of humanitarian aid to only six towns in Syria during 22-25 Sep, which is a pathetically weak response.
 - The ISSG met on 20 and 22 Sep, but did nothing, as chronicled [below](#). I characterized the ISSG as "a complete failure."
 - On 30 Sep 2016, Kerry is continuing to talk with Russian war criminals about resuscitating or amending the 9 Sep agreements.
 - The civil war returned to Syria, and there will be *no* negotiations in Geneva during the foreseeable future. While de Mistura refused to publicly recognize this fact, the opposition refuses to meet in Geneva. Further, the ISSG has apparently collapsed. So not only is the situation on the ground in Syria continuing to worsen, but also the peace process itself has completely collapsed.
-

Friends of Syria Meeting

On 7 September 2016 there was a 90-minute meeting of the Friends of Syria group in London, at the International Institute for Strategic [Studies](#). Remember that the Friends of Syria group are all anti-Assad — there is *no* attendance by Assad's government, Russia, or Iran. The main event at the 7 Sep meeting was the HNC presented their 25-page plan for a political transition in Syria.

Riad Hijab, the head of the HNC, posted the HNC plan, from which I quote the summary of the process on pages 3-5 of the 25-page plan:

The political transition process shall be divided into three main phases.

1. The first phase begins with the negotiation process that shall last for six months, launched on the basis of an agenda that reflects the principles stated in the

Geneva Communiqué as set forth in UNSC Resolutions 2118 and 2254. Both negotiating parties shall commit to a temporary truce, through which practical foundations for the implementation of the UNSC Resolutions will be set out. This shall be done in conjunction with the immediate and unconditional implementation of paragraphs 12, 13 and 14 of UNSC Resolution 2254 of 2015 and all obligations stipulated in International Humanitarian Law, especially in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its additional Protocols, which require an end to committing war crimes and crimes against humanity; ceasing all combat operations as well as all forms of artillery and aerial bombardment and illegal attacks against civilians; lifting the siege on all towns and areas; allowing humanitarian access; releasing detainees and disclosing the fate of all forcibly disappeared persons in prisons; abiding by international law and respecting human rights; putting an end to all forced displacement and arbitrary executions; returning internally displaced persons and refugees to their home areas; developing enforcement mechanisms in case of procrastination by the regime; and providing the international community with the necessary guarantees for the success of the negotiation process.

2. The second phase is the transitional period that shall last for a year and a half, which starts immediately upon the agreement of the two negotiating parties on the basic principles of the transitional process and a signed agreement that puts this phase within an inclusive constitutional framework and a comprehensive and final cessation of hostilities. The establishment of the Transitional Governing Body shall require the departure of Bashar al-Assad and his clique who committed heinous crimes against the Syrian people. A new constitution shall be drafted during this phase, in addition to issuing the necessary laws for holding administrative, legislative and presidential elections.

The TGB shall assume full executive powers that include:

- issuing a provisional constitutional declaration that shall be applied throughout the transitional period;
- creating a caretaker government, a joint military council, a high constitutional court, a reconstruction commission, and a national reconciliation commission;
- holding an inclusive national dialogue;
- restructuring the security sector;
- supervising the management of internal affairs and a local administration system based on the principle of administrative decentralization; ensuring the continuity and functioning of ministries, institutions, and public service bodies.

Combating and confronting terrorism — be it state terrorism practiced by the regime, or terrorism of individuals, groups and organizations — and eradicating the ideological, political, and organizational incubators that breed extremism, sectarianism, political tyranny, and corruption; as well as the departure of all various foreign troops.

During this period, A new political system shall be established based on a number of basic principles, including:

- the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Syria;
- a multi-party state based on freedom, democratic practice, inclusiveness, representation, and citizenship;
- the rule of law, human rights, and accountability, with effective mechanisms to ensure respect of human rights and dignity for all Syrians, and ensuring Syrians' right to full participation in the political process.

The Kurdish cause shall be considered a national Syrian cause and action shall be taken to ensure their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural rights in the constitution. There shall be an inclusive national dialogue launch with no exceptions or exclusions.

3. The end of the transitional period shall mark the inauguration of the third phase that represents a final transition through the implementation of the outcomes of the national dialogue and the constitutional revision. Local, legislative, and presidential elections shall be held under the supervision and with the technical support of the United Nations. The basic principles set forth in the interim agreement shall remain in force as part of the new constitution that should be based on the principle of citizenship, which stipulates:
 - separation of powers;
 - independence of judiciary;
 - freedom of the press;
 - political impartiality of the military and armed forces which shall be under the control of the legitimate government that is supported by a parliamentary majority; and
 - the creation of an economic system that takes into account social justice and that can benefit all Syrians without favoritism or discrimination.

The High Negotiation Commission, "Executive Framework for a Political Solution Based on the Geneva Communiqué," RiadHijab.com, September 2016. [Some typographical errors corrected by Standler, indented lists inserted by Standler.]

There is another copy posted at the International Institute for Strategic [Studies](#), where the Friends of Syria meeting was held. The Institute also posted a copy of the [slides](#) shown by Riad Hijab during his presentation.

After the meeting, Riad Hijab declared that the HNC would reject any plan drafted by Russia and the USA that significantly differs from the HNC plan. [Reuters](#). This is yet another nonnegotiable demand from the HNC, the group that scuttled the Geneva negotiations during 2016.

The HNC demand that Assad depart at the beginning of the Transitional Governing Body (second of three phases) is a nonstarter that will be rejected by Assad's government. Immediately, Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad condemned the HNC's demand that Assad leave office. [BBC](#). My comment is the HNC *talks* about democracy, but refuses to hold a nationwide election in which Assad is one of the candidates. The HNC refuses to allow the *people* to decide the leader of Syria.

The [BBC](#) tersely reports that Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said: "But if Bashar al-

Assad continues to be obstinate and continues to drag his feet and continues to refuse to engage seriously, then obviously there will have to be a Plan B which will involve more stepped up military activity." (Recall Kerry's outburst on 3 May 2016 in which he threatened Plan B.) My comment is that the Saudi military has been unable to defeat one Iranian-sponsored terrorist group in Yemen, and it is *not* reasonable for the Saudi military to fight against Assad's experienced military plus the Russian air force and Hezbollah.

There appears to be *no* Communiqué issued by this Friends of Syria meeting. I checked the websites of both the U.K. Foreign Office and the U.S. State Department on the nights of 7, 8, and 9 September, but found no Communiqué from the meeting on 7 Sep. The host, the U.K. Foreign Office, did post a [news story](#) on the day before the meeting. And the U.K. Foreign Minister, Boris Johnson, wrote an opinion that was published in *The Times* of London, which is only available by paying for a subscription.

Many major news sources in the UK and USA failed to cover this Friends of Syria meeting. I have collected links to some reports by journalists on 7 Sep, e.g., [Wall Street Journal](#); [Middle East Eye](#); [Middle East Monitor](#); [BBC](#); [Associated Press](#)(blog at 15:00 and 15:50 Beirut time); [Reuters](#).

On 8 September, the BBC published a discussion of the HNC plan:

.... Now in its sixth year of bitter civil war, the Syrian conflict has fragmented the country. It has sent millions on the road to internal displacement or to become refugees abroad. The true death toll is unquantifiable.

More dismal still, the fighting shows no sign of ending. Indeed, as it has gone on, external powers have been drawn in — Russia, Iran and Turkey all have troops or aircraft engaged in combat, not to mention the never-admitted role of small numbers of Western and Arab special forces, advising the rebels.

What began as a conflict between President Assad and sections of his own people has become a wider regional struggle. Syria has become the theatre for a battle between Sunni Arab states and Iran; between the West (along with its Arab and Turkish allies) against so-called Islamic State; and between Turkey and the Kurds, who Ankara sees as a threat to its own territorial integrity.

....

So what then was this London gathering all about? Or to put it another way, just who exactly does the High Negotiation Committee represent?

Ask a Western diplomat this question and you will get a stock answer: "The HNC is the most representative group formed since the Syrian revolution began," I was told. "It represents a number of major political forces along with independents."

In response to my sceptical gaze there was a quick addendum: "We acknowledge that there is a large middle ground in Syria that does not [yet] support the HNC. We hope the new peace plan encourages more people to back them."

So the HNC is that elusive thing that the West has been seeking throughout this conflict — Syrian democrats and people backing a pluralistic inclusive society. And it is the related collection of militias — the Free Syrian army — that has garnered the bulk of Western practical support.

....

[Assad,] and what Dr Hijab called "his clique"[,] had to go and there was a strong demand that many of them should face justice. But when I asked [Hijab] just where the boundaries of the "Assad clique" lay, he was evasive. Many military officers, he said, had already defected to the rebels. But what about those serving in operations currently under way, not to mention their soldiers? Are they to be purged, retired, prosecuted or what? To be fair, these are not easy questions....

....

The HNC plan is based on the Geneva communique of 2012 — the only moment of any real diplomatic consensus on Syria. But that moment was fleeting. Since then Russia and Iran have intervened to prop up the Syrian regime and the conflict has increasingly taken on a regional dimension.

....

The best that can be said about the transition plan is that it contains much that is good; it shows an understanding of many of the problems but for now it is a document that will largely sit on a shelf collecting dust.

The hope is that one day, when a peace plan for Syria is needed, then it can be taken down and dusted off, giving the peacemakers a running start to achieve a solution.

Jonathan Marcus, "Syria: The long path to peace," [BBC](#), 8 Sep 2016.

My comment is that the HNC does *not* represent the people of Syria. The HNC is a bunch of self-appointed expatriates, some of whom represent rebel or jihadist groups in Syria. I believe the HNC is focused on installing itself as the next government of Syria, after Assad is removed.

On 8 September, the *Los Angeles Times* published an insightful analysis of the HNC plan. Recent battlefield successes have left President Bashar Assad little incentive to consider the road map to a political transition presented at a meeting in London this week by the High Negotiations Committee,

....

Analysts said the opposition bloc's [HNC's] plan might have more to do with seizing the moral high ground and papering over the disarray in rebel ranks than with coming up with viable options to end the war.

“The narrative about the Syrian opposition in the last year or so is that these are gangs

of jihadists who would be even worse for Syria than if the regime continues,” said Mouin Rabbani, a former adviser to the U.N. envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura. “By doing this, they’re trying to show they’re enlightened and inclusive.”

Even if the government were to reach agreement with the High Negotiations Committee, there are dozens of factions arrayed against Assad, each with its own shifting agenda, and the group does not speak for all of them.

“A diplomatic deal becomes realistic when you have fixed players that have the power to concede and enforce compliance. This basic prerequisite hasn’t been met,” said Ramzy Mardini, a nonresident scholar at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank.

....

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, who hosted the meeting Wednesday at which opposition negotiators laid out their proposals to foreign ministers, said there was “still a chance that this vision can be made to work.”

....

At least one major faction, the Front for the Conquest of Syria, the group formerly known as Al Nusra Front, rejected the committee’s blueprint out of hand. Alexandra Zavis & Nabih Bulos, "Why a new opposition road map isn't the breakthrough negotiators are seeking in Syria," [LA Times](#), 18:40 PDT, 8 Sep 2016.

The Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 was written at a time when foreign diplomats expected the Assad regime would soon collapse, and Syria would need a new government. Now, a better plan would be to continue the Assad government with the inclusion of rebels. This requires two changes, neither of which are likely:

1. The USA, Western Europe, and Sunni-majority nations in the Middle East all need to abandon their obsession with deposing Assad, an obsession that has continued a futile civil war that is slaughtering civilians and destroying buildings. As part of abandoning their obsession, these foreign meddlers need to stop supplying weapons and ammunition to insurgents in Syria.
2. The rebels need to surrender to Assad. Ideally, the rebels would be reintegrated into Assad's army.

The Syrian government — with the help of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and whoever else wants to fight Islamic terrorism — can focus on defeating Nusra, ISIL, and various jihadist groups.

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](#)

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 the first eight months of 2016, despite significant problems in Syria. In my essay for August 2016, I said: "it appears that the ISSG is dead."

The ISSG agreements of February and May for a ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria have also died. The Lavrov-Kerry new agreements of 9 September 2016 died on or about 18 September, and efforts to resuscitate these agreements have failed, as described below.

20 Sep 2016: ISSG Meeting

On 19 September 2016, it was announced that the ISSG would meet on Tuesday, 20 September on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly annual meeting in

New York City. On 19 Sep, France again called for the new agreements to be made public.
[Associated Press](#).

The ISSG meeting on 20 September might have been another routine meeting in which the ISSG endorses a Russian/USA agreement that is presented as a *fait accompli*. But Kerry only recently distributed the text of the new agreements to the members of the ISSG. Also there were a huge number of violations of the new agreements by both Assad's army and insurgents during the first seven days, as well as *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria, and Assad's army rejected the new ceasefire on 19 September, as described [below](#) — so the new agreements were already dead when the ISSG met on 20 September.

I posted the U.S. summary of the 20 September meetings at [rbs0.com](#).

Reuters reported on the ISSG meeting:

"The ceasefire is not dead," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told reporters as he emerged from the gathering of the International Syria Support Group together with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

....

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier struck a decidedly pessimistic note about the chances of halting violence in the Syrian civil war, now in its sixth year, as he arrived for the meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly. "We will have to reflect if there are ways back to negotiations on a truce, or if this has already become hopeless," Steinmeier told reporters before the meeting in a New York luxury hotel.

Speaking afterwards, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault also voiced doubts. "It was a dramatic meeting. Is there still a chance this ceasefire will be effective? I can't answer that question," Ayrault told reporters. "Without (a) ceasefire it will be (a) spiral of war, but we have to be honest, the U.S.-Russian negotiation has reached its limits."

United Nations special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said the group would meet again in New York on Friday [23 Sep].

....

[In his final address to the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations,] U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accused the Syrian government of killing the most civilians during the civil war and said "powerful patrons that keep feeding the war machine also have blood on their hands."

John Irish & Lesley Wroughton, "U.S. says Syria ceasefire not dead, others sceptical," [Reuters](#), 10:37 EDT (14:37 GMT), 20 Sep 2016.

Here are the first two, and last two, paragraphs on Syria in Ban's speech to the United Nations General Assembly:

In today's world, the conflict in Syria is taking the greatest number of lives and sowing

the widest instability. There is no military solution. Many groups have killed many innocents — but none more so than the Government of Syria, which continues to barrel bomb neighbourhoods and systematically torture thousands of detainees. Powerful patrons that keep feeding the war machine also have blood on their hands. Present in this Hall today are representatives of governments that have ignored, facilitated, funded, participated in or even planned and carried out atrocities inflicted by all sides of the Syria conflict against Syrian civilians.

Just when we think it cannot get any worse, the bar of depravity sinks lower. Yesterday's sickening, savage, and apparently deliberate attack on a UN-Syrian Arab Red Crescent aid convoy is the latest example.

....

Accountability for crimes such as these is essential.

I appeal to all those with influence to end the fighting and get talks started. A political transition is long overdue. After so much violence and misrule, the future of Syria should not rest on the fate of a single man [i.e., Assad].

Ban Ki-moon, "Secretary-General's Address to the General Assembly," [U.N.](#), 20 Sep 2016.

My comment is that those "powerful patrons that keep feeding the war machine" are members of the ISSG. Unsurprisingly, foreign meddlers who are "feeding the war machine" have failed to organize a ceasefire in Syria. My essay for [May 2016](#) collected quotations from Ban in 2013 and 2014 on the need to end the flow of munitions into Syria. Ban was ignored then, and Ban is ignored now.

[Reuters](#) paraphrased Riad Hijab, head of the HNC: "international efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Syria's civil war were doomed without any credible mechanism to designate blame or attribute consequences." That is not surprising, because Russia protects Assad, and because the U.S. Government protects rebels and jihadists (e.g., Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam). Note that the HNC benefitted from the U.S. protection in May 2016, when Russia attempted to designate Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam — members of the HNC — as terrorist organizations.

The Associated Press reported on the ISSG meeting on Tuesday, 20 September:

Another city, another Syria meeting. Another failure. Tuesday's gathering of the top U.S. and Russian diplomats, and more than a dozen of their Arab and European counterparts, ended with ritual reaffirmation of a cease-fire that has all but disintegrated, and promises of future negotiations. But it left Syria no closer to peace.

....

The discussion led by Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov lasted only about an hour, after the two met privately beforehand. Goals were modest, focused on holding onto what might be salvageable from a week-old truce that had at least temporarily reduced the bloodshed. Gone were the loftier ambitions of creating a new, U.S.-Russian military partnership against Islamic State

militants and al-Qaida, once envisioned to start Tuesday.

....

[French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc] Ayrault, who has criticized Washington for not releasing the cease-fire agreement, said the U.S.-Russian negotiations "have reached their limits."

Bradley Klapper & Matthew Lee, "International gathering again puts Syria no closer to peace," [Associated Press](#), 14:35 EDT, 20 Sep 2016.

My comment is that the above Associated Press article is a breath of fresh air, amongst all of the diplomatic obfuscation and propaganda.

22 Sep 2016: ISSG Meeting

On 21 September, it was announced that there would be another meeting of the ISSG on Thursday, 22 September at 14:00 EDT, again on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly meeting. [Reuters](#).

On 22 September, Russia rejected Kerry's 21 Sep suggestion that *all* warplanes be grounded in Syria. [RIA-Novosti](#). My comment is that it was easily predictable that Russia would oppose grounding its own warplanes, because grounding Russian warplanes would render Russia impotent in supporting Assad's military.

The situation on the ground became more worser during the ISSG meeting, when Assad began a new military offensive in rebel-controlled eastern Aleppo. Since the HNC walked out of the negotiations in Geneva on 18 April 2016, the situation on the ground in Syria has gotten worse, worser, — and now we strain the English language for nonvulgar words to describe the situation — even more worser.

After the ISSG meeting on 22 September, Kerry made a long statement to journalists:

Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for your patience. There are reports that even as we were meeting this afternoon, a regime offensive was taking place in Aleppo, which is exactly the kind of regime action that has done so much damage to this process and to the credibility of the concept of restraint or ceasefire.

As I said yesterday [21 Sep] in the UN Security Council, this is a moment of truth for Russia, it's a moment of truth for the Assad regime and for the opposition. And it's a moment of truth for everybody, all of us, who are determined to try to end this war in Syria and to defeat the terrorist groups Nusrah and Daesh/ISIL.

....

Now, obviously, no one can possibly be satisfied with the events that have unfolded in the last few days — far, far from it. The cessation [of hostilities beginning 27 February] offered a glimmer of what could be achieved in the first few days when violence dropped significantly, but then the spoilers went to work. Humanitarian aid deliveries

were blocked. The ceasefire was violated by one or the other again and again. And accusations were then exchanged. And then Monday [19 Sep], one of the first aid convoys that was actually allowed to move towards Aleppo was brutally attacked.

....

But [The United States] can't be the only ones trying to hold this door open. Russia and the regime must do their part, or this will have no chance. The question now is whether there remains any real chance of moving forward, because it's clear we cannot continue on the same path any longer.

....

And we have said for days that it will take significant and immediate steps in order to put things back on track, not little changes around the margins. A lot of people doubt that this can be done or that, in fact, the key parties want it done. So the first thing that we have to do is find the way to restore credibility to the process if that can be done, and that means that we need significant action now. It can't be based on exceptions and loopholes and carve-outs that every time are exploited by one party or another in order specifically to undermine the cessation of hostilities. It has to be achieved through a genuine and sustained reduction in violence as well as unfettered humanitarian access that is unmistakable to everyone.

The only way to achieve that is if the ones who have the air power in this part of the conflict simply stop using it — not for one day or two, but for as long as possible so that everyone can see that they are serious. Absent a major gesture like this, we don't believe there is a point in making more promises or issuing more plans or announcing something that simply can't be enforced or reached. If Russia demonstrates that it is serious, we will work with the opposition to reciprocate and to pull back from this cycle of escalation, because the opposition also has a responsibility to observe the cessation of hostilities if the government does and to disassociate from al-Nusrah.

....

But at the same time, we can't go out to the world and say we have an agreement when we don't, nor can we tell our partners that there is a cessation when there isn't. The simple reality is that we can't resolve a crisis if one side is unwilling to do what is necessary to avoid escalation. And we won't get anywhere if we begin by ignoring facts and plain common sense or denying the truth.

I want to emphasize that both the regime and the opposition have an obligation to comply with the United Nations Security Council mandates that international humanitarian law be observed, that aid be allowed to reach besieged areas, that the UN role be respected, and that the safety of aid workers be guaranteed.

....

In today's meeting of the ISSG, we heard near unanimity that this process is the only

viable path forward. So I am no less determined today than I was yesterday, but I am even more frustrated, obviously. If the Russians come back to us with constructive proposals, we will listen. And as we've said, people need to believe that whatever it is is credible, and only by changing the equation of the current bombing which sows so much destruction and also confusion and just cracks the credibility possibilities, only by changing that equation can we find a way forward. The key is to restore credibility where there is none or create some where there is none. This is not a time for maneuvering or for delay. It is time to make decisions that will benefit the people of Syria and hopefully bring stability to a country and to a region that is in absolutely desperate need.

John Kerry, "Statement to the Press After the ISSG Meeting," [State Dept](#), 22 Sep 2016. [Text in brackets added by Standler.]

Also after the ISSG meeting on 22 September, the U.S. State Department provided two anonymous senior government officials to brief journalists. Here is a small part of what was said in that briefing:

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Hi, everybody. Thanks for joining. As I think most of you know, we just got out of a two-and-a-half-hour-plus meeting of the International Syria Support Group. It was a pretty contentious meeting, which is not surprising because it's been a pretty contentious week on the subject of Syria both here in New York and then obviously and more importantly on the ground in Syria as well.

We received reports during the course of the meeting of an announced regime offensive on the city of Aleppo, which was just further evidence of what the Secretary has been describing all week of the type of acts that are eroding the credibility of this process, and also of why we are not sure at this point whether or not it can be fixed.

....

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: But again, I want to stress at this point that it's going to require something extraordinary beyond the types of things that have been agreed in the past, and that we are not sure at this point whether [the Russians] are ready and willing to take those kinds of steps.

....

QUESTION [by Anne Barnard with *The New York Times*]: I just basically wanted to ask if Russia does not accept any of your proposals and things continue as they are, what will the United States do? What are the next steps?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Thanks, Anne. So, obviously, this is something we're giving a lot of thought to ourselves. And I reported to you the — sort of the tenor and the tone in the room at this ISSG meeting, which is that, again, as frustrated as all of us are, there is not — there at least was not a clear voice for a different path among our — both the strongest supporters of the opposition, our key partners, and also countries like Russia and Iran that are obviously on the other side of this conflict.

I think as we've said, our patience for the current process is far from limitless, and my colleague outlined our views on that before. I don't think tonight, and right now as we approaching a climactic stage of this, is the time to say where we will go from here, but your question is obviously one that is very much on our minds as well.

"Background Briefing on the Meeting of the International Syria Support Group," [State Dept](#), 22 Sep 2016.

De Mistura held a press conference after the 22 September ISSG meeting. Understandably, de Mistura is crushed as he realizes that all of his work towards negotiations for a political solution in Syria has been destroyed by Assad and insurgents.

Let me start by saying that it was a long, painful and disappointing meeting. We were hoping and we are still hoping, of course, that this meeting could have confirmed the fact that the cessation of hostilities was and is something that can be shown as a concrete result for the Syrian people. We did not get that. What we did get is an intense discussion where there was not yet a concrete solution. The bad news is that Syrian people are still waiting to have a cessation of hostilities. The good news — if you want to hear it — is that both Russia and America agreed to continue intensely to work on a possible restoration of it.

Now, let me make a point. I was there. On the 9th of September, two major countries — the Russian Federation and the US — in front of the world agreed on a good plan. The plan of the 9th of September is logical. Cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access and then addressing both the ambiguity about Al Nusra and the issue about grounding the Syrian airforce. The two major countries were again reminded again by everyone around the room — the ISSG — that they are expected to stand to their own commitment. And we know that they are working on it. But time in short. Meanwhile, what is happening is that Eastern Aleppo is under heavy attack. Meanwhile, everybody is going back to a new form of non-renewal of the cessation of hostilities but the conflict. [sic]

The next few hours — few days maximum — are crucial for making or breaking it. I want to believe that both Moscow and Washington are working on it seriously because the alternative is going back to conflict and war.

QUESTION: Special Envoy, the moment that you met, the Syrian Government said it was going to retake all of Aleppo. The timing wasn't coincidence?

SdM: That was clear today. Both co-chairs have been de-facto — undermined by others, who have so far not wanted or have tried to not deliver on the cessation of hostilities. The entry point for doing that was the humanitarian access. The government made it very complicated and some of the opposition made it complicated too. Why? Because at the end of the day, the real delivery of this whole plan was and remains the touching [sic] armed opposition from Al Nusra and grounding the Syrian airforce. Can you imagine a Syria where this would be clarified? You would see a different Syria the day after and we would have convoys moving. That was undermined but the two co-chairs have the right, duty and frankly the power to actually restore that.

QUESTION: What kept them away from reaching an agreement? It looks like such a

simple process to achieve.

SdM: Well, it's more complicated than that because the two co-chairs have the power but also need to be able to exercise it. As I said, there have been spoilers on both sides.

QUESTION: Isn't one of the co-chairs one of the spoilers?

SdM: I will not point fingers on this. What I will say is that both of them to me look as if they are interested. They've worked days, weeks and hours in order to get one form of agreement that was on the 9th of September. I was there. If they didn't want to believe in it, they could've stopped much earlier. The delivery is what matters and the spoilers. But they have the power and they now also have to also make it work.

....

SdM: [reply to an inaudible question] Let me be clear on that. Maybe just pro-forma but pro-forma matters. Those who announced the cessation of hostilities were Russia and America. Only they can declare that it's over. They are still trying and that I can confirm. We had a long meeting. It was a difficult meeting. Not a good meeting but they are still trying. So, declaring dead would be wrong.

Staffan de Mistura, "Near Verbatim Transcript Press stake-out by UN Special Envoy Mr. Staffan de Mistura following the Ministerial meeting on Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 22 Sep 2016.

My comment on de Mistura's remarks is that he apparently *believes* that Lavrov and Kerry have magical powers to create a ceasefire and force the delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. But what actually happened on the ground in Syria after the new agreements became effective at sundown on 12 Sep shows that the Russians and U.S. have only weak influence over Assad and the insurgents, because the fighting became more worser and there were *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid to besieged Aleppo. Frankly, it is easy to believe that Russia and Assad are conspiring to achieve a military victory in Syria, given that the Russian air force is continuing to bomb insurgents and civilians.

Pathetically, de Mistura still *believes* that Lavrov and Kerry are working to resuscitate the dead ceasefire. Worse, de Mistura refuses to admit the reality that the ceasefire is over, dead, finished, kaputt. And there are few or no deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria, because of the fighting and because of Assad's refusal to cooperate with deliveries.

De Mistura is weak in refusing to condemn the barbarians who violated the ceasefire and prevented delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. Notice that de Mistura repeatedly blames unnamed "spoilers".

One of the questions asks if Russia ("one of the co-chairs") is a spoiler, but de Mistura deflected the question. De Mistura retorts that he *believes* Russia was sincere in desiring a ceasefire, because of Russia's two months of work on the new agreements — but it is now obvious that Russia was using the negotiations for delay. My essay for August 2016 mentions that Russia blindsided de Mistura on 28 July and 10 August. Now on 22 September, Russia is assisting Assad with brutal airstrikes on the besieged city of Aleppo in the midst of Russia *talking* about a ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid. It is obvious that Russia is actively

conspiring with Assad to achieve a military victory in Syria.

The Associated Press reported on the 22 September ISSG meeting, which lasted only 150 minutes:

The United States and Russia ended any pretenses Thursday [22 Sep] of their ceasefire for Syria remaining in force after days of increased violence and the Syrian military's announcement of a new offensive in Aleppo.

"We can't go out to the world and say we have an agreement when we don't," Secretary of State John Kerry said after meeting the top diplomats from Russia and more than a dozen European and Middle Eastern countries.

Kerry's statement, after three days of private and public diplomacy on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, provided an ominous endnote to a week diplomats had hoped would be a major capstone toward peace.

Instead, Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who negotiated the truce two weeks ago, went their separate ways as violence in Syria flared up anew and the relationship between the two key foreign powers in the conflict appeared to reach a new low.

....

American officials described the two-and-a-half-hour meeting in the Palace Hotel as "contentious."

Kerry and others made the point repeatedly to Lavrov that Russia had to undertake new steps that went beyond previous agreements to salvage the process. Lavrov pushed only for all sides to recommit to the Sept. 9 truce, according to officials.

Russia provided "unsatisfactory" answers, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said.

Kerry said he would wait for Lavrov to tell him Friday [23 Sep] if Russia would suspend airstrikes for a significant period of time.

Bradley Klapper & Matthew Lee, "Kerry admits diplomacy at impasse as Syrian truce collapses," [Associated Press](#), 19:45 EDT, 22 Sep 2016.

Reuters reported that the 22 September ISSG meeting had failed to restore the ceasefire.

The United States and Russia failed to agree on how to revive a short-lived ceasefire in Syria during what the U.N. Syria mediator called a "long, painful, difficult and disappointing" meeting on Thursday [22 Sep].

The International Syria Support Group, including the U.S., Russia and other major powers, met on the sidelines of the annual United Nations gathering of world leaders in New York as the Syrian army announced the start of a new military offensive in the rebel-held east of the city of Aleppo.

"We have exchanged ideas with the Russians and we plan to consult tomorrow with respect to those ideas," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said, expressing concern at the reports of the planned new Syrian offensive. "I am no less determined today than I was yesterday but I am even more frustrated," said Kerry.

....

Kerry demanded on Wednesday [21 Sep] that Russia and the Syrian government immediately halt flights over Syrian battle zones.

"We have not succeeded so far, but there was a lot of support around the table for the proposal, a temporary ban for all flights in order to create the conditions for the truce," German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault described Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's response to the proposal for grounding planes as "not satisfying." He described the meeting as "intense." "The offensive on Aleppo just shows why we need Syrian planes grounded, otherwise there will be no truce," Ayrault said.

....

When asked what would happen next if the process completely collapsed, the [anonymous senior U.S. State Department] official said it was something the United States was "giving a lot of thought to."

Lesley Wroughton, John Irish, & Denis Dyomkin, "U.S., Russia fail to agree on how to revive Syria ceasefire," [Reuters](#), 21:14 EDT, 22 Sep 2016.

My comment: by the night of 22 September 2016, the ISSG is a complete failure. Not only were the members of the ISSG *not* allowed to vote on the new agreements, but also the ISSG failed to resuscitate the dead ceasefire. The ISSG did *not* produce a communiqué for either of its two meetings on 20 and 22 September.

23-24 Sep 2016

Journalists generally ignored what happened at the Friday, 23 Sep, meeting between Lavrov and Kerry. Apparently, Russia was unwilling to ground both Russian and Assad's warplanes for one week, and that meant that the efforts to resuscitate the ceasefire failed. See, e.g., [WSJ](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 24 September, the foreign ministers of France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, plus the European Union High Representative met at Tufts University in Boston and issued the following statement on Syria:

The devastating events in Syria this week underscore what we have been saying for some time: the burden is on Russia to prove it is willing and able to take extraordinary steps to salvage diplomatic efforts to restore a cessation of hostilities (CoH), allow unfettered humanitarian assistance and create the conditions necessary for the

resumption of UN-led talks about a political transition.

The outrageous bombing of a humanitarian convoy, the Syrian regime's public denunciation of the CoH, continuing reports that the regime is using chemical weapons, and the unacceptable ongoing regime offensive on eastern Aleppo, supported by Russia, blatantly contradicts Russia's claim that it supports a diplomatic resolution. The Quint nations and the European Union High Representative therefore call on Russia to take extraordinary steps to restore the credibility of our efforts, including by halting the indiscriminate bombing by the Syrian regime of its own people, which has continually and egregiously undermined efforts to end this war. We welcome recent proposals made in the International Syria Support Group to enhance monitoring of these efforts.

We reaffirm our commitment to the destruction of Da'esh in Syria and Iraq and urge Russia to follow through on its pledge to actually focus on this group. We also reaffirm our shared view that the Nusra Front, al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, is a terrorist organization and an enemy of the international community. Nusra rejects a negotiated political transition and inclusive democratic future for Syria, and we call on all armed groups fighting in Syria to cease any collaboration with Nusra.

We demand immediate, expanded humanitarian access to all areas of Syria, including those on the United Nations' priority list, and we deplore the delays and obstruction caused primarily by the Syrian regime of humanitarian deliveries to Syrians in desperate need. We fully support the United Nations investigations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and are resolved to take further action to address it.

Finally, the Quint and the EU High Representative reaffirm calls made in this week's meetings of the International Syria Support Group for the Co-Chairs to continue their diplomatic consultations on these issues, but also underscore that patience with Russia's continued inability or unwillingness to adhere to its commitments is not unlimited. We therefore also call on the UN Security Council to take urgent further steps to address the brutality of this conflict, and particularly the assault on Aleppo.

"Joint Statement on Syria by the Foreign Ministers of France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the High Representative of the European Union,"

[U.S. State Dept](#), 24 Sep 2016. Copy at [France](#).

My comment is that if Assad, with the help of Russian warplanes, can defeat the insurgents in western Syria, there will be *no* need for "UN-led talks about a political transition".

The statement says: "we call on all armed groups fighting in Syria to cease any collaboration with Nusra." Idealistically, that is correct. But without cooperation with Nusra, the little rebel/jihadist groups will be annihilated by Assad's army. One might prevent that annihilation by providing more weapons to the rebels, but the last thing that the Syrian civil war needs is more weapons and munitions. Moreover, some weapons given to rebels/jihadists are likely to be acquired by terrorist groups like Nusra or ISIL.

The statement declares they "underscore that patience with Russia's continued inability or unwillingness to adhere to its commitments is not unlimited". Back on 15 June, Kerry bleated: "our patience is not infinite." On 15 July, Kerry said in Moscow: "But our patience

also is not limitless." Enough! The statement on 24 Sep *should* have said: Our patience ends now. We will stop cooperating with Russia.

The statement says: "We therefore also call on the UN Security Council to take urgent further steps to address the brutality of this conflict, and particularly the assault on Aleppo." History shows that the *only* thing that the United Nations Security Council has done on the Syrian civil war is issue meaningless, unenforceable resolutions. There is *no* reason to believe that the Security Council will be more effective now than previously. And *if* the Security Council attempts to be effective, Russia will surely veto the effort.

In summary, this 24 Sep statement shows the weakness of Western Europe and the USA, as well as being a waste of effort.

Cessation of Hostilities

Introduction

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

The last paragraph of the February 2016 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, Iran, Russia), so the world *needs* to hear the U.S. view of violations in Syria.

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.

My essay for [August 2016](#) chronicles the futile attempts of the United Nations to establish weekly 48-hour ceasefires in Aleppo, to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid. I collect reports of bombing of hospitals and medical clinics in Syria. I also chronicle the surrender of Daraya and tersely mention the siege of Aleppo.

United Nations proposes 48 hour ceasefire Syrians ignore the proposal

On 21 July 2016, 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](#).

For more history, see my essay for [August 2016](#).

On 4 September, Assad — with the assistance of airstrikes by Russian military airplanes — again besieged insurgent-controlled areas of Aleppo. To give a sense of the Russian perspective, here is a quotation from the Syrian Arab News Agency:

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov said that the government of the Syrian Arab Republic has officially affirmed its stance to provide the necessary guarantees for the safety of the delivery of humanitarian aid through corridors to Aleppo city, noting that there are no similar guarantees up till now from the armed groups, controlled the United States, in Syria.

Antonov told reporters in Moscow on Monday [5 Sep] that the Russian Defense Ministry hopes that the United States would do whatever is necessary to ensure the safety of roads in delivering humanitarian aid to the locals in Aleppo as soon as possible.

He reaffirmed that Russia supports the initiative of the UN envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura regarding Aleppo, but it knows that it can be applied only if there are guarantees for the security of the said corridors.

Antonov pointed out that there are eight safe corridors in Aleppo through which Russian military personnel deliver humanitarian aid with the Syrian authorities' support, clarifying that the locals are provided daily with water, foodstuffs and necessary materials through seven corridors, while the 8th corridor was opened in Castillo road area to let the gunmen leave the city, noting that the Russian military personnel are carrying out a humanitarian operation in Aleppo during the entire month. "Russian Defense Ministry hopes the US would ensure safety of corridors to deliver humanitarian aid to Aleppo," [SANA](#), 5 Sep 2016.

The [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) also reported Antonov's propaganda.

My comment is that the Russian/Syria propaganda has false facts and gives a misleading impression that all is well in Aleppo. In the first paragraph, Antonov says the insurgents in Aleppo are "controlled the United States". That is certainly *not* true of Nusra Front, one of the largest insurgent groups. Some of the smaller rebel groups receive support from the U.S., but they are *not* "controlled" by the U.S. Government. Indeed, the U.S. Government has tried — and failed — to convince rebels to stop cooperating with Nusra, which failure is evidence of the lack of U.S. control of rebel groups. In the last paragraph, the "eight safe corridors in Aleppo" are *not* mentioned by mainstream journalists (e.g., Reuters and the Associated Press) and these corridors may be fictional.

For comparison with the Russian/Syrian propaganda, here are two snippets from Reuters and the Associated Press:

Prices inside rebel-held parts of the city have gone up ten-fold, with no new supplies brought in for 12 days because of Russian air strikes and Syrian army bombardments, said Brita Hagi Hassan, president of the city council for eastern Aleppo.

"Syrian army presses Aleppo campaign as rebels retrench," [Reuters](#), 20:55 GMT, 5 Sep 2016.

With fighting disabling the power to the city's water pumping facilities, Aleppo residents have had access to running water for less than 24 hours since the end of [July 2016].

"Fighting in Syria's Aleppo leaves 2 million without water," [Associated Press](#), 13:20 GMT, 9 August 2016.

Pipe water is still *not* available in Aleppo in early September, and the United Nations has been clamoring for 48-hour ceasefires, in order to fix the electricity supply so the water pumps function again.

On the night of 9 September, Kerry and Lavrov announced a nationwide ceasefire in Syria, to begin at sundown on 12 September. *If* Assad and insurgents will obey this new nationwide ceasefire, then that would be significantly better than weekly 48-hour ceasefires in Aleppo.

One of the major goals of the new agreements on 9 Sep was "unhindered" deliveries of humanitarian aid to Aleppo. The new agreements became effective on 12 Sep at 19:00 Syrian time. Showing the total failure of the new agreements, there were *zero* deliveries of humanitarian aid to Aleppo in September. Further, on the night of 19 Sep there were airstrikes on a convoy of trucks that was unloading humanitarian aid at a warehouse in Aleppo province, killing 20 workers.

On 30 September, Stephen O'Brien, the United Nations emergency relief coordinator, was again calling for weekly 48-hour ceasefires in Aleppo, to permit delivery of humanitarian aid. [Reuters](#).

1-9 September: Siege of Aleppo

On 4 September 2016, while Russia was negotiating with the U.S. Government about a renewed ceasefire in Syria, Assad began a new assault on Aleppo, which again besieged Aleppo. Russian airplanes provided airstrikes in support of Assad's assault on Aleppo. Assad recaptured the Syrian military academy that Nusra Front had captured on 7 August. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#)(17:51GMT, 4Sep); [Reuters](#)(06:12GMT 5Sep); [Al-Jazeera](#). Aside from the worsening situation in Aleppo, this assault shows that the Russians are *not* controlling Assad. Kerry wants the Russians to ground the Syrian air force to prevent attacks on civilians, hospitals, and U.S.-supported rebels. Kerry also wants a nationwide ceasefire in Syria. But with the Russians either unable or unwilling to control Assad, there is *no* hope that negotiations with Russia will lead to a ceasefire. Delivery of humanitarian aid is less likely than a ceasefire, given not only the fighting prevents deliveries, but also Assad is not giving permission for deliveries.

On 6 September, Assad continued to press the siege of Aleppo. [Reuters](#). Not just a siege, but also there are allegations that Assad dropped chlorine on a civilian neighborhood in Aleppo. (see [above](#).)

On 7 September, the [Associated Press](#) published an article with the headline: "Aleppo bombed as US and Russia plan Syria talks". An airstrike today killed at least 10 civilians in the same neighborhood that was gassed yesterday.

On 8 September, Assad's forces seized the Ramousah district in south Aleppo that had been captured by insurgents in August. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 10 September, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that "The eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo city are witnessing an extremely bad humanitarian situation, as the result of the regime forces' siege" since 17 July 2016. They also report: "The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also since the 31st of July 2016 until the dawn of the 10th of August 2016 was able to document the death of 718 civilians...." killed by regime forces in eastern Aleppo. An additional 184 civilians were killed by regime forces in other parts of Aleppo. [SOHR](#).

10-12 September: Continued Fighting in Syria

On 10 September, hours after the historic Russia/USA agreement for a new nationwide ceasefire in Syria to begin at sundown on 12 Sep, fighting continued in Aleppo. At 13:00 GMT on 10 Sep, Reuters reported:

But only hours after it was announced, Syria's army attacked rebel-held areas in the northern city of Aleppo, both sides said, as the military pushed to maximise gains before the ceasefire deadline. Insurgents said they were planning a counter-offensive.

....

Syria's moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels said on Saturday [10 Sep] they were sceptical the deal would be enforced as Damascus and Moscow had continued bombing their areas under earlier truces.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi & David Brunnstrom, "U.S.-Russian Syria peace deal raises rebel

doubts as fighting rages," [Reuters](#), 12:59 GMT, 10 Sep 2016.

On the night of 10 Sep, the Associated Press reported:

The Aleppo Media Center, an activist collective, said 45 people were killed Saturday [10 Sep], just hours after the new U.S.-Russian agreement was reached to try and end the violence in Syria. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 30 people were killed in Aleppo province and another 39 were killed by airstrikes in neighboring Idlib province.

....

Saturday's violence shows that it might be difficult to implement the U.S.-Russia agreement as both countries enjoy limited influence on the government and insurgent groups to cease the bombardment.

Bassem Mroue, "At least 45 killed in Syria after US-Russia agreement," [Associated Press](#), 20:15 GMT, 10 Sep 2016.

On the night of 10 September, Reuters reported:

But hours after [the breakthrough deal] was agreed, warplanes bombed a marketplace in rebel-held Idlib in northwestern Syria, killing at least 40 civilians, according to rescue workers and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Locals said they believed the jets to be Russian.

Idlib province has endured escalating strikes by Russian planes in recent months, according to international aid workers and residents, destroying scores of hospitals, bakeries and other infrastructure across rebel-held territory.

Aleppo was also hit from the air and fighting continued on the ground on Saturday [10 Sep]. The army attacked rebel-held areas, both sides said, pushing to maximise gains before the ceasefire deadline.

Ten people were killed by barrel bombs dropped by army helicopters on the besieged rebel-held east [Aleppo], and jets, either Syrian or Russian, bombed rebel-held towns along important insurgent supply routes.

....

President Bashar al Assad's government made no comment on the peace deal, but Syrian state media quoted what it called private sources as saying the government had given its approval.

Syria's mainstream political opposition, the Riyadh-based High Negotiations Committee (HNC), said it had not received a copy of the deal and would only react after consulting members. [The HNC sentence is from [Reuters](#) at 11:46 GMT on 10 Sep.]

Suleiman Al-Khalidi and David Brunnstrom, "U.S.-Russian Syria peace deal raises rebel doubts as fighting rages," [Reuters](#), 20:26 GMT, 10 Sep 2016.

Early on Sunday morning, 11 September, Agence France-Presse reported:

Air strikes that hit a market and areas of the rebel-held northwestern city of Idlib Saturday killed dozens of people, a monitor said, a day after Russia and the US agreed a truce for Syria.

It was not immediately clear who carried out the raids that also hit several neighborhoods in Idlib and wounded at least 90 people, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The initial death toll figure was put at 24, but later soared to 58. But the Britain-based monitor could not immediately confirm how many of the casualties were civilians saying some bodies "were burned beyond recognition".

"Death toll soars after air strikes on Syria's Idlib," [Al-Arabiya](#), 04:29 GMT, 11 Sep 2016.

On Sunday night, the Associated Press reported:

On Saturday [10 Sep], presumed Russian or government airstrikes on rebel-held Idlib and Aleppo provinces killed over 90 civilians, including 13 children in an attack on a marketplace in Idlib, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Philip Issa, "Syrian Rebels leery of cease-fire plan," [Associated Press](#), 20:52 GMT, 11 Sep 2016.

In the early morning of 12 September, Reuters summarized the fighting on Sunday, 11 September:

Government troops and insurgents fought in several parts of Syria on Sunday, apparently seeking to strengthen their positions on the eve of a ceasefire that Free Syrian Army rebels said they would observe but with major reservations.

....

In Latakia province, violent clashes continued on Sunday two days after the army and its allies launched an offensive around several villages near the main coast road to Aleppo using heavy artillery fire and dozens of air strikes, the [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights] said.

More air strikes were reported in Aleppo and Idlib province on Sunday after scores of people were killed in aerial bombardment on Saturday. One in the town of Saraqeb hit a civil defense center where civilian rescuers are based, injuring several, according to the Observatory.

Tom Perry & Angus McDowall, "Syria rebels guardedly agree on truce but battles persist," [Reuters](#), 02:15 GMT, 12 Sep 2016.

Violations of New Agreements

12 September: After New Agreements Effective

The first official mention by Assad's government of the new agreements was in a terse statement by the Syrian army. Here is the entire statement:

The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces announced on Monday that a truce regime will be applied for seven days.

In a statement, the General Command said that the truce is applied across Syria for seven days as of 19:00 on September 12th 2016 and until 23:59 on September 18th, adding that at the same time the army has the right to respond decisively using all types of firepower to any breach by armed groups.

"Army General Command: Truce regime applied for 7 days with right to respond to breaches by armed groups," [SANA](#), 12 Sep 2016.

The new agreements became effective at sunset, 19:00 in Syria, 16:00 GMT on 12 September. I quote below an early report by the Associated Press.

A U.S.-Russian brokered cease-fire for Syria came into effect on Monday at sunset, with monitoring groups and state media reporting clashes up until the final minutes, and the most powerful rebel groups having yet to commit to the truce.

Syria's military announced at 7 p.m. (1600 GMT) that it would abide by a cease-fire until Sunday [18 Sep] at midnight, while maintaining its right to defend itself against any violations.

....

Ahmad al-Masalmeh, an opposition activist in the contested city of Daraa, said calm had prevailed over the city since 4 p.m., but observers elsewhere in the country reported fighting all the way up to and after the start of the cease-fire.

In Aleppo, the northern city that has emerged as the epicenter of the fighting, opposition media activist Mahmoud Raslan said government helicopters dropped crude barrel bombs on a contested neighborhood, while a doctor reported heavy shelling along the Castello road, a key route to besieged, opposition-held areas. He spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

The terms of the agreement permit government forces to target the Al-Qaida-linked Jabhat Fatah al-Sham for the first week of the cease-fire. It was unclear whether the group's positions were being targeted after the truce began.

Philip Issa & Bassem Mroue, "Syria cease-fire enters into effect," [Associated Press](#), 16:58 GMT, 12 Sep 2016.

Reuters published an early report on the observance of the new agreements in Syria:

Combatant sources on both sides said calm was prevailing in the first hours of the ceasefire. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group, shared that assessment.

Tom Perry, "Syria ceasefire takes effect with Assad emboldened, opposition wary," [Reuters](#), 18:32 GMT, 12 Sep 2016.

Later, the Associated Press reported:

A cease-fire came into effect in Syria at sunset Monday in the latest attempt led by the United States and Russia to bring some quiet in the 5½-year civil war.

Residents and observers reported quiet in most of the country hours after the truce came into effect, though activists said airstrikes took place on contested areas around the northern city of Aleppo.

....

Still, residents in Aleppo reported some airstrikes and shelling, including a barrel bomb attack by government helicopters. It was not immediately known if the targets were Fatah al-Sham [formerly Nusra] or other factions.

Philip Issa & Bassem Mroue, "Syria cease-fire enters into effect, but rebels don't commit," [Associated Press](#), 21:35 GMT, 12 Sep 2016.

The Washington Post reported violations of the new ceasefire by Assad in Aleppo.

A U.S.- and Russian-backed cease-fire agreement that went into effect Monday [12 Sep] was almost immediately violated, diluting hopes for an imminent halt to the relentless violence that has raged for the past five years and raising new questions about U.S. policies aimed at ending the war.

Residents and activists of the besieged rebel portion of Aleppo said that Syrian government helicopters had dropped barrel bombs on one neighborhood of the city and that loyalist forces were shelling a route intended to be used for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Pro-government media accused the rebels of launching a new attack in the southern province of Quneitra, and there were reports of airstrikes and artillery shelling in other parts of the country.

Liz Sly & Karen DeYoung, "Syrian cease-fire backed by U.S. and Russia gets off to rocky start," [Washington Post](#), 19:56 GMT, revised at 23:29 GMT, 12 Sep 2016.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on 12 September that "Provinces of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Daraa, Tartous, Idlib, Homs and different areas of Syria are still witnessing silence after the ceasefire". But the Observatory also reported attacks at unspecified times on 12 September, and I quote:

- Some areas of Taiba al-Imam, Kawkab, villages in Hama countryside are still witnessing aerial bombardment.
- One shell targeted Duma city.
- A surface to surface missile targeted Bait Naim town in the eastern Ghouta.
- Shells fired by regime forces targeted Khan al-Shekh camp.
- Regime forces targeted Barada valley.
- Aerial bombardment targeted al-Shaqif town in the northern countryside of Aleppo and other areas of al-Mansoura town.
- Rebels fired shells on al-Mallah area.
- Regime forces bombarded Hreitan town and Hanano housings neighborhood.
- Regime forces fired several shells on the northern western countryside of Dar'a.
- Rebels targeted al-Hader town in the northern countryside of Quneitra.

"Bombardment targets several areas of Syria after announcing the cease fire," [SOHR](#), 12 Sep 2016.

The New York Times reported:

Despite pessimism over how long the cease-fire would last, calm was widely reported after it took effect at 7 p.m. local time, but there were a few notable exceptions.

Less than an hour into the truce, residents in the divided northern city of Aleppo said via text message that a government helicopter had dropped explosive cylinders on a rebel-held district. And in the southern province of Dara'a, a rebel faction said in a statement that it had killed four government soldiers. By midnight, opposition factions had reported 10 violations by government forces.

There have been extensive doubts expressed among many entangled in the conflict that the cease-fire, timed to coincide with the start of the Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha, will be respected.

Anne Barnard & Rick Gladstone, "Syria Is Calmer but Cautious as Cease-Fire Begins," [NY Times](#), 12 Sep 2016.

13 September: First Full Day of New Agreements

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported *no* civilian deaths in the first 15 hours of the new ceasefire (i.e. from 16:00 GMT on 12 Sep until 07:00 GMT on 13 Sep). The SOHR reported "the town of Andan ... witnessed heavy machine-gun fire by regime warplanes." [SOHR](#).

At 13:37 GMT on 13 September, the Associated Press reported:

The Syrian cease-fire appeared to be holding on Tuesday [13 Sep] despite sporadic and minor violations of the U.S. and Russian brokered truce, which is aimed at paving the way for the delivery of humanitarian aid and the revival of peace talks.

....

Syrian state news agency SANA said rebels fired three shells at a government-held neighborhood in Aleppo. It also reported shelling near the Castello road, northwest of the city, and the Ramouseh area in the south — both main arteries leading to Aleppo.

Rami Abdurrahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said there were minor violations in central Hama province. Another activist group, the Local Coordination Committees, reported shelling in Aleppo and the southern region of Quneitra.

Bassem Mroue, "Syria cease-fire holding, with only minor violations," [Associated Press](#), 13:37 GMT, 13 Sep 2016.

At 21:44 GMT, the Associated Press summarized:

A cease-fire brokered by the U.S. and Russia brought calm across much of Syria on Tuesday as residents of the northern city of Aleppo awaited an expected aid shipment.

....

The Russian military said U.S.-backed rebels have repeatedly violated the cease-fire, with six people killed and 10 wounded in Aleppo since the truce began. It said two Syrian soldiers were killed and another wounded in a separate attack in Aleppo.

Syrian state media reported nearly two dozen violations by insurgents, mostly mortar attacks and sniper shots. It said insurgents attacked power lines in the southern Quneitra region, causing a province-wide blackout.

"Syrian cease-fire holds as Aleppo awaits relief," [Associated Press](#), 21:44 GMT, 13 Sep 2016.

The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic is blind to violations by Assad. But for what it is worth, here is their report for 13 September:

After the resumption of the ceasefire on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, there have been two ceasefire violations by detachments of the armed opposition in the Latakia province where the positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near the heights Abu-Ali and Kuzul-Dag have been fired at.

....

Groupings of Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS international terrorist organizations do not stop making attempts to break the ceasefire regime. Within last 24 hours, 21 cases of firing against positions of the government troops and civilians have been registered from their side in the following provinces: Aleppo (6), Damascus (7), Hama (4), Idlib (3) and Daraa (1).

[Russian MoD](#), 20:00 GMT, 13 Sep 2016.

If one believes the Russians, the biggest "violators" of the ceasefire are Nusra and ISIL, which are excluded from the ceasefire.

14 September: Second Full Day of New Agreements

On 14 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that 15 people were killed in Syria "yesterday" (i.e., 13 Sep), including 10 rebels. [SOHR](#).

But then, Reuters reported:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it had not recorded a single civilian or combatant death from fighting in the first 48 hours of a ceasefire in Syria which came into effect on Monday [12 Sep] night.

But the monitor recorded a number of incidents of shelling by various rebel factions and of shelling and air strikes by pro-government forces around the country.

Lisa Barrington, "Syrian Observatory recorded no deaths in first 48 hours of Syria truce," [Reuters](#) 17:16 GMT, 14 Sep 2016.

There is *no* explanation for the inconsistency in deaths. However, note that 15 dead/day is a remarkably low death rate, compared to the average of 144 dead/day during August 2016. The big issue on 14 Sep is *not* violations of the ceasefire, but instead failure to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria.

On 14 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights contrasted zero deaths in the first 48 hours of the new ceasefire with 185 dead civilians in the 48 hours before the new ceasefire. [SOHR](#).

On 14 September, Reuters reported on failure to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria, and on the Russian report of ceasefire violations:

Two convoys of aid for the Syrian city of Aleppo were waiting in no-man's land on Wednesday after crossing the Turkish border, held up by security fears and disagreements between combatants on the third day of a ceasefire. The convoys, each of around 20 trucks carrying mostly food and flour, set off from the Turkish border town of Cilvegözü, 40 km (25 miles) west of Aleppo, on Tuesday [13 Sep] but made it little further than the Turkish customs post on the Syrian border.

....

The Syrian army has meanwhile accused rebels of numerous violations since the ceasefire took effect. The Russian army, in comments carried by Interfax, said there had been 60 such violations, adding that most were the work of Ahrar al-Sham, a hardline Islamist rebel group which Moscow says has not accepted the ceasefire. [see 14:43 GMT article by [Reuters](#)]

....

A second U.N. official said that deliveries to Aleppo had to cross numerous checkpoints operated by both opposition and government forces, and it was still unclear whether the aid could get through safely.

....

The U.N. special envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said on Tuesday [13 Sep] that the U.N. was still waiting for Damascus to issue letters authorising aid deliveries. A Turkish official said no further trucks were expected to cross the border on Wednesday until the situation became clearer.

Osman Orsal & John Davison, "Aid for Syria waits on Turkish border as warring sides bicker," [Reuters](#), 18:04 GMT, 14 Sep 2016.

On 14 September, the Associated Press reported on ceasefire violations:

Russian Lt. Gen. Victor Poznikhir said rebels had violated the truce 60 times since it came into force sunset Monday. For their part, opposition forces said they had recorded some 28 various violations by government troops on Tuesday [13 Sep].

Sarah El Deeb & Nataliya Vasilyeva, "Russia urges Syrian rebels to separate from 'terrorists'," [Associated Press](#), 18:48 GMT, 14 September 2016.

The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, which does *not* report violations of the ceasefire by Assad, claimed:

Within last 24 hours, 42 cases of ceasefire violations have been registered from their side in the following provinces: Aleppo (20), Hama (8), Damascus (5), Homs (4), Latakia (3) and Daraa (2).

In the Aleppo province, terrorists have fired mortars and AT missile complexes against inhabited areas Shkeif, Braij-er-Rikh, al-Hader, Shurfa and positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Zahrat-abu-Zulam.

Within last 24 hours, in the Aleppo city terrorists have fired twice against Ramusi quarter, positions of government troops near the Kastello trade centre, and for three times fired mortars against Khai-al-Ansari quarter. Positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near the cement plant and the military school of armament have been also fired at.

The most harsh consequences appeared after the shelling of the Khai-al-Ansari quarter in the course of which 3 civilians were killed and 7 injured.

In the Hama province, militants have fired MLRS and mortars against settlements: Maharda, Maan, Habit, Kaukab, Achan, Mardes and twice — against a checkpoint of the government troops near the Ard-Kaukab location.

Illegal armed groups have fired mortars against Tair-Maala inhabited area, positions of the government troops near Tesnin and the Al-Vaar location in the Homs province.

In the Damascus province, shelling has been performed against the following settlements: Baharia, Haush-Nasri, Harasta, the farms of Khan-ash-Shikh (Damascus province); Shir-Adaba, Rasha and the point 409.5 (Latakia province); Khirbat-al-Gazala and Osman (Dara province).

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 14, 2016)," [Russian MoD](#), posted at 20:45 GMT, 14 Sep 2016.

My comment is that the failure of Assad's government to authorize any deliveries of humanitarian aid in September 2016 is a serious problem, and an apparent violation of the new agreements. Moreover, I expect the professional soldiers in Assad's army to obey the new ceasefire, so their 28 alleged violations on 13 Sep are a serious issue. Apparently, Assad is only begrudgingly supporting the new agreements.

I expect the amateur soldiers in the rebel and jihadist groups to violate the new agreements. In particular, the jihadist group Ahrar al-Sham violated the previous ceasefire many times, beginning in April and May 2016, so it is *not* surprising that they also violated the new ceasefire.

15 September: Third Full Day of New Agreements

On 15 September, as quoted [above](#), de Mistura made it absolutely clear that the Assad

government is violating the new agreements by refusing to authorize deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria during September.

On 15 September, the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic — which does *not* report violations by Assad — reported a whopping 45 violations by insurgents of the ceasefire in the past 24 hours.

Within last 24 hours, 45 cases of ceasefire violations have been registered from their side in the following provinces: Aleppo (18), Hama (9), Damascus (5), Homs (12), and Latakia (1).

In the Aleppo province, terrorists have fired mortars, MLRS and AT missile complexes against al-Nayrab, Azizi, and Benyamiin inhabited areas, al-Zahraa, 1070, Dar al-Muallimin, Hai al-Ansari, Ramusi, Leramon, and al-Ramusi living quarters, cement and gas plants, Castello trade center, Al-Asad Military Academy and armament school in the Aleppo city.

In the Hama province, Maan, Makharda, Kaukab, Mardes, Kumkhana, and a railway station in the Narb Nafsa inhabited area have been shelled with MLRS and mortars.

Following inhabited areas have been also shelled with mortars: Kormos, Teib Garbiyah, Tesnin, Teir Maala, Kafer Nan, Ard al-Jaburin, Ala Basi, al-Rastan in the Homs province; Harasta, Kasmiyah, Jaubar in the Damascus province as well as the Ibn al-Walid Hospital in Damascus; positions of the Syrian Armed Forces have been shelled near mark 1154 in the Latakia province.

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 15, 2016)," [Russian MoD](#), 20:00 GMT, 15 Sep 2016.

At the end of my essay for [March 2016](#) is a table of the daily number of violations of the ceasefire that was reported by Russia. The average in March was 10.4 /day, and the maximum number in March was 29/day. There were only three days in March with more than 15 violations. If we assume that Russia is counting violations in September the same way as in March, then the new ceasefire in September is more violent than the old ceasefire in March.

On 15 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported there were *zero* deaths from fighting in the ceasefire areas during the first 72 hours of the new ceasefire. There continue to be deaths in Deir Ezzor, which is besieged by ISIL, which is excluded from the ceasefire agreement. The SOHR reported that "violations escalated dramatically in the third day of ceasefire in Syria", including:

1. two shells fell on two areas near the scientific research area in Halab al-Jadidah area which is controlled by the regime forces,
2. a child was wounded by a sniper fire in Al-Masharqa area which is controlled by the regime forces and adjacent Bustan al-Qasr neighborhood which is controlled by the factions,
3. four shells fell on places in al-Eis area in the southern countryside of Aleppo,
4. a shell fell on the area in Jam'eyyat al-Zahra'a neighborhood west of Aleppo city and under the control of the regime forces, no information about injuries,

5. warplanes renewed the bombing with three missiles at least at areas in Qebtan al-Jabal town in the northwestern countryside of Aleppo,
6. the regime forces opened heavy machineguns' fire on areas at the road leading to Kafnaha the Orem al-Kubra and other places near Jam'eyyat al-Mohandesin in the western countryside of Aleppo, and other areas in the northern countryside of Aleppo,
7. four shells launched by the factions and landed on areas in the southwestern outskirts of Aleppo city from the side of 1070-apartment, no information about casualties,
8. areas in Daraa al-Balad in Daraa city witnessed an exchange of fire and sporadic clashes by machineguns between fighters of the rebel and Islamic Factions against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them, amid the fall of five shells launched by the regime forces on areas on the outskirts of Manshiya neighborhood,
9. two people were shot by the snipers of the regime forces on the road linking the towns of Dael and Khirbet al-Ghazaleh,
10. the regime forces targeted areas in al-Mal village and Kafr Nasej town in the countryside of Daraa, no reports about injuries,
11. the regime forces opened heavy machineguns' fire on areas in al-Yadodeh town,
12. eight shells launched by the regime forces and landed on areas at the town of Dael in the western countryside of Daraa.
13. a man was injured by a sniper fire, due to gunfire by the regime forces and Hezbollah on the besieged city of Madaya,
14. clashes described as violent took place between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them against the Islamic factions in the vicinity of Hosh Nasri, al-Rihan, Hosh al-Fara and Al-Nashabiyah in the Eastern Ghouta, coincided with the fall of several shells launched by the regime forces on areas in the town al-Shifonyyah in the Eastern Ghouta,
15. the regime forces targeted with about 5 shells places in the farms of Tal Kurdi in the Eastern Ghouta,
16. a shell fell on the area between the al-Rihan farms and the city of Douma,
17. two mortar shells [fell] on areas in the vicinity of the town of Hosh Nasri in the Eastern Ghouta,
18. a child under the age of ten was wounded in the town of al-Fu'ah which is inhabited by Shiite citizens at the northeastern countryside of Idlib,
19. warplanes carried out two raids targeted Marat Hermeh and Sheikh Mustafa village at the southern countryside of Idlib, which caused injuries in Sheikh Mustafa village including a woman,
20. warplanes targeting with heavy machineguns places in the area near the town of al-Taman'aa from the side of Khan Shaykhun, no information about casualties.
21. warplanes carried out four raids targeted places in Morek area in the northern countryside of Hama,
22. a drone targeted positions of the factions' fighters at the northern countryside of Hama and its surrounding and nearby areas with several shells, which injured several persons from the fighters of Jaysh al-Ezza in the northeastern countryside of Hama,
23. warplanes and helicopters carried out more airstrikes on al-Zowwar area,
24. warplanes targeted areas in Atshan village at the northeastern countryside of

- Hama, they targeted Zor al-Nasiriya and the surrounding hills and other areas near it,
25. the sounds of machineguns exchange was heard between the factions and the regime forces at the fronts of the northern and the northwestern countryside of Hama, and near the Kawkab area,
 26. four shells at least launched by the regime forces and landed on areas at the outskirts of Rastan city north of Homs province, wounding several persons,
 27. the regime forces launched four shells on areas in Kafr Laha village at Houla area in the northern countryside of Homs,
 28. the regime forces launched two shells at least on areas in the town of Al-Ghantu, in the northern countryside of Homs, no information about casualties,
 29. the factions launched two shells on areas in the town of Kafernan which is controlled by the regime forces in the northern countryside of Homs.

"Violations escalated dramatically in the third day of ceasefire in Syria," [SOHR](#), 15 Sep 2016. [Numbered list by Standler. "While" and "also" in three long run-on sentences in numbered list deleted by Standler.]

My comment on this above list of 29 specific violations: Forget what diplomats and government officials are saying. Does this list look like one day in a real ceasefire? **NO!** The only real indication of a ceasefire is a much reduced death toll since the new ceasefire began on 12 Sep.

Later on 15 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported three civilian deaths in ceasefire areas:

1. the death of a child from Hodr town in the northern countryside of Al-Quneitra by the factions' targeting of areas in town using rocket shells,
2. the death of a child affected by injuries he had hours earlier by a sniper shot in the neighborhood Al-Masharqa which is under the control of the regime forces in Aleppo city, [and]
3. the death of a person by regime's sniper in al-Zebdiyyeh neighborhood which is controlled by the factions in Aleppo city.

"First three civilians killed in a ceasefire area," [SOHR](#), 15 Sep 2016. [Indented list by Standler.]

On 15 September at 17:30 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported that the Syrian army finally began to withdraw from the new demilitarized zone around Castello Road in Aleppo. See also [Associated Press](#) at 21:33 GMT.

On 15 September at 23:05 GMT, [Reuters](#) published a news article with the headline: "Syria ceasefire deal in balance as Aleppo aid plan stalls". My comment is that, despite numerous violations of the ceasefire by both insurgents and Assad's forces, the greater concern is about the failure to deliver any humanitarian aid in Syria during the first 15 days of September.

16 September: Fourth Full Day of New Agreements

The situation in Aleppo is confusing, with contradictory reports by journalists. Apparently what happened was the Syrian army began withdrawing from Castello Road on the evening of 15 Sep. But when the insurgents failed to make a reciprocal and symmetrical withdrawal, the Syrian army returned to its previous position. The opposition's version of the facts says the Syria army never withdrew. There were *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid to Aleppo on 16 Sep, or anytime in September.

Insurgents fired a rocket that hit the Syriac Catholic Church in an Assad-controlled neighborhood of Aleppo.

Also on 16 September, Assad's army attempted to seize Jobar, a town northeast of Damascus, but the army was repelled by insurgents. The [SOHR](#) reports Assad's army fired 6 artillery shells at Jobar.

Because journalists combined all of these violations of the new agreements in a single news story, I am citing them here in chronological order:

- "Syria ceasefire deal in balance as Aleppo aid plan stalls," [Reuters](#), 10:50 GMT, 16 Sep 2016.
- "Fierce clashes east of Syria capital as UN pleads for aid access," [Middle East Eye](#), 10:59 GMT.
- "Aid Expected in Syria's Aleppo as Ceasefire Threatens to Unravel," [ABC News](#), 11:40 GMT. ("The Observatory reported the first civilians killed since the ceasefire began on Thursday, and there appeared to be a further unraveling on Friday [16 Sep], with an airstrike killing 23 in Deir Ezzor Province and clashes erupting in the capital of Damascus, the Observatory said.")
- "Mounting violence in Syria, no aid for Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 17:03 GMT.
- "Aid convoys for Syria's Aleppo delayed amid rising violence," [Associated Press](#), 17:11 GMT. ("The fighting and mutual accusations of violations sparked concern that the fragile cease-fire, which brought some relief to millions of people across the war-ravaged country, may be starting to fray.")
- "The Latest: UN says Syria meeting canceled," [Associated Press](#), 21:47 GMT.
- "Russia, U.S. seek to prolong Syria truce but aid blocked, violence spreads," [Reuters](#), 22:03 GMT. ("... the agreement looked increasingly shaky, undermined by increasing violence and a failure to deliver aid.")

The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic — which does *not* report violations by Assad — reported 39 violations by insurgents of the ceasefire in the past 24 hours.

Illegal armed formations have not started withdrawing hardware and armament from

the Castello road simultaneously with the government troops; therefore they failed to observe their obligations in accordance to the Russian-American agreements.

Detachments of the opposition are using the ceasefire regime in order to recover their combat capabilities and regroup their forces in the Aleppo, Hama, and Homs provinces. They increase the number of shellings.

That is why the government troops had to stop withdrawing forces and return them to the position, which they had kept before.

The Russian center for reconciliation of opposing sides sent an appeal to the American party informing that detachments of the “moderate opposition” had failed observing the agreement.

Within last 24 hours, 39 cases of ceasefire violations have been registered from their side in the following provinces: Aleppo (19), Hama (5), Damascus (6), Homs (8), and Latakia (8).

In the Aleppo province, terrorists have fired with mortars, MLRS, AT complexes and small arms against Braidge al-Rih, al-Khader inhabited areas, al-Khalidiyah, al-Zahraa, Ramusi, Dakhiyah al-Asad, al-Masharqah, and 1070 quarters, cement plant, gas plant, armament school, checkpoint on the Castello road, Karyat Khalab fortress, and Castello trade center in the Aleppo province.

In the Hama province, Maan, Zor Abu Zaid, Makharda, and Skandariyah inhabited areas have been shelled with MLRS, mortars, and armored vehicles.

Terrorists have shelled Harasta, Haush al-Hayat, Haush al-Farah inhabited areas in the Damascus province, Ibn al-Walid hospital in the Damascus city, Qinsibba, Ain al-Kantara, Rasha, Abu Ali mountain regions, and Shillif fortress in the Latakia province, Alya Basi quarter in the Homs province.

Russian Aerospace Forces and Syrian Air Force have not carried out strikes on regions, where the opposition detachments could be located.

Despite numerous violations of the ceasefire regime and absence of progress in dividing moderate opposition from Jabhat al-Nusra by the American party, the Russian party is ready to prolong the ceasefire regime for 72 another hours.

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 16, 2016)" [Russian MoD](#), 21:47 GMT, 16 Sep 2016.

In the first four full days of the new ceasefire, the Russians report a total of 128 violations by insurgents (i.e., $2 + 42 + 45 + 39$).

On Friday, 16 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights posted few news articles at its English-language website, and there was *no* list of violations. But on 17 September, the SOHR posted an article about violations on Friday:

1. a shell launched by the factions on areas in Al-Assad Suburb controlled by the regime forces in south of Aleppo city,
2. warplanes targeted places in the areas of al-Atareb and Orem al-Kobra in the western countryside of Aleppo, and elsewhere in the Regiment 46 area near the town of Atareb in the western countryside of Aleppo,
3. warplanes also bombed areas in the town of al-Jinah near the town of Atareb in the western countryside of Aleppo,
4. a shell launched by the rebel factions and landed on the area of the Church of Syrian Catholic Archdiocese in the neighborhood of Azizia which is under the control of the regime forces in Aleppo city, resulting in material damage, but no information about injuries,
5. clashes described also violent took place between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them of Arab and Asian nationalities against the rebel and Islamic Factions, Fath al-Sham Front and the Islamic Turkestan Party in the vicinity of the 1070-project southwest of Aleppo city,
6. two shells launched by factions on regime forces' controlled areas near Halab al-Jadidah neighborhood in Aleppo city,
7. warplanes opened the fire of heavy machineguns on areas in the town of Huraytan in the northern countryside of Aleppo,
8. warplanes targeted using heavy machineguns' fire areas in the towns Qebtan al-Jabal, Babis, Orem al-Kobra, Hor and Kafnaha in the western countryside of Aleppo,
9. a child died affected by injuries he had when the rebel and Islamic factions targeted using heavy machineguns' fire areas in the neighborhood Al-Masharqa which is under the control of the regime forces in Aleppo,
10. a person who killed after being targeted by snipers of the regime forces in the neighborhood of al-Zebdiyyeh which is controlled by the factions in Aleppo city,
11. several people were injured when the regime forces targeted using their snipers' fire areas in the Bostan al-Qasr neighborhood in Aleppo city,
12. warplanes bombed areas in the village of al-Sayyad in the northern countryside of Hama, and other areas in the villages of Zara and Hirbnafsa in the southern countryside of Hama,
13. the Islamic factions targeted with Grad missiles Hama airbase area, no information about casualties,
14. the rebel factions dropped a reconnaissance drone belongs to the regime forces in the southern outskirts of al-Lataminah town in the northern countryside of Hama,
15. warplanes carried out raids on areas in the towns of Soran and Tayyibat al-Imam and Morek in the northern and northeastern countryside of Hama,
16. the vicinity of the Maan town witnessed shelling exchange between the rebel and Islamic Factions against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them,
17. helicopters dropped barrel bombs on areas in Al-Lataminah town in the northern countryside of Hama,
18. warplanes and helicopters bombed areas in Atshan village at the northeastern countryside of Hama,
19. warplanes also bombed areas in the city of Tayyibat al-Imam and the towns of Al-Lataminah, Halfaya, Soran and Maardis, and the village of Alexandria and other areas in the northern countryside of Hama.

20. helicopters dropped barrel bombs on areas in the village of al-Hrak in the northern countryside of Homs, which injured several people,
21. the regime forces launched about six shells on areas in the village of Al-Ghantu at the northern countryside of Homs,
22. warplanes bombed areas in the city of Rastan in the northern countryside of Homs,
23. warplanes carried out two airstrikes on Talbiseh city north of Homs province,
24. warplanes bombed areas in Khan Shaykhun city and its outskirts south of Idlib province, which three citizens were killed (a man, a boy and girl) in addition to injuring about 13 civilians including 6 citizens at least, and the death toll is expected to rise because there are some people in critical situation,
25. two citizens were injured due to the fall of several shells launched by the Islamic factions on areas in the towns of Kafriya and Al-Fu'ah, which are inhabited by Shiite citizens in the northeastern countryside of Idlib,
26. warplanes bombed areas in Ma'er Shamshameh village in the eastern countryside of Maarrat al-Nu'man, which led to the injury of a citizen and a citizen woman,
27. warplanes carried out airstrikes on areas in the town Deir Eastern in the eastern countryside of Maarrat al-Nu'man, resulting in material damage,
28. warplanes also targeted a civil defense center in the town of al-Taman'aa in the southern countryside of Idlib, which put it out of service, and damaged some vehicles,
29. areas in Sinjar township in the eastern countryside of Idlib were bombed by warplanes,
30. helicopters targeted areas in the farms around Skaik town in the southern countryside of Idlib,
31. warplanes targeted using the fire of its heavy machinegun areas in the town of al-Taman'aa in the southern countryside of Idlib.
32. about 9 missiles launched by the rebel and Islamic Factions on regime forces' controlled areas in the town of Khan Arnabah in the countryside of Al-Quneitra, followed by shelling by the regime forces on areas in the vicinity of the area,
33. five shells fell on areas in the town Hodr in the northern countryside of Al-Quneitra which is under the control of the regime forces,
34. areas at the pine grove in the vicinity of Hodr town in the northern countryside of Al-Quneitra were shelled targeted by the regime forces,
35. the regime forces also launched five shells on areas in the town of Jebbata al-Khashab in the northern countryside of Al-Quneitra,
36. an explosive cylinder launched by the regime forces and landed on area in the outskirts of al-Manshiyyeh neighborhood in Daraa al-Balad at the city of Daraa,
37. the regime forces targeted using heavy machineguns' fire areas in the town of al-Hamidiyyeh in the mid-sector countryside of Al-Quneitra,
38. the regime forces also targeted using a guided missile position of the factions in Kassarat Tranjah area in the northern sector countryside of Al-Quneitra, which caused casualties in the ranks of the factions,
39. the factions targeted positions of the regime forces in al-Baath city in the mid-sector countryside of Al-Quneitra, which injured a member from the regime forces,
40. the rebel and Islamic Factions targeted areas in the town Hodr at the northern sector countryside of Quneitra, killed a child girl and wounded several others.

41. clashes took place between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them against the rebel and Islamic Factions in the vicinity of the villages of Samma and al-Hnidat, in the western countryside of al-Suwaidaa,
42. two mortar shells landed on places between Jobar orchards and Al-Abbasin on the outskirts the capital,
43. two shells fell on areas at Bab Sharqi in the outskirts of al-Qaboun neighborhood at the eastern outskirts of the capital,
44. violent clashes are taking place between Rahman Corps against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them, amid attempts by the regime forces to achieve advancement in the Arfa Front area and the fronts of Crash factory and Tayba,
45. a shell landed near a soap factory in al-Qaboun neighborhood which caused material damage,
46. sporadic clashes are taking place between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them against Jaysh al-Islam in the vicinity of the town of Hosh Nasri in the Eastern Ghouta, where the first 3 fighters from the factions — including a field commander — died in the ceasefire areas due to injuries they had in the clashes at the vicinity of Hosh Nasri and in Jobar neighborhood,
47. a shell fell on area in the town of Saqba in the Eastern Ghouta,
48. the fall of three mortar shells on areas in the town of Ein Tarma, which wounded two persons,
49. two shells fell on area on the outskirts of the southern Motahalleq from the side of Zamalka city,
50. the fall of two shells on areas in the vicinity of Arbin city,
51. the regime forces also launched more than 21 artillery shells and missiles believed to be ground-to-ground on the neighborhood, with the violent clashes that broke out at 08:00 Friday, amid the detonating by the regime forces of building in which fighters of Corps Rahman were positioned, which injured fighters of the Corps and some of them were badly injured,
52. one shell at least launched by the regime forces and fell on areas in the city of Harasta in the Eastern Ghouta, causing material damage, no information about injuries,
53. two missiles launched Friday morning by the regime forces and landed on area in the vicinity of the town of Hosh Nasri in the Eastern Ghouta,
54. the regime forces launched five shells at least on areas in the towns of Hammuriyyeh and Saqba in the Eastern Ghouta,
55. violent clashes took place between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them against the factions in the vicinity of Deir Khebyeh town in the west of Rif Dimashq,
56. the regime forces also launched 3 shells on areas in Hazrma town and the outskirts of al-Mid'aani in the Eastern Ghouta,
57. the regime forces targeted with the fire machineguns areas at the outskirts of Douma city in the Eastern Ghouta, amid the fall of a shell launched by the regime forces on the outskirts of the city,
58. the regime forces targeted using heavy machineguns' fires areas in the vicinity of Ifrah village of Wadi Barada, and other areas in the surrounding hills of Ayn al-Fijeh in Wadi Barada.

"The fourth day of the ceasefire witnesses the death of the first 7 civilian citizens in aerial

bombing, shells and sniper fire," [SOHR](#), 17 Sep 2016. [Numbered list by Standler. "While", "also", and "in conjunction with" in four long run-on sentences in numbered list deleted by Standler.]

The SOHR also documented the deaths of 7 civilians on Friday, 16 September:

- a young man, a boy and girl were killed in raids by warplanes on the city of Khan Shaykhun in the southern countryside of Idlib,
- a girl and a citizen woman were killed when shells fell at areas in the towns of Khan Arnabah and Hodr which are controlled by the regime forces in the countryside of Al-Quneitra,
- a child was killed by a sniper in the neighborhood Al-Masharqa which is controlled by the regime forces in Aleppo city,
- a young man was killed by regime forces' sniper in al-Zebdiyyeh neighborhood at Aleppo city.

Ibid.

My comment is that 58 violations in one day is a very weak ceasefire. However, the death toll seems to be much less than before the new ceasefire. The SOHR count of violations is greater than the Russian count, because the SOHR — unlike Russia — also includes violations by Assad's forces.

17 September: Fifth Full Day of New Agreements

On 17 September 2016 at 09:04 GMT, [Reuters](#) quotes an anonymous rebel official as saying "The truce, as we have warned, and we told the (U.S.) State Department — will not hold out." Reuters also repeats their remark from yesterday night that the new ceasefire was "increasingly shaky".

On 17 September, there were again *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria.

The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic — which does *not* report violations by Assad — reported 55 violations by insurgents of the ceasefire in the past 24 hours.

Within last 24 hours, 55 cases of ceasefire violation have been registered from the side of illegal armed formations in the provinces of Aleppo (27), Hama (7), Damascus (11), Homs (2), Latakia (6), al-Quneitra (1), and Daraa (1).

In total, 199 cases of ceasefire violation have been conducted by illegal armed formations since the renewal of the ceasefire regime.

In the Aleppo province, illegal armed formations have fired improvised MLRS, mortars and AT missile complexes against farms in Sheikh Ali Kobtani, al-Zahraa, Ramusi, 1070, Dar Menyan, al-Makhamed, Dakhiya al-Asad, Halab al-Jalid, al-Masharka, and Laramon quarters as well as Kastello trade center, Atawari school, gas and cement plants in the Aleppo city.

In the Damascus province, Jaubar Harasta, Haush Nasri, Huteita al-Jarash, Haush Harabu inhabited areas, Ibn al-Walidi hospital, and farms in Khan al-Shikh have been shelled with mortars.

In the Hama province, Maan, al-Mahruk, Shajar, Skandariya, Hadjar, Maharda inhabited areas as well as an airfield in the Hama province have suffered shelling with improvised MLRS and mortars.

Terrorists have also shelled the Shillif fortress and Nahshebba in the Latakia province, al-Manshiya quarter in the Daraa city, and Jubbaita al-Hashab in the al-Quneitra province.

In the Homs province, terrorists have fired BM-21 MLRS and mortars against Teib Garbiya inhabited area, and Bayaza quarter of the Homs city.

....

Leadership of the Center for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic have sent the letter to W. Wood, the head of the US interservice delegation to Geneva, informing that the moderate opposition had broken the ceasefire regime. The letter also contained information about concentrations of insurgents in the north of the Hama province, and possible attacks by carried out by them.

The Russian party asked the American colleagues to influence on the opposition leadership in order to hold them from a rush venture. The Russian party also informed the American side about intention of the command staff of the Syrian government troops to take retaliation coherent measures.

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 17, 2016)," [Russian MoD](#), 20:00 GMT, 17 Sep 2016. [The ellipses indicate deletion of the section on delivery of humanitarian aid by Russia.]

Note that the Russian count of 199 violations by insurgents is greater than the total of 183 violations in the daily Russian reports (i.e., $2 + 42 + 45 + 39 + 55$) during the first five full days of the new ceasefire.

On 17 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that "violations escalated" during 17 September. They documented the death of 7 persons:

1. A child and a woman killed by regime's bombardment on Talbisa city.
2. A child killed by regime's bombardment on Hreitan town.
3. A man killed by Hezbollah snipers in Zabadni.
4. A young man from Jesrin was killed by bombardment by regime forces on the town.
5. A young man killed by a sniper in al-Ajraf area.
6. One militant in al-Rahman convoy killed by clashes against regime forces in Jobar.

"The 5th day of the ceasefire agreement ends with human losses and violations," [SOHR](#),

17 Sep 2016.

17 September: Accidental U.S. Airstrike

The major incident on 17 September was a U.S. airstrike hit near a Syrian airbase at Deir Ezzor, killing at least 83 Syrian soldiers. After the U.S. attack, ISIL terrorists were able to "take control [of] the artillery brigade around the [Syrian] military airport". [SOHR](#). The [Associated Press](#) reports the Syrian army told Russia that 62 soldiers were killed.

The Syrian Arab News Agency reported that the airstrikes were at 17:00 Syrian time, which is 14:00 GMT. [SANA](#) reported the Syrian army said: "US alliance aircrafts targeted at 5 PM on Saturday a Syrian Arab Army position in al-Tharda Mountain in the surroundings of Deir Ezzor Airport, causing losses in lives and equipment and clearly paved the way for ISIS terrorists to attack the position and take control of it." See also [Reuters](#).

The U.S. told Russia to tell Assad that the U.S. "regretted" killing Assad's soldiers. [Reuters](#).

The Pentagon promptly posted a press release on 17 September. Here is the entire Pentagon press release:

Coalition officials halted an airstrike in progress today against an Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant fighting position in Syria they had been tracking for "a significant amount of time before the strike" when Russian officials told them it was possible the personnel and vehicles targeted were part of the Syrian military, U.S. Central Command officials said.

The location of the strike, south of Dayr Az Zawr, is in an area the coalition has struck in the past, Centcom officials said, and coalition members in the Combined Air Operations Center had earlier informed Russian counterparts of the upcoming strike.

"It is not uncommon for the Coalition Air Operations Center to confer with Russian officials as a professional courtesy and to deconflict coalition and Russian aircraft, although such contact is not required by the current U.S.- Russia Memorandum of Understanding on safety of flight," officials said in a statement.

"Syria is a complex situation with various military forces and militias in close proximity, but coalition forces would not intentionally strike a known Syrian military unit," officials said in the statement. "The coalition will review this strike and the circumstances surrounding it to see if any lessons can be learned."

"Coalition Halts Airstrike in Progress Against Possible Syrian Military Position," [Pentagon](#), 17 Sep 2016.

My comment is that one lesson that the U.S. Government could learn is *not* to have airstrikes in foreign nations without the permission of — and coordination with — the local government.

Neither the White House nor the U.S. State Department websites posted a press release on

Saturday, 17 September.

Russia called an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Saturday night, 17 September, beginning at 19:30 EDT. Samantha Power, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, told journalists before the meeting began:

Good evening, everybody. We are still gathering information at this time, but we have been able to confirm that, earlier today, the United States struck what we believed to be an ISIL target. We halted the attack when we were informed by Russia that it was possible that we were striking Syrian regime military personnel and vehicles. We are investigating the incident. **If we determine that we did indeed strike Syrian military personnel, that was not our intention, and we, of course, regret the loss of life.**

This said, even by Russia's standards, tonight's stunt — a stunt replete with moralism and grandstanding — is uniquely cynical and hypocritical. Since 2011, the Assad regime has been intentionally striking civilian targets with horrifying, predictable regularity. They have besieged civilian areas, prevented life-saving humanitarian aid from reaching people who are starving to death and dying of illnesses that could be treated with basic medicine.... The regime has routinely used chemical weapons against its own people.

And yet, in the face of none of these atrocities has Russia expressed outrage, nor has it demanded investigations, nor has it ever called for a Saturday night emergency consultation in the Security Council — they have never called an emergency consultation on any of these practices.

.... Russia decided to join the Assad regime, escalating the conflict, and — perhaps worst of all — itself adopting some of the regime's worst practices: hitting hospitals, hitting refugee camps, hitting markets without a single public expression of remorse. Seriously? They're calling this emergency meeting? Really?

Now, because of a single airstrike — **a strike that, if it struck regime forces, did so in error**; a strike that we have swiftly acknowledged and committed to investigating — again, none of which the Assad regime or Russia have done in their airstrikes on innocent civilians. Now, of all times, Russia calls the entire UN Security Council to convene urgently so that it can stand up here and express outrage. Imagine how often this Council would be meeting if we were to gather every time the regime or Russia struck a hospital, or a school, or a bread line. Imagine if we gathered every time they blocked vital aid from reaching children who are eating leaves — leaves — so that they do not starve to death,

....

The United States is extremely serious about making this agreement work. In the last 36 hours, Secretary Kerry has spoken with UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura, the foreign ministers of Turkey, of Qatar, Saudi Arabia. Of course, he has spoken also with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, including today. And Secretary Kerry told Foreign Minister Lavrov that the regime is bombing groups who are party to the Cessation of Hostilities. Even though violence is down in many parts of Syria, the regime is acting

against groups that want to be part of this peace process. Secretary Kerry made clear that the aid is not flowing even though we were assured again and again that permissions would be forthcoming; even though UN trucks have been idling filled with precious food, as mothers can't feed their kids. So Secretary Kerry shared all of this with Mr. Lavrov, but he didn't have to, because Russia is fighting alongside the Assad regime. Russia knows exactly what is happening in Syria. They know exactly which groups are terrorists and which groups are opposition groups who want to be part of a political transition and who want a multiconfessional, pluralistic Syrian society on the backend. They know the difference.

So why are we having this meeting tonight? It's a diversion from what is happening on the ground in Syria. When you don't like the facts, you try to create attention somewhere else. It's the classic magician's sleight of hand. Get the world and the media to focus here, so they will take their eye a little bit off what is happening over there. What's happening over there is so important. It is jeopardizing something that gives the Syrian people a chance. So again, we encourage the Russian Federation to call emergency meetings with the Assad regime and to deliver the Assad regime to this agreement that we so want to work.

....

Assad's antics — his tactics, his strategy — have been a gift to terrorists in Syria and well beyond. And these are terrorists who threaten us all. On that we agree. There is a better way forward but Russia really needs to stop the cheap point-scoring and the grandstanding and the stunts and focus on what matters, which is implementation of something that we negotiated in good faith with them which has shown it can reduce violence, and shown it can save lives. But it needs to be implemented. And a meeting like this — a stunt like this — isn't helping anybody. Thank you.

Samantha Power, "Remarks Before UN Security Council Consultations on Syria," [U.S. Mission](#), 17 Sep 2016. [Boldface added by Standler.]

Power barely mentioned the substance of the emergency meeting, when she simply said *if* the U.S. attacked Syrian troops, then the U.S. attack was *not* intentional. Because she barely mentioned those facts, I have boldfaced her words in the transcript quoted above. Power spent most of her remarks in an emotional criticism of the Russians for calling the emergency meeting. Power did *not* explain why the U.S. Military was violating the sovereignty of Syria by bombing ISIL in Syria since September 2014. While Power is correct that Assad's army has done many terrible things, the specific Syrian soldiers who were killed by the U.S. airstrike were engaged in fighting ISIL, which is an approved activity.

Power's irrelevant response angered the Russian ambassador to the United Nations. [Reuters](#) reported: "When asked if the incident ended the Syria deal between Moscow and Washington, Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said: 'This is a very big question mark. If what Ambassador Power has done today is any indication of their possible reaction then we are in serious trouble.' " See also [Associated Press](#).

Instead of recognizing that this was an accident by the U.S. Military, both Syria and Russia wildly accused the U.S. of supporting ISIL. The [Syrian propaganda](#) said: "this act is a serious

and blatant aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic and its army, and constitutes conclusive evidence that the United States and its allies support ISIS and other terrorist organizations". Maria Zakharova, the spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, said late on Saturday night that the U.S. was "defending" ISIL. [TASS](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Russia Today](#). Churkin accused the U.S. Military of intentionally targeting the Syrian army. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Russia Today](#).

My comment is that one expects such propaganda from Syria, which is currently also falsely [proclaiming](#) that Assad's government "does what is necessary to deliver humanitarian aid to those in need anywhere in Syria." But by using one innocent mistake as a propaganda opportunity, the Russians show themselves as an unreliable partner for the U.S. If the Russian and U.S. air forces were to cooperate, one could easily imagine the Russians targeting a hospital or civilians, then blaming the attack on U.S. aircraft.

Power is correct that it was hypocritical for Russia to express outrage at one erroneous U.S. airstrike when Russia has been silent about a much larger number of atrocities by Assad. But it is also propaganda for Power to criticize Russia for calling the emergency meeting, instead of Power addressing the substance of Russia's assertions. One wonders what the Russians hope to gain from this propaganda attack on the U.S. Government, at a time when the Russians and U.S. *should* be cooperating on Syria. Apparently, the Russians hope to blame the U.S. Government for the failure of the new agreements in Syria. That would mean the Russians care more about assigning blame than making a successful ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid.

The Russians do *not* know when to shut up. On 18 September, the Russian Foreign Ministry said: "The actions of coalition pilots — if they, as we hope, were not taken on an order from Washington — are on the boundary between criminal negligence and connivance with Islamic State terrorists." [Reuters](#).

On 18 September, [SOHR](#) reports a total of 90 Syrian soldiers died in the U.S. airstrike near Der-Ezzor military airport.

On 18 September, the Australian Defense Ministry confessed to being involved in the U.S.-led airstrikes on the Syrian army. [Australia](#).

On 18 September, John Kerry was interviewed by Elise Labott of [CNN](#), where Kerry called on Russia "to stop the grandstanding, stop the showboating, and get the humanitarian assistance going." [State Dept](#). Kerry should *not* tell the Russians to stop grandstanding, instead Kerry should focus on the substance of what the Russians are saying. By focusing on the substance of what the Russians are saying (e.g., U.S. made an intentional attack on the Syrian army, U.S. is supporting ISIL, etc.), one could show the Russian assertions are *not* credible. Furthermore, the new agreements were already dead on 18 September, and further cooperation with the Russians is futile.

Kerry also explained to Labott that "... unfortunately, we live in a world where you have to do business even with people with whom you have deep disagreements, and that is not new." Kerry is correct. For example, the U.S. Government cooperated with Stalin in the fight against Hitler. So why can't the U.S. cooperate with Assad in the fight against Islamic

terrorists?

On 19 September, the United Kingdom Defense Ministry and Denmark both confessed to being involved in the U.S.-led airstrikes on the Syrian army.

On Monday, 19 September, the Russian hysteria about the U.S. airstrike on the Syrian army mysteriously vanished, as Russia frantically began to attempt to salvage the collapsed ceasefire.

18 September: Sixth (and last) Full Day of New Agreements

On Sunday, 18 September, the Associated Press reports the dismal conditions during the sixth full day of the new ceasefire:

Syria's fragile cease-fire started to unravel on Sunday with the first aerial attacks on rebel-held neighborhoods of Aleppo and a southern village that killed at least eight people, violations that came as tensions between the American and Russian brokers of the deal worsened following a deadly U.S. strike on Syrian government forces.

....

Despite largely holding, the cease-fire has been repeatedly violated by both sides, and aid convoys have not reached besieged rebel-held neighborhoods of Aleppo, Syria's largest city and one-time commercial center, which has been the center of violence in recent months. Aid delivery to Aleppo is part of the U.S.-Russia cease-fire deal.

....

The Observatory and Ahmad al-Masalmeh, an opposition activist based in the southern province of Daraa, said government helicopters dropped barrel bombs on the village of Dael, killing at least eight and wounding a large number of people. In Aleppo, warplanes fired missiles at three neighborhoods, wounding several people, according to the activist-run Local Coordination Committees and the Observatory.

Bassem Mroue, "Syrian truce receives new blows with airstrikes, shelling," [Associated Press](#), 20:08 GMT, 18 Sep 2016.

My comment is that the Associated Press showed restraint in waiting until the sixth full day before saying the ceasefire "started to unravel". Although it is uncertain precisely when the ceasefire began to fail, it is now clear on 18 Sep that the new ceasefire has failed.

The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic — which does *not* report violations by Assad — reported 50 violations by insurgents of the ceasefire in the past 24 hours.

Within last 24 hours, 50 cases of ceasefire violation have been registered from the side of illegal armed formations in the provinces of Aleppo (17), Hama (7), Damascus (11), Homs (3), Latakia (5), and Daraa (7).

In the Aleppo province, armed formations of terrorist groupings have fired improvised

MLRS, mortars and AT missile complexes against farms in Sheikh Ali Kobtani, Karyat Khalab fortress, Ramusi and Dakhiya al-Asad quarters, area of the Castello trade center, artillery school, Atavari school, a tannery, and positions of the government troops near al-Ramusi and 1070 quarters in the Aleppo city.

In the Damascus province, Jaubar, Harasta, Arbil, Duma, Marj Sultan inhabited areas, farms in Khan al-Shikh settlement, al-Abasin quarter, and Ibn al-Walid hospital in the Damascus city.

In the Hama province, terrorists have shelled Maan and Mardes inhabited areas, positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near Jabel Zaig al-Abdin and Tell Bazzam Mounts with improvised MLRS and mortars.

Areas of Daraa and Osman have suffered artillery strikes in the Daraa province.

Terrorists have fired mortars against Ain al-Qantara, Shir Adaba, Tubal fortress, and positions of the government troops near mark 1154 in the Latakia province.

Ard al-Jaburin and Tesnin have been shelled in the Homs province.

....

On September 17, two F-16, two A-10, and an attack UAV of the US Air Force carried out strikes on positions of the government troops located in 6 km to the south from the Deir ez-Zor airfield. The strikes have been stopped by the demand of the Russian party.

ISIS insurgents launched offensive simultaneously with the strikes in this area. Offensive of the terrorist grouping has been stopped in course of the tough combat. Russian Aerospace Forces supported the government troops.

The American air strike on positions of the Syrian government troops killed 62 people, injured 98 ones, and destroyed 11 pieces of military hardware.

On September 17, insurgents roughly put down protests of about 300 civilians. The civilians demanded insurgents to leave city in order to avoid activation of warfare.

According to citizens, insurgents shot 26 people, including 9 teenagers.

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 18, 2016)," [Russian MoD](#), 20:00 GMT, 18 Sep 2016.

On 18 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented violations of the ceasefire:

1. warplanes targeting Aleppo city with five missiles, the missile targeted areas in the neighborhoods of al-Mowasalat, Karm al-Jabal, Karm al-Biek, al-Sakhur and Sheikh Khader in Aleppo city, which killed a citizen woman and injured others in al-Sakhur neighborhood,
2. the regime forces shelled areas in the village of al-Bwayda and its surroundings

- in the southern countryside of Aleppo,
3. two fighters from the Islamic factions were killed during clashes against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them in the 1070-apartment project southwestern of Aleppo city,
 4. several people were injured when several explosive bullets launched by factions landed on regime forces' controlled areas in Seif al-Dawla neighborhood in Aleppo city,
 5. warplanes targeted with the fire of their heavy machineguns areas in Kafnaha town in the western countryside of Aleppo,
 6. 9 people — including two children — were killed and tens of people were wounded, as a result of dropping two barrel bombs on places in the main roundabout area in Dael town at the eastern countryside of Daraa, and the death toll is expected to rise because there are some people in critical situation,
 7. a shell launched by the regime forces and landed on an area in the town of al-Hrak,
 8. the factions targeted this morning the area of Abu Kaser checkpoint and the abandoned battalion in the countryside of Daraa,
 9. several shells launched by the regime forces landed on areas in the town of Dael in the countryside of Daraa,
 10. the regime forces opened heavy machineguns' fire on the areas of the Tal Antar and Tal al-Allaqiyyat north of KafrShams town in the northwestern countryside of Daraa,
 11. helicopters targeted places at the outskirts of Ayb village in al-Lajat area at the northeastern countryside of Daraa.
 12. warplanes carried out raids on areas in the town of Al-Ghantu in the northern countryside Homs, in conjunction with shelling by the regime forces on areas in the town which caused injuries,
 13. warplanes carried out 9 raids on areas in the cities of al-Rastan and Talbiseh, the town of Al-Ghantu and the villages of al-Farhaniyah and al-Zafarana in the northern countryside of Homs,
 14. the regime forces shelled areas in al-Sha'abaniyyeh village in the northern countryside of Homs,
 15. 4 rocket shells fell on areas in the neighborhoods of Zahra and Jobb al-Jandaly the city of Homs,
 16. a member from the regime forces died affected by injuries he had during clashes against the rebel and Islamic Factions in the vicinity of Snisl village in the northern countryside of Homs,
 17. five shells at least fell on areas in Tasnin village in the northern countryside of Homs which is controlled by the regime forces, resulting in material damage,
 18. several shells landed on areas in the villages of al-Najmeh, Ashrafyeh and al-Mokhtaria in the northern countryside of Homs,
 19. the regime forces launched this morning more than 12 shells on areas in the city of Talbiseh north of Homs province,
 20. warplanes carried out 2 raids on areas in the village of al-Ameriyah and its surroundings in the northern countryside of Homs,
 21. clashes took place after midnight yesterday between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them against the rebel and Islamic Factions in Snisl front area in the northern countryside of Homs,

22. the regime forces targeted with 7 shells places in the town of Kafr Laha in the northern countryside of Homs, and other places in al-Houla area at the northern countryside of Homs,
23. the helicopters dropped barrel bombs on areas in the village of Al-Ghantu in the northern countryside of Homs injuring 6 people,
24. clashes took place between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them against the rebel and Islamic Factions in the vicinity of Jwalak village in the northern countryside of Homs,
25. warplanes targeted using heavy machineguns' fire areas at the road of Maarraf al-Nu'man — Khan Shaykhun in the southern countryside of Idlib, and other areas in the road of Saraqeb — Khan al-Sobol in the southeastern countryside of Idlib, and other areas in the city of Khan Shaykhun south of Idlib province which injured a person,
26. the regime forces targeted using shells areas around the town of Bdama in the western countryside of Idlib,
27. the regime forces also targeted using shells areas in the town of MasHara in the northern sector countryside of Al-Quneitra.
28. the regime forces also launched 11 shells at least on areas in the vicinity of Hosh Nasri town, in conjunction with continued clashes between Jaysh al-Islam against the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them, amid the flight of regime's drones over the area,
29. helicopters dropped at least 4 barrel bombs on areas in the farms of Khan al-Shih camp in the Western Ghouta,
30. the regime forces targeted areas in the farms around Khan al-Shih camp in the Western Ghouta,
31. the factions targeted using machineguns' fire areas in the airport road near Beit Sahem town in the south of Rif Dimashq, killing a member of the regime forces,
32. clashes took place between the regime forces, Hezbollah and the gunmen loyal to them against and Rahman Corps and Fath al-Sham Front in several places at Jobar area on the outskirts of the capital, which caused injuries in the ranks of Rahman Corps, and also wounded 2 from Fath al-Sham Front, it also damaged a tank belongs to the regime forces and caused casualties in its ranks, accompanied by a fall of 13 shells launched by the by regime forces on areas in the neighborhood,
33. explosive bullets fell on areas of George Khoury Square and al-Abbasiyyin are in the capital,
34. a mortar shell fell on area near the soap factory in the industrial area at al-Qaboun neighborhood.
35. helicopters dropped barrel bombs on areas in Kawkab village at the northeastern countryside of Hama,
36. the Islamic factions targeted using guided missile a military bulldozer belongs to the regime forces in Shaylout checkpoint area in the northern countryside of Hama which damaged it, but no information about the casualties,
37. a fighter was killed and another was wounded from Jaysh al-Nasr when the regime forces targeted their position point in the vicinity of al-Janabera village in the northern countryside of Hama,
38. the regime forces targeted areas in al- Janabera village in the northern countryside of Hama,

39. warplanes targeted areas al-Lataminah town in the northern countryside of Hama,
40. the regime forces shelled areas in the far northeastern countryside of Latakia; on the administrative border with Idlib province, accompanied by opening the fire of heavy machineguns on the same areas,
41. the regime forces targeted using shells and heavy machineguns' fire several areas in Jabal al-Akrad at the northern countryside of Latakia.

"The ceasefire agreement ends its 6th day with new casualties, including a massacre in a town within the ceasefire areas," [SOHR](#), 18 Sep 2016. [Numbered list by Standler. "While" and "also" in four long run-on sentences in numbered list deleted by Standler.]

Also the Observatory documented the deaths of 10 civilians: "9 citizens including two children killed when the helicopters dropped barrel bombs on areas in the town of Dael in the countryside of Daraa" and "a citizen woman killed in when the warplanes launched a missile on area in al-Sakhr neighborhood at Aleppo city." *Ibid*.

My comment is that it is obvious that the new ceasefire is *not* being observed. Russia reported between 39 and 55 violations/day by insurgents during 14-18 September. There are additional violations by Assad's military. And, of course, there have been *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria during September. The only good news is that the daily death toll in Syria is now less than before the new ceasefire.

On 12 September, Assad's army accepted the new ceasefire until midnight on 18 September. It is *not* known if the Syrian army will renew their "acceptance" of the new ceasefire. When I looked at the website of the Syrian Arab News Agency at 04:00 GMT on 19 Sep (7 hours after the expiration of the Syrian army's initial acceptance of the ceasefire), there was *no* mention of renewing the ceasefire. My comment is that with all of the violations of the ceasefire by Assad and insurgents, the ceasefire had already expired by virtue of being ignored.

19 September: Seventh Full Day of New Agreements

Early on Monday morning, 19 September, the Associated Press reviewed the new ceasefire: Syria's week-long cease-fire, brokered by the United States and Russia, was in doubt Monday amid repeated violations and with no aid deliveries to the besieged rebel-held part of the northern city of Aleppo, a key point in the agreement.

....

For its part, the Syrian army, which endorsed the U.S.-Russia deal, had said in a statement that the cease-fire would end at midnight Sunday. Damascus has since announced no extensions of the truce.

....

On Monday, the opposition reported 254 violations by government forces and their

allies since the truce started on Sept. 12. Syrian state media said there were 32 violations by rebels on Sunday alone.

George Sabra, of the opposition High Negotiations Committee, told The Associated Press on Monday that the truce has been repeatedly violated and did not succeed in its main objective — opening roads for aid to enter besieged rebel-held areas.

"Hundreds of thousands of people in Aleppo are waiting for this truce to allow aid to enter the city," he said, adding that there are aid trucks still waiting on the Turkey-Syria border. "I believe that the truce is clinically dead."

Bassem Mroue, "Syria truce hangs in the balance amid attacks, lack of aid," [Associated Press](#), 09:35 GMT, 19 Sep 2016.

Reuters characterizes the ceasefire as "near collapse".

A Syrian ceasefire brokered by the United States and Russia was in deep trouble on Monday as a rebel official said it had practically failed and signalled insurgents were preparing for a full resumption of fighting.

....

The collapse of the ceasefire, a major project of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, could doom any chance of the administration of President Barack Obama negotiating a breakthrough on Syria before it leaves office in January.

Tom Perry, "Syria ceasefire seen near collapse," [Reuters](#), 12:54 GMT, 19 Sep 2016.

15:09 GMT on 19 September, the Associated Press published a terse announcement that Assad's army had refused to renew their observance of the new ceasefire. The entire official notice at the Syrian Arab News Agency said:

The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces announced on Monday [19 Sep] that the effect of truce regime, which came into force at 19:00 on September 12th 2016 under the Russian-US agreement has ended.

The General Command said in a statement that the truce regime was supposed to form a real opportunity to stop the bloodshed, but the armed terrorist groups turned a blind eye to the agreement and didn't adhere to any of its terms.

It pointed out that more than 300 breaches have been perpetrated by the armed terrorist groups during the truce period in all areas through targeting the residential neighborhoods and the sites of the Syrian Arab Army, killing and injuring tens of civilians and military personnel.

The General Command of the army went on to say that the armed terrorist groups took advantage of the announced truce regime by mobilizing the terrorist groups and various types of weapons to continue their attacks on the residential areas and military sites and to carry out wide terrorist operations, mainly in Aleppo, Hama and Quneitra.

The statement confirmed that the criminal acts of the terrorist groups during the truce period form clear evidence on the extent of the affiliation of these groups to

international and regional sides which have no interest in the cessation of hostilities or putting an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

The army's command clarified that units of army did their best to implement the truce regime and exercised the highest degree of self-restraint in facing the breaches of the terrorist groups except in some cases when the army units were forced to respond to fire sources.

The general Command concluded its statement by emphasizing on its intention and determination to continue its national tasks in the fight against terrorism to restore security and stability to the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

"Army general Command: Truce effect ended, armed terrorist groups didn't commit to any of its terms," [SANA](#), 19 Sep 2016.

My comment is that *both* Assad's military *and* some of the rebel/jihadist groups frequently violated the new ceasefire, as documented above by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Blaming "armed terrorist groups" is only partly correct, because Assad's military was also a frequent violator of the new ceasefire. Furthermore, the "armed terrorist groups" label makes *no* distinction between groups that are excluded from the ceasefire (e.g., ISIL and Nusra), jihadist groups that never accepted the new ceasefire (e.g., Ahrar al-Sham), and rebel/jihadist groups that did accept the new ceasefire. The important message from Assad's government is that the new ceasefire "under the Russian-US agreement has ended."

On 19 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights did *not* publish a detailed list of violations of the ceasefire.

The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic — which does *not* report violations by Assad — reported 53 violations by insurgents of the ceasefire in the past 24 hours.

Within last 24 hours, 53 cases of ceasefire violation have been registered from the side of illegal armed formations in the provinces of Aleppo (26), Hama (5), Damascus (8), Homs (7), Latakia (5), and Daraa (2).

In the Aleppo province, illegal armed formations fired small arms, improvised MLRS and mortars against Sheikh Ali Kobtani, Karyat Khalab fortress, Ramusi and al-Zahraa quarters, the cement plant, the Castello trade center and the Castello road in the Aleppo city.

In the Damascus province, terrorists shelled Harasta, Kabun and Haush Harabu inhabited areas, al-Khamadani, al-Abasin quarters, and positions of the government troops near al-Khamadani quarter in the city of Damascus.

Insurgents fired improvised MLRS and mortars against Maan in the Hama province, Etbaa in the Daraa province, positions of the Syrian Armed Forces near al-Mahrak Mountain in the Hama province as well as near Osman in the Daraa province.

Kerad Dasniya, Homs, Kafr al-Abed, Meshherfa, and Ard Jaburin inhabited areas in the Homs province as well as Rasha, Quinsibba, Nahshebba inhabited areas and Tubal

fortress have been shelled with mortars.

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 19, 2016)," [Russian MoD](#), 20:00 GMT, 19 Sep 2016.

In the first seven full days of the new ceasefire — a ceasefire that is now past tense — the Russians have reported a total of 286 violations by insurgents (i.e., 2 + 42 + 45 + 39 + 55 + 50 + 53).

On 19 September, the Associated Press reported on the failed ceasefire. The Associated Press also reported that a United Nations/Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy of trucks carrying humanitarian aid had been attacked by warplanes in Urum al-Kubra, a rebel-controlled town that is northwest of the city of Aleppo.

A U.N. humanitarian aid convoy inside Syria was hit by airstrikes, U.N. officials said, as the Syrian military declared on Monday that the week-long U.S.-Russian brokered cease-fire had failed.

With the truce apparently teetering on the brink of collapse, the U.S. said it's prepared to extend the agreement, and Russia — after blaming rebels for the violations — suggested it could still be salvaged.

U.N. officials said the U.N. and Red Crescent convoy was delivering assistance for 78,000 people in the town of Uram al-Kubra, west of Aleppo city. Initial estimates indicate that at least 18 of the 31 trucks in the convoy were hit, as well as the Red Crescent warehouse in the area.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 12 were killed in the attack, mostly truck drivers and Red Crescent workers. The Syrian Civil Defense, the volunteer first responder group also known as the White Helmets, confirmed that casualty figure.

....

The convoy, part of a routine interagency dispatch operated by the Syrian Red Crescent, was hit in rural western Aleppo province.

....

Aid deliveries to the besieged eastern districts of Aleppo have not reached their destination. The U.N. accused the government of obstructing the delivery while Russian officials said rebels opened fire at the delivery roads.

Sarah El Deeb & Vladimir Isachenkov, "Aid convoy attacked as Syria calls cease-fire finished," [Associated Press](#), 21:33 GMT, 19 Sep 2016.

My comment is that only Assad's air force and the Russians are flying warplanes in Aleppo province, so those are the only two parties who can be blamed for this atrocity. The same kind of barbarians who attack hospitals also attack humanitarian aid convoys.

On 19 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 32 dead from

"intensive airstrikes which targeted the neighborhoods of Aleppo city and areas in the western countryside". The 32 dead includes "12 persons — most of them are truck drivers of the aid and relief materials convoys and staff of the Red Crescent — were killed in raids which targeted Urem al-Kubra ... (the so-called road of Aleppo — Bab Al-Hawa)". [SOHR](#).

The spokesman for the U.S. State Department issued a brief official comment on Assad's airstrike of the humanitarian aid convoy:

The United States is outraged by reports that a humanitarian aid convoy was bombed near Aleppo today [19 Sep].

For more than a week, we have urged Moscow to fulfill the commitments it made in Geneva to facilitate the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. And for more than a week, the Syrian regime repeatedly denied entry to these UN convoys, preventing them from delivering urgent food, water and medical supplies to desperate Syrian citizens. Only today did the regime finally grant permits for some convoys to proceed.

The destination of this convoy was known to the Syrian regime and the Russian federation and yet these aid workers were killed in their attempt to provide relief to the Syrian people.

The United States will raise this issue directly with Russia. Given the egregious violation of the Cessation of Hostilities we will reassess the future prospects for cooperation with Russia.

John Kirby, "Strike on Humanitarian Aid Convoy in Syria," [U.S. State Dept](#), 19 Sep 2016.

Three days later, Jan Egeland, de Mistura's assistant for humanitarian aid, gave a press briefing in which he summarized what happened to the humanitarian aid convoy that was unloading at a warehouse.

The devastating sustained attack at our convoy in Big Urem (Urum al-Kubra) outside of Aleppo this Monday is the worst attack ever sustained on a UN cross-line, cross-border convoy. There have been hundreds of such convoys and what this attack really means is that there is now a tremendous cloud over the whole de-confliction and notification system that is the precondition for a lifeline to millions of people.

If a convoy that was notified in detail, well in time, where it would go, when it would go, how it would load, where it would stay, where it would end, where it would unload, what was inside, if such a convoy can be, apparently, attacked, how can humanitarian workers believe that they can continue their sacred service to the civilians?

So, a message to the co-chairs, Russia and the United States, and all of the members of this task force, and of course here are also the regional powers in this area, is that we need a reboot, we need a restart for security assurances, guarantees for the humanitarian lifeline.

....

Can I also say that there were no warnings from any armed opposition group that

reached the UN in relation to going to Big Urem (Urum al-Kubra), there was none. Jan Egeland, "Transcript of joint stakeout by U.N. Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, and U.N. Special Advisor to the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 22 Sep 2016.

One piece of good news from Syria on 19 September: the United Nations made their first delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria during September. The Associated Press reported:

The International Committee of the Red Cross says it has delivered humanitarian aid to the besieged town of Talbiseh in Syria's central Homs province.

It says a joint convoy of 45 ICRC, Syrian Arab Red Crescent and U.N. trucks delivered nearly 17,000 food parcels as well as 1,000 bulk food rations to the town of 84,000 residents on Monday [19 Sep].

Talbiseh is besieged by government forces. A humanitarian convoy last reached the town in July, the ICRC said.

The ICRC says it also delivered materials to repair the town's water network as well as hygiene products.

Associated Press, "The Latest," [Associated Press](#), 18:30 Beirut time, 19 Sep 2016.

Continuing Civil War in Syria

20 September 2016

On the morning of Tuesday, 20 September, Reuters reported the United Nations has suspended *all* humanitarian aid in Syria, in response to yesterday's bombing of a convoy of trucks.

The United Nations has suspended all aid convoy movements in Syria after an air strike hit a 31-truck convoy late on Monday, U.N. humanitarian aid spokesman Jens Laerke said on Tuesday.

"As an immediate security measure, other convoy movements in Syria have been suspended for the time being pending further assessment of the security situation," he told a briefing, adding that the U.N. had recently received permission from the Syrian government to deliver aid to all besieged areas in the country.

"U.N. suspends all Syria aid convoys after air strike," [Reuters](#); 09:13 GMT, 20 Sep 2016.

Strangely, the Russian military denied there had been an airstrike on the convoy, instead the Russians claimed cargo in the trucks had burst into flame "because of some incident on the ground." After the Russian claim, the United Nations changed "airstrikes" to "attacks" in the [UNOCHA statement](#) on the atrocity. [Reuters](#).

The [Associated Press](#) reports that witnesses heard helicopters and fighter jets overhead the convoy that was unloading at a Syrian Arab Red Crescent warehouse, and the attack lasted for two hours. The Russian propaganda that this incident was a "cargo fire" is ludicrous. The

Associated Press reported the International Committee of the Red Cross said a total of 20 people died in the attack.

On 20 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights did *not* publish a detailed list of violations of the ceasefire.

The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic — which does *not* report violations by Assad — reported 45 violations by insurgents of the ceasefire in the past 24 hours.

Within last 24 hours, 45 cases of ceasefire violation have been registered from the side of illegal armed formations in the provinces of Aleppo (26), Hama (4), Damascus (11), Latakia (2), and al-Quneitra (2).

In the Aleppo province, terrorists fired improvised MLRS, mortars, and small arms against al-Hader, farms in the Sheikh Ali Kobtani inhabited area, Ramusi, al-Zahraa, 1070, Hai al-Ansari, al-Khalidiyah, and Laramon quarters, the Castello trade centre and the Castello road, the cement and gas plants, and the armament school in the Aleppo city.

In the Damascus province, Huteita al-Jarash, Harasta, Haush Harabu, Duma, Marj Sultan, school in Jaubar, farms Bala al-Kadima, and positions of the government troops near Arbil and Kabun were shelled with improvised MLRS, mortars and small arms.

Armed formations of terrorist groupings fired improvised MLRS against Maan, Mubbatan, and Mureived in the Hama province, the Tubal fortress, and area near height 409,5 in the Latakia province.

In the al-Quneitra province, positions of the government troops located near height 1226 were shelled by a tank, and al-Baas suffered shellings of artillery and mortars. "Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 20, 2016)," [Russian MoD](#), 20:00 GMT, 20 Sep 2016.

Note that the Russian report omits the attack on the United Nations humanitarian aid convoy. I refrain from making inflammatory, pejorative remarks about the Russian liars.

21 September 2016

On Wednesday, 21 September, at 16:06 GMT, [Reuters](#) characterized the situation in Syria: "Syrian rebels and pro-government forces battled each other on major frontlines near Aleppo and Hama, ..., as a ceasefire appeared to have completely unravelled. The renewed battles demonstrated the thin prospects for reviving a truce that collapsed into fresh fighting and bombardments on Monday [19 Sep]...."

At 16:30 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) was somewhat more optimistic than Reuters when the AP said: "A U.S. and Russian-brokered cease-fire that went into effect nine days ago is on the brink of collapse, with the government and the rebels alleging dozens of violations."

On 21 September, John Kerry spoke to a meeting of the United Nations Security Council where he criticized the changing story from Russia about their 19 Sep attack on the Syrian Red Crescent convoy and warehouse:

And just think about what happened in the last couple of days. First, President Putin's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, claims that the attack on the humanitarian convoy was somehow a necessary response to an alleged offensive by al-Nusrah elsewhere in the country. That's the first claim.

Then a Russian ambassador said that Russian and Syrian forces were not bombing the area but they were targeting Khan Tuman.

Then we heard a completely different story. The defense ministry said that the aid convoy had been accompanied by militants in a pickup truck with a mortar. We've seen no evidence of that. But that, in any case, would not justify a violation of the cessation of hostilities. And by the way, that mortar could never have inflicted the damage that has been caused on those trucks.

Then the defense ministry switched completely and it denied Russia's involvement. It said, according to spokesman Igor Konashenkov, I quote, "Neither Russia nor Syria conducted airstrikes on the UN humanitarian convoy in the southwestern outskirts of Aleppo." That's a quote.

Then Konashenkov went further and he said the damage to the convoy was the direct result of the cargo catching fire. The trucks and the food and the medicine just spontaneously combusted. Anybody here believe that? I mean, this is not a joke. We're in serious business here. If we can stand up and say, yes, accidentally, we had a strike, we should have some responsibility — maybe it's an attempt to distract attention or to somehow deflect this, but I think what it underscores is that we have a responsibility here to find a way forward.

And guess what? Everything I just said is contradicted by public information, by conclusions already reached by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross, the Red Crescent Societies, the Syrian Arab [Red] Crescent, independent journalists, and aid workers on the ground, eyewitnesses. John Kerry, "Remarks at the Council Session on Syria," [U.S. State Dept](#), 21 Sep 2016.

My comment is that the Russian stories remind me of the Monty Python's Flying Circus sketch in which a man purchases a Norwegian Blue parrot from a pet store, takes it home, then realizes the parrot is dead. The man returns to the pet store, and the store gives him a series of bogus excuses (e.g., the parrot is resting, the parrot is stunned, the parrot is "pining for the fjords").

On the night of 20 September, either Assad's air force or Russian warplanes made an airstrike on a medical clinic in Khan Tuman, killing at least 4 staff members and 10 patients. See [below](#).

On 21 September, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's army began a major offensive in Hama province.

On 21 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported airstrikes "in the town Kafr Dael in the western countryside of Aleppo", "in the neighborhood of al-Ferdus in Aleppo city", and the "in Huraytan area at the northern countryside of Aleppo". Airstrikes "in the neighborhoods of al-Salhin, al-Mashhad, al-Sekkary and al-Mowasalat in Aleppo city" have killed at least 11 people. Furthermore there were "violent clashes took place between the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them against the rebel and Islamic Factions in the vicinity of Handarat camp in the northern city of Aleppo". [SOHR](#).

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 18 deaths in airstrikes on Khan Shaykhun City in Idlib province. [SOHR](#).

On 21 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights did *not* publish a detailed list of violations of the ceasefire.

On 21 September, The Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic — which does *not* report violations by Assad — [reported](#) only 7 violations of the ceasefire, all in Damascus province. That is *not* credible, given the reports by journalists. According to the Russian propaganda, the ceasefire has the fewest violations *after* the ceasefire is over and the civil war has resumed.

22 September 2016

On 22 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 16 people died in bombings by warplanes in Aleppo today. [SOHR](#).

On 22 September, at 20:20 in Damascus, the Associated Press reported:
Activists say at least 12 people have been killed in fierce bombing on the contested city of Aleppo, as diplomats in New York [i.e., the ISSG meeting] struggle to revive a cease-fire for Syria.

A spokesman for the Civil Defense search-and-rescue group said rescuers are still trying to reach victims of the presumed Syrian government or Russian air raids Thursday on neighborhoods in the city's opposition-held eastern quarters.

Ibrahim Alhaj says "for anyone who hears the airstrikes from yesterday [21 Sep], at 7 p.m., until now [22 Sep], they would say it is a world war in Aleppo."

Video from the city and the nearby town of Kafr Dael show massive fires fueled by what appears to be incendiary munitions.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group says 14 civilians have been killed in the east of Aleppo since the morning.
"The Latest: Syria's military announces new Aleppo operation," [Associated Press](#), 19:53 GMT (15:53 EDT), 22 Sep 2016.

On 22 September, at 22:50 in Damascus, the Associated Press reported:

Syria's military command for Aleppo says it is commencing operations in the contested city's rebel-held eastern quarters.

In a statement carried on state news Thursday [22 Sep] the command calls on citizens to keep away from "terrorist groups."

Ibid.

Here is the entire official statement at the English-language Syrian Arab News Agency website:

Command of the military operations in Aleppo announced on Thursday [22 Sep] the start of its operations in the eastern neighborhoods of the city, calling on citizens to keep away from sites and centers of armed terrorist groups.

"No detention or inquiry to any citizen reaches the points of the Syrian Arab army, the command said in a statement, adding that it has taken all procedures and facilities to receive the civilians and provide them with shelter.

It added the facilities and procedures include those who were misled, yet they can return to the homeland's lap.

"Military operations' Command announces the start of its operations in the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo," [SANA](#), 22 Sep 2016.

Reuters described Assad's new assault on rebel-held eastern Aleppo:

Warplanes mounted the heaviest air strikes in months against rebel-held districts of Syria's commercial hub and largest city, dealing a fresh blow to efforts to end Syrian civil war that has raged since 2011.

Rebel officials and rescue workers said incendiary bombs were among the weapons that rained down on Aleppo. Hamza al-Khatib, the director of a hospital in the rebel-held east, told Reuters 45 people were killed.

"It's as if the planes are trying to compensate for all the days they didn't drop bombs" during the ceasefire, Ammar al-Selmo, the head of the civil defence rescue service in opposition-held eastern Aleppo, told Reuters.

....

Syrian state media announced the new offensive and quoted the army's military headquarters in Aleppo urging civilians in eastern parts of the city to avoid areas where "terrorists" were located and said it had prepared exit points for those who want to flee, including rebels.

....

The aerial assault, by aircraft from the Syrian government, its Russian allies or both, signalled Moscow and Damascus had rejected a plea by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to halt flights so aid could be delivered and the ceasefire salvaged.

Tom Perry & Lesley Wroughton, "Syria announces new offensive, diplomats fail to renew

truce," [Reuters](#), 01:14 GMT, 23 Sep 2016.

On 22 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights did *not* publish a detailed list of violations of the ceasefire.

23 September 2016

On the morning of 23 September, the Associated Press reported that Assad was again targeting first responders in Aleppo. I say "again" because Assad previously targeted them on 26 April 2016.

A bombing campaign in rebel-held districts of Syria's Aleppo city intensified Friday [23 Sep], targeting several neighborhoods and centers of the award-winning volunteer civil defense group known as the White Helmets, as the government announced a new offensive in the area.

The intense bombing and the declaration of a new offensive come as diplomatic efforts failed to salvage a cease-fire that lasted nearly a week, before giving way to a new level of violence. Residents and activists say the bombing, which began in earnest late Wednesday [21 Sep] night, has been unprecedented, targeting residential areas, infrastructure and civil defense centers. Some streets have been closed off because of piles of rubble.

....

Ibrahim Alhaj, a member of the Syrian Civil Defense, said three of the group's centers had been targeted in the air bombing campaign that usually accelerates after dark. By Friday morning, one center in the Ansari neighborhood in the southern part of the rebel-held district had been put out of service after it was hit around 7 a.m.

Ambulances and the one fire engine that serves the rebel-held part of Aleppo had been damaged. In another center, Alhaj said, a bomb fell in the courtyard of the center and the extent of the damage was not yet clear.

Sarah El Deeb, "Intense bombing campaign targets Syria civil defense centers," [Associated Press](#), 12:01 GMT, 23 Sep 2016.

Liz Sly of *The Washington Post* wrote an article titled "A ferocious assault on Aleppo suggests the U.S. may be wrong on Syria".

Syrian and Russian warplanes launched a ferocious assault against rebel-held Aleppo on Friday [23 Sep], burying any hopes that a U.S.-backed cease-fire could be salvaged and calling into question whether the deal would ever have worked.

Waves upon waves of planes relentlessly struck neighborhoods in the rebel-held east of the city on the first day of a new offensive announced by the government. Residents described the most intense airstrikes they had yet witnessed in a five-year-old war that has already claimed in excess of 300,000 lives.

By nightfall, more than 100 bombs had landed, and more than 80 people were dead, said Ammar al-Selmo, head of the Aleppo branch of the White Helmets civil defense

group.

Rescuers don't have the capacity to reach all the places that were hit because there are too many, he said. Three White Helmets bases were among the locations targeted, and two were destroyed, along with their equipment and fuel supplies, further diminishing the group's ability to respond.

....

If there had been any doubt before that the cease-fire deal co-sponsored with Russia is dead, at least for the foreseeable future, the violence Friday put it to rest. A meeting in New York between Secretary of State John F. Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov ended swiftly, without statements or discernible progress toward Kerry's stated goal of reviving last week's cease-fire.

Instead, the launch of the offensive called into question the entire premise of the agreement painstakingly negotiated by Kerry and Lavrov over the past eight months: that Russia shares the Obama administration's view that there is no military solution to the conflict.

....

Whether Russia ever would have been able to persuade Assad to comply with the deal is in question, said Robert Ford, who served as U.S. ambassador to Syria during the earliest years of the uprising against Assad and is now with the Washington-based Middle East Institute. It is also far from clear whether the United States would have been able to sell the fractious rebels on a deal that would have required them to separate from extremists [Nusra], he said. "Both the U.S. and Russia overestimated the other side's leverage," he said.

....

"I could imagine the regime retaking Aleppo eventually," Ford said. "The direction of the battle is glacial, but it is only going in one direction."

Liz Sly, "A ferocious assault on Aleppo suggests the U.S. may be wrong on Syria," [Washington Post](#), 23:43 GMT, 23 Sep 2016.

My comment is that the U.S. has been wrong on Syria since 2011, when Hillary Clinton and Obama declared Assad had lost his legitimacy to lead Syria. The USA and other foreign meddlers were wrong to send weapons to insurgents in Syria. (Ban Ki-moon was correct in 2013 and 2014 when he urged nations to stop sending weapons to Syria.) The USA and other foreign nations were wrong to believe that meetings of the Friends of Syria — or meetings of the ISSG — would make Syria a better place. The USA and other nations were wrong to let Saudi Arabia and Turkey create the HNC, and allow the HNC to become the sole negotiating team for all opponents of Assad. The list of serious errors by the U.S. Government goes on and on.

The Russian airstrikes in support of Assad (which airstrikes began on 30 Sep 2015) and

Assad's open declarations of pursuing a military victory made any ceasefire futile. Also the belligerence of the insurgents contributed to the failure of the ceasefire in Syria. Nusra was excluded from the ceasefire agreements, while some jihadist groups never accepted the new ceasefire agreement in September.

Reuters reported on the effect on U.S. foreign policy:

"For the next president on Day One, this becomes the problem from hell," said Frederic Hof, a former Obama adviser on Syria who is now at the Atlantic Council think tank.

"It's a problem that's going to persist in one way or another throughout the first term of the next president and probably beyond."

A U.S. official suggested White House plans to keep Syrian chaos under control as Obama leaves office have been upended.

"It was hoped that they could turn over a simmering mess to the next president," said a U.S. official. "But what happened was that the simmering mess blew up and now they are going to have to figure out what to do."

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that Russian aircraft, long-range artillery and special forces advisers were directly participating with Syrian government forces in the drive to conquer eastern Aleppo, the largest urban stronghold of the U.S.-backed moderate opposition.

....

"The Russians are actively participating in the current offensive in Aleppo," said one U.S. official. "It appears to be a no-holds barred attempt to crush the opposition."

Russian aircraft were flying sorties at the same rate — about 40 per day — as they were before Washington and Moscow negotiated a failed ceasefire between the Syria government and opposition forces in February, the officials said.

....

Moreover, U.S.-backed rebels, dismayed over what they saw as Obama's abandonment of Aleppo, could begin joining al Qaeda's Syrian branch [i.e., Nusra]. It is widely regarded as the most effective opposition group and has vehemently rejected a negotiated settlement with Assad, U.S. officials and experts said.

Jonathan Landay & Matt Spetalnick, "As Syria cease-fire fails, Obama may leave successor 'problem from hell'," [Reuters](#), 22:48 GMT, 23 Sep 2016.

Reuters reported on Assad's new military offensive in Aleppo:

Warplanes bombed Aleppo on Friday [23 Sep] with what residents described as unprecedented ferocity after the Russian-backed Syrian army announced an offensive to fully capture Syria's biggest city, killing off any hope of reviving a ceasefire.

....

The apparent collapse of U.S.-backed peacemaking may mark a turning point in the 5½-year-old war, with the government and its Russian and Iranian allies now seemingly determined to crush the rebellion in its biggest urban stronghold.

....

Hamza al-Khatib, head of a hospital in rebel-held eastern Aleppo, said that 91 people had been killed in Friday's bombardment while the Civil Defence rescue group that operates in opposition areas said 40 buildings were destroyed.

....

The collapse of the ceasefire — the same fate as that of all previous efforts to halt a war that has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians — appeared to have doomed the peace bid, probably the last chance for a settlement before U.S. President Barack Obama leaves office in January [2017].

Ellen Francis & Tom Perry, "Warplanes bomb Aleppo after Syrian army launches offensive," [Reuters](#); 01:39 GMT, 24 Sep 2016.

My comment is that there are three news items in *The Washington Post* and Reuters articles: first, eastern Aleppo is being pulverized by airstrikes, second, the ceasefire is really dead, and third, the U.S. policy in Syria is in shambles.

On 23 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 72 people were killed by "intensive airstrikes" in Aleppo on 23 Sep alone. [SOHR](#).

The only good news from Syria was there was a delivery of humanitarian aid to *one* town: ... last night, an inter-agency convoy of 23 trucks completed delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance to some 35,000 people in the besieged town of Moadamiyeh in Rural Damascus. Assistance included food, medical supplies, nutrition, education, water and sanitation and non-food supplies. Trucks and drivers returned safely to Damascus after offloading. The town was last reached with an inter-agency convoy on 24 July of this year. That was the eighth convoy there this year.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 23 Sep 2016.

24 September 2016

On Saturday morning, 24 September, Agence France-Presse reported:

Nearly two million civilians were without water in Syria's second city of Aleppo on Saturday after regime bombardment damaged one pumping station and rebels shut down another in retaliation, the UN said.

....

"Intense attacks last night have damaged the Bab al-Nayrab water pumping station, which supplies water to some 250,000 people in the eastern parts of Aleppo," the UN

children's agency UNICEF said.

"Violence is preventing repair teams from reaching the station."

"In retaliation, the Suleiman al-Halabi pumping station, also located in the east, was switched off, cutting water to 1.5 million people in the western parts of the city," which are held by the government.

....

The denial of access to food, water and medicines has been used repeatedly as a weapon by all sides in Syria's brutal five-year-old civil war.

"Two million people without water in Syria's Aleppo: UN," [Al-Arabiya](#), 09:53 GMT, 24 Sep 2016.

The spokesman for the United Nations Secretary General issued the following statement:

The Secretary-General is appalled by the chilling military escalation in the city of Aleppo, which is facing the most sustained and intense bombardment since the start of the Syrian conflict.

Since the announcement two days ago by the Syrian Army of an offensive to capture eastern Aleppo, there have been repeated reports of airstrikes involving the use of incendiary weapons and advanced munitions such as bunker buster bombs. The Secretary-General underlines that the apparent systematic use of these types of indiscriminate weapons in densely populated areas may amount to war crimes.

The Secretary-General considers this a dark day for the global commitment to protect civilians. The international community has to unite to send a clear message that it will not tolerate the use of indiscriminate and ever more deadly and powerful weapons against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Aleppo," [U.N.](#), 24 Sep 2016.

Reuters reports that the battle in Aleppo may be an active pursuit of a military victory by Assad with the full support of Russia.

The assault on Aleppo, where more than 250,000 civilians are trapped in a besieged opposition sector, could be the biggest battle yet in a civil war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and driven 11 million from their homes.

Residents say air strikes on eastern Aleppo since the offensive was announced on Thursday have been more intense than ever, using more powerful bombs. Scores of people have been killed in the last two days.

Two weeks after Moscow and Washington announced a ceasefire [on the night of 9 Sep], President Bashar al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies appear to have launched a campaign for a decisive battlefield victory that has buried any hope for diplomacy.

....

The war has ground on for nearly six years, with all diplomatic efforts collapsing in failure. For most of that time, world powers seemed to accept that neither Assad nor his opponents were likely to be capable of decisive victory on the battlefield.

But Russia's apparent decision to abandon the peace process this week could reflect a change in that calculus and a view that victory is in reach, at least in the western cities where the overwhelming majority of Syrians live.

Assad's fortunes improved a year ago when Russia joined the war on his side. Since then, Washington has worked hard to negotiate peace with Moscow, producing two ceasefires. But both proved short-lived, with Assad, possibly scenting chances for more battlefield success, showing no sign of compromise.

Tom Perry, "Battle rages near Aleppo, air onslaught continues," [Reuters](#); 22:33 GMT, 24 Sep 2016.

On 24 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 52 people killed in Aleppo today. "[T]he death toll is expected to rise because there are some people in critical situation, and because there are missing people under the rubble of the buildings destroyed by the Russian and Syrian regime's warplanes." [SOHR](#).

25 September 2016

On Sunday, 25 September, there was an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council about Syria. De Mistura said about the situation in Syria:

[¶4] And then on 18 September, airstrikes resumed on Aleppo City, when five districts were hit reportedly with five severe airstrikes. And when the Government unilaterally declared the end of the cessation of hostilities on 19 September, we began to hear reports of use of barrel bombs and airstrikes in eastern Aleppo, where, I want to remind all of us, up to 275,000 people are currently de facto trapped — fair enough, there is 1.6 million people on the other side of Aleppo, but they are not isolated as the ones in eastern Aleppo. Only minutes after the Government's announcement, our own team in Aleppo — which happened to be there because we had sent them to accompany and assist these possible truck convoy that was meant to leave Turkey in order to get via Castello Road to eastern Aleppo — they clearly heard the sounds of shelling and bombardment begin in Aleppo.

[¶5] As the Secretary-General has reported to this Council, on the evening of the same 19 September, there was a horrific attack which took place against a humanitarian convoy to Oram Al-Kubra, killing 20 humanitarian Syrian workers and drivers including the team leader, destroying 18 out of 31 clearly identified trucks. We have condemned this attack in the strongest terms — as have many other Member States around this table who have offered condolences and have been calling for an enquiry and for those who committed such an action to be held accountable.

[¶6] Since that fateful day [19 Sep], we have seen the situation in eastern Aleppo

deteriorate to new heights of horror. Amid intensive airstrikes reported on Friday [23 Sep], following the announcement of the beginning of a government offensive — an announcement made by the government itself —, the community across opposition-controlled eastern Aleppo even called off their own Friday prayers. Information received by OHCHR indicates dozens of airstrikes on Friday and Saturday, that have been hitting residential buildings across the de facto besieged eastern Aleppo, causing scores of reported civilian deaths and injuries, including those of many children.

[¶7] First responders appear overwhelmed and unable to respond to many of the sites. We have seen reports of 3 of the 4 centres operated by the White Helmets in eastern Aleppo being hit. As numbers of casualties are rising, rescue workers struggle to remove people from under the rubble. Even tools that might or might have been able to mitigate some of the suffering of civilians have reportedly been destroyed in the attacks against the civil defence stations.

[¶8] Information received from sources on the ground, allegedly due to airstrikes on AOG-held areas, suggest the following numbers to date — we can't verify them but these are the figures we are seeing at the moment: 213 fatalities in Aleppo province, [including] 139 fatalities in eastern Aleppo, 74 fatalities in rural Aleppo, all including dozens of women and children.

[¶9] How many airstrikes? Obviously we have no independent capacity to verify. And sources on the ground tell us that they no longer have the capacity to count them accurately, given the chaos in Aleppo city, due to the fact they often take place at night and with remarkable new intensity. We heard the words “unprecedented”, in quantity and also in scale and type, in the types of bombing. We have seen reports, videos and pictures of reported use of incendiary bombs, that create fireballs of such intensity that they light up the pitch darkness in eastern Aleppo, as though it was actually daylight. We now hear of bunker-busting bombs being used and see pictures of large craters in the earth much larger than in previous aerial bombings. If it is confirmed, the systematic indiscriminate use of such weapons in areas where civilians and civilian infrastructure are present may amount to war crimes. Civilians across town must be asking themselves where on earth is now safe to be in this tormented city.

....

[¶12] Madam President, up to 275,000 people — and they can't be all terrorists frankly — in Eastern Aleppo have now been under a form of de facto siege for almost 20 days, since the al-Ramouseh corridor was closed and after the Castello road was blocked since 7 July.

[¶13] Since this closure, the humanitarian situation has taken a turn for the worse. In essence, basically supplies are running out. WFP stocks inside eastern Aleppo amount to only 12,000 food rations (which means basically sufficient for 60,000 people out of 275,000). And there is no prospect of replenishing them, since both roads are blocked. Bread is available only for 3 days a week and bakeries are being hit (which could reduce again in coming days). There is lack of fuel for general public use, reducing the services on transport, private wells, and household use — especially for cooking.

[¶14] As this Council is aware, the UN/WFP had planned to send a convoy to eastern Aleppo at the beginning of the renewed cessation of hostilities [12 Sep] and WFP had mobilized a convoy of 40 trucks — I have the pictures here, every morning at 5 o'clock they are ready, they are waiting to go — loaded with food rations sufficient to provide full food rations for some 35,000 people and wheat flour assistance for an additional 130,000 people of the 275,000. We all know what happened: the convoy never moved because it never received sufficient guarantees — frankly, let's be honest — from either side and the cessation of hostilities broke down. We had complicated arguments raised by the government, such as driving licences suddenly becoming crucial in the whole conflict, and on the opposition side all sorts of arguments asking for all sorts of impossible conditions in order to make sure we would have the guarantees. Obviously there was a hesitation from both sides to see this convoy moving, and we saw the result of this.

[¶15] Two million people now have no access to running water through the public network, after intense fighting stopped water pumping from the two key pumping stations that service the population — both eastern and western parts of the city. On 22 September, the Bab Al-Nairab water pumping station, that serves the eastern part of the city, was reportedly hit by airstrikes. And Jaish al-Fateh turned off as a retaliation the water to 1.5 million people in the western part of the city — so no water — in a grave tit-for-tat type of move. Water has now been luckily, and we hope more regularly, turned back on, after difficult last-minute negotiations led by UNICEF. However, people in eastern Aleppo still remain at risk due to interruptions to safe drinking water. Water from wells, which used to be plenty, has become, due to the conflict, highly contaminated and people, particularly vulnerable children, are at risk of catastrophic outbreaks of waterborne diseases. God forbid, that's the last thing we need in a moment like this.

Staffan de Mistura, "Briefing to the Security Council on Syria by Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura [as delivered]," [U.N.](#), 25 Sep 2016.

On 25 September, *The New York Times* reported:

Make life intolerable and death likely. Open an escape route, or offer a deal to those who leave or surrender. Let people trickle out. Kill whoever stays. Repeat until a deserted cityscape is yours.

It is a strategy that both the Syrian government and its Russian allies have long embraced to subdue Syrian rebels, largely by crushing the civilian populations that support them.

But in the past few days, as hopes for a revived cease-fire have disintegrated at the United Nations, the Syrians and Russians seem to be mobilizing to apply this kill-all-who-resist strategy to the most ambitious target yet: the rebel-held sections of the divided metropolis of Aleppo.

....

The tactics [of “starve-or-submit”] have succeeded in much smaller areas: in encircled

suburbs of the capital, Damascus, and in rebel enclaves in the central city of Homs — first in the historic Old City and, most recently, last week, in the outlying neighborhood of Waer.

....

More than 90 people died [in Aleppo] on Friday [23 Sep], and more than 100 on Saturday [24 Sep]. At one hospital, nearly half of the 67 people treated for injuries were children. On Sunday [25 Sep], scores in the rebel-held districts were dead by evening.

Anne Barnard & Somini Sengupta, "In Push on Aleppo, Syria and Russia Seem Ready to Further Scorch Its Earth," [NY Times](#), 25 Sep 2016.

On Sunday, 25 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 26 people killed in Aleppo today. "... the death toll is expected to rise because there are some people in critical situation and due to missing people under the rubble." [SOHR](#).

The Associated Press reported:

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 26 civilians had been killed by 7:30 p.m. and said it expects the toll to rise. Ibrahim Alhaj of the Syrian Civil Defense search and rescue outfit gave a higher toll, saying hospitals and rescuers had documented the deaths of 43 people so far on Sunday [25 Sep].

The Observatory, which relies on a network of contacts inside Syria, said earlier in the day that 213 civilians had been killed by airstrikes and shelling on opposition areas in and around Aleppo since the U.S.-Russian brokered cease-fire collapsed Monday [19 Sep] evening.

Hospitals are overwhelmed with casualties and medical workers are expecting many of the wounded to die from a lack of treatment, according to Mohammad Zein Khandaqani, a member of the Medical Council, which oversees medical affairs in the city's opposition quarters.

Philip Issa & Edith M. Lederer, "At least 26 killed in Aleppo as UN meets over Syria," [Associated Press](#), 21:40 GMT, 25 Sep 2016.

On 25 September, there was some good news from Syria, as the Associated Press reported on delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria.

The International Committee for the Red Cross says it has delivered food, medical supplies, and other supplies to a set of four besieged Syrian towns that have been inaccessible to aid organizations in nearly six months.

The organization said Sunday [25 Sep] it was reaching 60,000 residents trapped in the towns of Madaya, Zabadani, Foua, and Kafraya.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which is managing the convoys jointly with the U.N. and the ICRC, says 53 trucks have reached Madaya and Zabadani, besieged by pro-government forces, and 18 trucks have reached Kafraya and Foua, which are besieged by rebels.

"The Latest: ...," [Associated Press](#), 20:00 Damascus time, 25 Sep 2016.

26 September 2016

On Monday, 26 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights did *not* post any news from Aleppo at its English-language website, but they posted reports of battles in Idlib, Hama, and Daraa provinces. Both the Associated Press and Reuters coverage of Syria focused on diplomatic efforts and said little about what was happening on the ground in Syria.

27 September 2016

On Tuesday, 27 September 2016, the Associated Press reported:

A Syrian military official says operations in Aleppo have been continuing since they were announced last week [22 Sep] and will not stop before "terrorist groups" in the area have been eliminated. Speaking to The Associated Press in the capital, Damascus, on Tuesday [27 Sep], the official says battles will continue daily on all fronts in Aleppo until the "terrorists" in the "eastern parts of the city are wiped out." The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Albert Aji, "The Latest:" [Associated Press](#), 14:00 Damascus time, 27 Sep 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

With international diplomacy in tatters and the U.S. focused on its election, the Syrian government and its Russian allies are seizing the moment to wage an all-out campaign to recapture Aleppo, unleashing the most destructive bombing of the past five years and pushing into the center of the Old City.

Desperate residents describe horrific scenes in Syria's largest city and onetime commercial center, with hospitals and underground shelters hit by indiscriminate airstrikes that the U.N. said may amount to a war crime.

Debris covers streets lined with bombed-out buildings, trapping people in their neighborhoods and hindering rescue workers. On Tuesday, activists reported at least 23 people killed in airstrikes on two districts in the rebel-held part of Aleppo.

....

Over the course of the conflict, the government has slowly regained control of major cities. Its aim appears to be securing what some analysts call "useful Syria" — a portion containing the four largest cities of Aleppo, Damascus, Homs and Hama, along with its Mediterranean coast.

Aleppo is the last of the major cities still being contested, and it could take government forces between six months and a year to capture it, unless they aim to "annihilate" the politically significant city, a Western diplomat told The Associated Press. The envoy, who is familiar with the cease-fire talks that have faltered, spoke on condition of anonymity because of his government's regulations.

Bassem Mroue & Sarah El Deeb, "Battle for besieged Syrian city of Aleppo intensifies," [Associated Press](#), 21:39 GMT, 27 Sep 2016.

Reuters reports that Assad's army began a ground assault on Aleppo:

Syrian government forces and their allies attacked the opposition-held sector of Aleppo on several fronts on Tuesday [27 Sep], the biggest ground assault yet in a massive new campaign that has destroyed a U.S.-backed ceasefire.

The United States says the assault on Aleppo is proof that President Bashar al-Assad and his Russian and regional allies have abandoned an international peace process to pursue victory on the battlefield after nearly six years of civil war.

....

Only about 30 doctors are left in rebel-held Aleppo, coping with hundreds of wounded each day who are being treated on the floors of hospitals that are bereft of supplies. [See [Reuters](#) on 26 Sep.]

....

Tuesday's assault saw pro-government forces, which include the Syrian army and allied militia from Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, attempt to attack Aleppo's Old City near its historic citadel, as well as around several of the city's major access points.

Tom Perry & Angus McDowall, "Syrian government launches Aleppo ground attack," [Reuters](#), 22:38 GMT, 27 Sep 2016.

On 27 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported 23 dead "when the warplanes bombed areas in neighborhoods of al-Shaar and al-MashHad in Aleppo city, the death toll is expected to rise because there are some people in critical situation, and because there are a lot of missing people". [SOHR](#).

28 September 2016

The Associated Press reported that either Assad's or Russian warplanes had attacked two hospitals in Aleppo, as well as people waiting for bread to eat.

Government shelling and airstrikes in Syria's Aleppo landed near a bread distribution center and two hospitals Wednesday [28 Sep], killing seven people and putting at least one of the medical facilities completely out of service, activists and medics said.

U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon described the conditions in eastern, rebel-held Aleppo as worse than a "slaughterhouse" at a Security Council meeting.

"Those using ever more destructive weapons know exactly what they are doing — they know they are committing war crimes," Ban said, without naming any countries. Syria's government is waging a major offensive in Aleppo and both Syria and Russia are carrying out airstrikes on the city.

Doctors Without Borders, which supported both of the hospitals damaged Wednesday [28 Sep], said a "brutal and relentless onslaught from air and land" has left eastern Aleppo with just seven surgical doctors to treat a population of some 250,000.

....

Aref al-Aref, a nurse at M2, one of the hospitals, said government shelling hit the bread distribution center near the city center before dawn. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the Aleppo Media Center said six people were killed outside the center.

Sarah El Deeb, "Syrian government attacks 2 hospitals, bread line in Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 19:13 GMT, 28 Sep 2016.

More on the bombing of hospitals is [below](#).

29 September 2016

On 29 September 2016, the United Nations Daily Press Briefing included the following text on Syria:

Just now, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, told the Security Council that the last seven days have seen an intensification of attacks across Syria. From airstrikes in Deir Ezzour, to airstrikes and ground attacks in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idlib and Rural Damascus and other governorates, fighting has intensified despite a one-week lull when the cessation of hostilities was reinstated, albeit with violations on all sides. He said that nowhere has the fighting been more intense in the last days than in besieged east Aleppo, where estimates are that more than 320 civilians were killed, 765 injured in the first days.

....

.... We have been able to get some [humanitarian aid] convoys in over the last week. There was a convoy, I think, two days ago, so some of the convoys have been able to reach al-Waer, Moadamiyeh, and the Four Towns, which is good and which is to be welcomed. Obviously, we're still not able to reach Aleppo, East Aleppo. I think the description of the devastating humanitarian situation on the ground is clear, and we've been very vocal about that. And just yesterday, a planned convoy to Douma for about 35,000 people had to be aborted after waiting for seven hours at a Government of Syria checkpoint. We're not where we want to be on the distribution of aid. We've submitted a plan for October to the Government for approval, and that was done on 19 September, and we're hoping to get swift approval for that plan.

....

Question: And also, a general question on Syria. I have asked you this and some other journalists ask you this, and the UN officials were quoted as saying that there should be some progress made on Syria before the end of the year, before the term of Ban Ki-moon and Obama's term, as well. Do you think it's realistic right now when we

basically make one step forward and two steps back?

Spokesman: Our focus isn't so much on the end of the Secretary-General's term, the end of Ban Ki-moon's term. Our focus is on trying to get help to the people in Syria that need it now. As I said, whether it's on the humanitarian end, we're not where we want to be. On the political track, we're not where we want to be. We're continuing contacts with various parties at all levels. We want to see progress. The Syrian people need to see some progress. They need to see some pause in the fighting for us to get the aid in that we need.

Question: Yes, but now things seem to be going from bad to worse.

Spokesman: I'm aware of that, and I think the Secretary-General has said it in ways that were much more eloquent than me yesterday.

Question: Thank you. In his statement today to the Security Council, Mr. O'Brien said that continued inaction by the Security Council on the humanitarian crisis, particularly in East Aleppo, would put the Security Council and, by extension, the UN on the wrong side of history. And he also said that "it is time to place blame". So if the Security Council continues to be paralyzed by divisions, particularly amongst the permanent members, is the Secretary-General considering the possibility of proactively recommending that the General Assembly invoke the Uniting for Peace Resolution and consider assigning blame and censuring through public resolution — publicly adopt a resolution censuring those who are apparently responsible for the carnage in East Aleppo?

Spokesman: I think the Secretary-General used the same words yesterday, talked about the collective failure of the UN, of the Security Council in the UN as a whole, of not getting any progress on Syria. The General Assembly has, over the past five years, been seized of the matter. There have been briefings to the Security Council. It's been debated and discussed in the Security Council. I think we're at a time where words are used, but we need to see action, and we need to see action on a cessation of hostilities.

Question: Well, just to follow up, institutionally, the UN, either through the General Assembly or the Secretary-General himself, could go beyond just a general abstract condemnation and, at the very minimum, do some naming and shaming of the parties that are responsible primarily for the carnage in East Aleppo. I mean, he, obviously, cannot control the divisions amongst the Member States in the Security Council, but there are mechanisms institutionally that the Secretary-General could invoke to attempt to get other organs, like the General Assembly, to make less passive statements and put the onus of accountability on those parties who are known to be responsible for this carnage.

Spokesman: I think the Secretary-General's been pretty clear on those issues, but, obviously, there are always... as we said, there are always other options.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 29 Sep 2016.

On 29 September, Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, de Mistura's assistant, gave a press briefing in Geneva about the humanitarian situation in Syria.

As I said earlier, Aleppo is overshadowing the deliberations of the Humanitarian Task force. The situation in Aleppo is utmost on our minds, the Secretary-General has expressed in the strongest possible terms, including yesterday in the Security Council, his outrage at what is happening. He and the Special Envoy have made clear that it the extremely heavy aerial bombardment is a major threat to the civilians in eastern Aleppo. Also there is indiscriminate shelling of western Aleppo. The bombing must stop, civilians must be protected and the cessation of hostilities must be restored. We reiterate once again United Nations repeated appeals in this regard, and call upon the co-chairs of the ISSG to work together to make the cessation of hostilities a reality once again.

Meanwhile, humanitarian actors on the ground are doing their best to help the people of Aleppo, and that is what we discussed today. The UN at the Task Force appealed to the members of the ISSG to help us discharge our duties.

Utmost in our minds is the need to address the very concerning medical situation. Many hospitals have been damaged by air strikes, and medical supplies are dwindling. It is estimated that there are as many as 600 wounded cannot be provided with adequate treatment. Just yesterday two of the remaining eight hospitals in eastern Aleppo were reportedly hit by shelling, taking them out of service. There are now no more than 35 doctors, covering a population of at least 275,000.

....

Also food stocks are running low in Aleppo. Many bakeries remain closed and only 14,000 rations remain in eastern Aleppo, enough for only a quarter of the population. Basic infrastructure has also been affected such as the water and electricity, there is severe shortage in that regard too.

....

As to the other deliveries beyond Aleppo, there has been some movement. There was a delivery to the four-towns on September 25th, it took 150 days to clear that, I hope we do not have to wait another 150 days for another delivery. On September 24th there was a delivery for 70,000 people in Al Waer, and on September 22nd, there was a delivery to Moadameya, for 35,000 people.

"Transcript of Stakeout by Deputy UN Special Envoy for Syria, Ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy," [U.N. Geneva](#), 29 Sep 2016.

On Thursday, 29 September 2016, the Associated Press reported:

Syrian government forces continued their push into rebel-held districts of Aleppo on Thursday as international officials issued dire warnings of an ongoing humanitarian disaster in Syria's largest city.

The U.N.'s humanitarian chief Stephen O'Brien told the Security Council that the

conditions in eastern Aleppo, which is besieged and assaulted by all sides by government forces, had descended into the "merciless abyss of humanitarian catastrophe."

Speaking to the Security Council via video link from Geneva, O'Brien painted a grim picture of the conditions in the war-racked eastern part of the city, where at least 320 civilians including 100 children have been killed in the past week. An additional 765 have been wounded.

....

Most of the [861,200] besieged citizens [in Syria], divided across at least 18 locations around the country, are trapped by government forces, and international observers are beginning to accuse both Damascus and its close ally Moscow of war crimes.

....

Meanwhile, airstrikes destroyed the last remaining bakery in Anadan, an opposition town north of Aleppo, activists said.

Philip Issa, "UN warns of 'merciless abyss' in besieged eastern Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 22:19 GMT, 29 Sep 2016.

30 September 2016

On Friday, 30 Sep 2016, the United Nations formally declared Aleppo as besieged. (Note that eastern Aleppo has been de facto besieged since 7 July 2016, when Assad's army captured Castello Road.) The U.N. Daily Press Briefing said:

Concerning Syria, we continue to receive reports of ongoing aerial bombardment on eastern Aleppo city, as well as other areas in the Governorate, resulting in civilian casualties and severely damaging civilian infrastructure, including water networks, medical facilities and bakeries.

The United Nations calls for a cessation of hostilities, to put an end to the indiscriminate bombing and shelling to protect civilians, civilian infrastructure, and to enable urgent humanitarian life-saving assistance.

And, at a minimum, weekly 48-hour humanitarian pauses are needed to allow humanitarian aid to enter, to allow for medical evacuations and to take those in critical condition out, and to provide civilians respite from the barrage of bombs and attacks.

The UN and our partners have been ready, and remain ready, as soon as conditions allow, to deliver assistance to eastern Aleppo through cross-border and cross-line support. Eastern Aleppo and its estimated population of 275,000 people is now declared as besieged.

....

Following [statement](#) retroactively included in daily press briefing:

The Secretary-General has decided to establish an internal United Nations Board of Inquiry to investigate the incident involving a United Nations — Syrian Arab Red Crescent relief operation to Urum al-Kubra, Syria, on 19 September 2016.

In the evening of 19 September, as 31 trucks delivered lifesaving assistance in Urum al-Kubra, a few kilometres west of Aleppo city, humanitarian workers came under fire. At least 18 people, including the head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in Urum al-Kubra, were killed. The warehouse where supplies were being unloaded, as well as a nearby medical clinic, were also severely damaged.

The Board of Inquiry will ascertain the facts of the incident and report to the Secretary-General upon the completion of its work. The Secretary-General will review the report and decide what further steps to take.

The Secretary-General urges all parties concerned to cooperate fully with the Board. Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 30 Sep 2016.

The Associated Press reported on airstrikes in Aleppo:

The Syrian Civil Defense group and a Syrian monitoring group are reporting that airstrikes on rebel-held neighborhoods in the northern city of Aleppo have killed at least 12 people.

The Civil Defense says they have recovered 24 bodies on Friday [30 Sep], adding that search and rescue operations are continuing to pull more people trapped under the rubble.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Friday's airstrikes killed 12, adding that the death toll was expected to rise. "The Latest: ...," [Associated Press](#), 18:45 Damascus time, 30 Sep 2016.

On 30 September, [Reuters](#) reported that the Russian-language newspaper, *Izvestia*, said "a group of Su-24 and Su-34 frontline bombers have already arrived at the Hmeimim base" in Syria.

[Reuters](#) reports that the World Health Organization (WHO) said on 30 Sep that 338 people have been killed in rebel-held eastern Aleppo since 23 Sep, and 846 wounded. I looked at the WHO website on 1 Oct, but I did *not* find a press release on this topic.

On 30 September, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) that at least 18 people had been killed by airstrikes in Aleppo on 30 Sep.

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 May 2016, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2286, which is titled "protection of civilians in armed conflict". This meaningless and unenforceable resolution is actually concerned with protecting hospitals and medical clinics during warfare. Attacks on medical personnel are already a violation of international law, since the the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

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."

My essay for [August 2016](#) quotes 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]."

On 20 September at 20:00 GMT, there was an airstrike on a medical clinic in the village of Khan Tuman (also spelled Khan Touman), near the city of Aleppo. Union des Organisations de Secours et Soins Médicaux (UOSSM), which operates the clinic, reported that four personnel (2 nurses and 2 drivers) in two ambulances were killed, and a nurse was injured. The Associated Press reported "three nurses and two ambulance drivers died". The two-story clinic building collapsed. Later, UOSSM announced that 10 patients have died. [UOSSM](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Bawaba](#).

On 28 September 2016, warplanes from either Assad or Russia did it again: bombed two hospitals in Aleppo. The Syrian-American Medical Society (SAMS) issued a press release part of which said:

This morning at approximately 4:00 am, two SAMS-supported hospitals, two of the largest in eastern Aleppo City, were targeted — one by an airstrike and one by artillery shelling — and were severely damaged, forcing the facilities to go out of service. The attacks on one hospital, known as M2, an OBGYN and pediatric clinic, killed two patients and injured three staff and four patients. One of the patients was from the pediatric ICU and died during transportation to another facility. The second hospital, known as M10, which operates underground and is the largest trauma and ICU center in eastern Aleppo City, was targeted by missiles, severely damaging the hospital. Since July, both of these hospitals were attacked a total of 14 times. The systematic targeting of hospitals and medical personnel in Syria continues with impunity.

....

The besieged city [Aleppo] has now lost two of the five trauma centers that provide critical care for wounded patients. Only six ICU beds in the city remain operational for a population of over 300,000, including 85,000 children. There are only four to six ventilators left in the city. The loss of two healthcare facilities has severely diminished the already strained medical services in eastern Aleppo City. Patients are in need of critical medical evacuation to Idlib or to facilities with more specialized care across the border of Turkey.

"Press Release: Two of Aleppo's Largest Hospitals Targeted and Out of Service," [SAMS](#), 28 Sep 2016.

The Associated Press reported:

Medical officials say airstrikes have severely damaged two hospitals in eastern rebel-held Aleppo, leading to the death of two seriously ill patients.

The airstrikes early Wednesday hit the M2 and M10 hospitals, knocking out generators and cutting off water supplies, putting them temporarily out of service.

Mohammed Abu Rajab, head of M10 hospital, the largest of eight hospitals in eastern Aleppo, says two patients died because they could not be kept alive. He says the intensive care unit was severely damaged.

Adham Sahloul, of the Syrian American Medical Society, based in Gaziantep, Turkey, confirmed the strikes and described them as deliberate. He says government forces know the location of both facilities.

The closures leave eastern Aleppo with six functioning hospitals, only three of which are capable of dealing with emergencies.

"The Latest:", [Associated Press](#), 08:30 GMT (11:30 Beirut time), 28 Sep 2016.

Agence France-Presse reported:

Air raids hit the two largest hospitals in rebel-held parts of Syria's Aleppo early Wednesday [28 Sep], putting them temporarily out of service, the medical organization that supports them said.

"The attack happened at 4:00 am (0100 GMT). One warplane targeted both of them directly," said Adham Sahloul of the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS).

"There are only six hospitals currently operational now that the M2 and M10 have been temporarily taken out of service," he said.

"Raids hit two largest hospitals in rebel-held Aleppo: NGO," [Al-Arabiya](#), 09:41 GMT, 28 Sep 2016.

Médecins San Frontières issued a news release that said:

Two hospitals in east Aleppo, supported by MSF and other organisations, have been severely damaged in Tuesday [27 Sep] night's indiscriminate bombing of the city and have been forced to halt all activities. The two attacks caused the death of at least two patients and injured two medical staff.

Out of the eight hospitals left in east Aleppo, there were four with surgical capacity and now there are only two left.

"According to different medical sources, there are only seven surgical doctors left in the area, serving an estimated population of 250,000", says Carlos Francisco, MSF's head of mission for Syria. "And this comes at a time when east Aleppo has been under siege since July and is suffering the bloodiest indiscriminate bombing since the beginning of the war. We don't know how to say it anymore: This has to stop."

"Syria: Two surgical hospitals bombed in east Aleppo," [MSF](#), 28 Sep 2016.

Reuters reported:

Only about 30 doctors are believed to be left inside the besieged zone, coping with hundreds of wounded a day.

"The warplane flew over us and directly started dropping its missiles ... at around 4 a.m.," Mohammad Abu Rajab, a radiologist at the M10 hospital, the largest trauma hospital in the city's rebel-held sector, told Reuters.

"Rubble fell in on the patients in the intensive care unit."

M10 hospital workers said oxygen and power generators were destroyed and patients were transferred to another hospital.

Photographs sent to Reuters by a hospital worker at the facility showed damaged storage tanks, a rubble strewn area, and the collapsed roof of what he said was a power facility.

....

Asked by a reporter at the United Nations whether Syria had bombed the two hospitals hit on Wednesday, the Syrian ambassador to the world body, Bashar Ja'afari, appeared to laugh.

Ellen Francis & Tom Perry, "Warplanes knock out Aleppo hospitals as Russian-backed assault intensifies," [Reuters](#), 01:51 GMT, 29 Sep 2016.

On 28 September 2016, the United Nations Security Council met for two hours to discuss attacks on hospitals in war zones. A [summary](#) of the meeting was prepared by the United Nations.

On 30 September 2016 at 17:14 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported: "An aerial bombardment of rebel-held areas [in Aleppo] continued on Friday [30 Sep], with heavy air strikes in the Shaar district where incendiary material struck a complex of medical buildings, the complex's director and other medical workers said."

My comments: There can be *no* doubt that a military attack on a hospital is an atrocity. If deliberate, such attacks are 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 exposes the impotence of the diplomats who fail to enforce international law.

Moadamiyeh

On 1 September 2016, the 28,000 inhabitants of the town on Moadamiyeh — a suburb of Damascus — agreed to surrender to Assad's government. Approximately 200 insurgents will be allowed to travel to Idlib province or Aleppo province. [Associated Press](#).

On 2 September, the evacuation of Moadamiyeh began. By 11:20 Syrian time, approximately 300 people are leaving. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) reports: "The remaining Daraya refugees will depart during the next week or 10 days".

On 8 September, 146 residents of Moadamiyeh were evacuated from Moadamiyeh to other suburbs of Damascus. These 146 people were originally from Daraya, but had lived in Moadamiyeh for almost three years. [Associated Press](#).

On 10 September, the Syrian Arab News Agency reported that "300 gunmen from the city [al-Moaddamiyeh] turned themselves in and handed over their weapons to the authorities, which in turn settled their legal status in implementation of the reconciliation agreement and the Amnesty Decree no. 15 for 2016." [SANA](#). That is effectively a surrender by the insurgents, and their reintegration into Syrian society.

As described in my essay for [August 2016](#), the United Nations had their knickers in a twist when the residents of Daraya surrendered to Assad on 25 August, without any involvement of the United Nations. Part of the U.N. dismay may be sour grapes that the U.N. was *not* involved in the surrender. Most of the U.N. dismay is that in an ideal world, civilians should not be denied food and medical care to force them to obey the government. But Syrians do *not* live in an ideal world. The United Nations was absolutely powerless to stop Assad from bombing and shelling civilians. The United Nations was absolutely powerless to stop Assad from dropping cylinders of toxic gas on civilians. The United Nations was absolutely powerless to force Assad's government to allow delivery of food, medicine, and other humanitarian supplies to besieged towns. And so, in the real world in which residents of Daraya and Moadamiyeh live, a surrender to Assad is a much better choice than dying.

Journalists suggest that Daraya and Moadamiyeh set a precedent for how besieged towns in Syria should surrender. And it shows that Assad's strategy of besieging towns, and starving residents into submission, is effective. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is that these surrenders also show that the United Nations, and other humanitarian organizations, are impotent.

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 16 August 2016 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.

Again, in his 16 September 2016 report, Ban neither called for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court, nor called for punishment for violators of international law. He did *not* mention war crimes.

... what is most needed is for the conflict to end. As world leaders come together for the seventy-first session of the General Assembly in late September, there should be no greater goal than to put the collective power of the world's leaders together to end the world's greatest humanitarian tragedy. I call upon all Member States, on those who are engaged in the conflict, on those who are engaged in the International Syria Support

Group, on any who have influence, to act. The world is watching.
Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/796 at ¶41 (16 Sep 2016).

Debacle in Iraq

Death Toll in Iraq

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of monthly death tolls announced by United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) during 2013-2015.

I am no longer listing the Iraqi death toll on my HTML webpage, because the statistics from the Iraqi government are seriously incomplete and *not* credible. But, for what it is worth, the United Nations reported 1003 Iraqis killed in terrorism, violence, and armed conflict during September 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.
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September 2016: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 2 September, there were at least 4 attacks in Baghdad. Also someone attacked a Shiite militia munitions storage depot, causing an explosion and ensuing fire. At least three rockets were accidentally launched from the depot, and those rockets hit Baghdad. A total of at least

15 people were killed in the 4 attacks and munitions explosion. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 6 September, a car bomb killed at least 12 civilians in Baghdad. [Associated Press](#).

On 24 September, three suicide bombers detonated at a security checkpoint north of Baghdad, at the town of al-Salam. 11 dead, 34 wounded. There was another terrorist attack at the eastern edge of Salahuddin province that killed 4 policemen. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) reported a total of 18 dead in the attacks on 24 Sep.

On 25 September, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated as Shiites were erecting tents for the festival of Ashoura in Baghdad, at least 7 dead and 28 wounded. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 27 September, two ISIL suicide bombers detonated in Baghdad, killing at least 17 people. Reuters mentions a third attack with a roadside bomb. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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

No Prosecution for Rout at Ramadi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 1 October 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.

My essay for [August 2016](#) mentioned that the Iraqi parliament sacked the Defense Minister, after he accused several members of parliament of corruption.

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On 21 September, the Iraqi parliament voted "no confidence" in the Iraqi finance minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, allegedly because of his corruption, but possibly political revenge on him. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Iraq's interior minister resigned in July after a truck bomb killed 292 people in Baghdad, and Iraq's defense minister was sacked on 25 August. So Iraq currently has *no* defense minister in the midst of a war against ISIL, and *no* finance minister in the midst of a financial crisis caused by low oil prices and high government spending.

On 29 Sep 2016, the Iraqi government postponed its planned sale of US\$ 2 billion in bonds "until at least early 2017". Iraq is hoping that oil prices will increase and the Iraqi army will defeat ISIL in Mosul. [Reuters](#). A year ago, on 11 October 2015, the Iraqi government canceled a planned sale of bonds, because investors demanded too high interest.

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](#).

On 28 September 2016, the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced that an additional 615 U.S. troops would be sent to Iraq, to assist Iraqis with the assault on Mosul. The additional troops makes a total of 5262 U.S. military personnel in Iraq. [Pentagon](#); [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](#).)

September 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 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](#).

During September 2016, there are promises that the assault on Mosul will begin in October 2016.

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

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

Then some military leaders and politicians developed the notion that Muslim clerics needed to explain *why* so-called "Islamic terrorism" was unIslamic, to stop the flow of foreigners into Syria to fight for ISIL and Nusra Front, and to stop the financial support of terrorists. This exposure of the erroneous ideology of Islamic terrorism is a different kind of public relations problem from defending mainstream Islam.

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

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.) But beginning in September 2014, Muslim clerics stopped publicly denouncing terrorism. There needs to be a consistent and continuing condemnation of terrorism by Muslim clerics, in part to discourage young Muslims from joining Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

This continuing condemnation by Muslim clerics is *not* something that is nice to have. It is an essential element in fighting against Islamic terrorism. On 3 Dec 2014, sixty nations agreed that "ideological delegitimization" was one of five "lines of effort" that would be used to defeat ISIL, see my essay for [Dec 2014](#). However, this program was quickly ignored by nearly everyone.

In the context of the Islamic terrorist attack in Paris on 7-9 Jan 2015, my [essay](#) explains two

different reactions by Christian politicians to Islamic terrorism:

1. Some Christian politicians have condemned Islamic terrorism as unIslamic, but I think it is inappropriate — and *not* credible — for Christians to say what is, or is not, proper Islam. Instead, such distinctions should come from Islamic clerics.
2. Other Christian politicians carefully refuse to make a connection between Islam and terrorism. This may be "politically correct", but it is factually wrong. The facts are obvious, but I will tersely review them anyway. Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

It is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics — and Islamic opinion leaders — consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government.

September 2016

My essays for [Feb 2015](#) and [November 2015](#) criticize Obama for refusing to say the words "Islamic terrorism". How could he solve the problem of Islamic terrorism if he could not say those words? On 28 Sep 2016, in an interview on [CNN](#), Obama still refuses to say "Islamic terrorism".

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); [Pentagon](#)(12Sep).
- On 8 September, Abu Hajer al Homsy, also known as Abu Omar Saraqeb, the top military commander of Nusra Front (now called "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham") was killed by an airstrike in the village of Kafr Naha, Syria. [Reuters](#); [Middle East Eye](#). On 9 Sep, [FRANCE24](#)(AFP) and [Al-Arabiya](#) reports that the Pentagon denied a U.S.-airstrike killed him.
- On 7 September, a U.S. airstrike splatted Wa'il Adil Hasan Salman al-Fayad, a senior leader of ISIL and the ISIL minister of information, who prepared terrorist videos. [Pentagon](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
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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 at Shiite

mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.

8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."

21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
25. 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. See my essay for [August 2016](#).
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 September 2016, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of August 15, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$9 billion and the average daily cost is \$12.3 million for 739 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 20 Sep 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 Russia, Iran, USA, and Syria's neighbors. On 27 Sep 2016, the U.S. Government has spent a total of US\$ 5.9 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 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Aug. 31, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, bomber, 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 ground-attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, three strikes destroyed four ISIL tanker trucks and a pump jack.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes engaged an ISIL vehicle-borne improvised explosive device facility, and destroyed three oil tanker trucks, a tank, and two tactical vehicles.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL pump jack.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building.
- Near Bayji, one strike damaged an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed three fighting positions and a weapons cache.
- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units, and destroyed a tunnel and two assembly areas.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed a building and a mortar system.

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

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

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

2 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 1, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, rocket artillery, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes damaged an ISIL weapons cache and destroyed another weapons cache.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units, and destroyed seven fighting positions and a weapons cache.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a communications antenna.
- Near Ar Rutbah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building.
- Near Hit, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, and destroyed a building and a bunker.
- Near Kisik, one strike damaged two ISIL tunnels.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed two ISIL weapons caches.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar tube and a vehicle.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL security headquarters building.
- Near Tal Afar, 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](#), 2 September 2016.

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

3 September 2016: airstrikes

During 2015 and 2016, the CENTCOM website routinely fails to post press releases on each Saturday and Sunday. On Monday morning — Tuesday morning in case of a three-day weekend — the CENTCOM website finally posts the press releases that were written during the weekend. But for the Labor Day weekend (3-5 Sep) 2016, the CENTCOM website failed to post the press releases for Saturday and Sunday, so I use the Pentagon versions. Moreover, the CENTCOM website waited until Tuesday to post the Friday press release, giving CENTCOM a four-day weekend.

The U.S. Military routinely flies dangerous combat missions in Iraq and Syria every day, including weekends and holidays. The U.S. State Department and the Pentagon both post items at their websites on weekends. For example, around 23:00 EDT on Friday night, 9 Sep, the State Department posted a transcript of Kerry's press conference on Saturday morning in Geneva. So CENTCOM needs to work on weekends and holidays too.

On Saturday, 3 September 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

Coalition military forces conducted three strikes in **Syria**, using rocket artillery and remotely piloted aircraft:

- Near Ayn Isa, a strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a building.

Attack and fighter aircraft conducted three strikes in **Iraq**, coordinated with and in support of the Iraqi government:

- Near Ramadi, a strike destroyed two ISIL vehicle bombs and four buildings.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, a strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a

vehicle.

- Near Tal Afar, a strike destroyed three ISIL artillery systems, six tunnel entrances, and a weapons cache.

[Pentagon](#), 3 September 2016.

4 September 2016: airstrikes

On Sunday, 4 September 2016, the Pentagon reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria: Attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft conducted 11 strikes in **Syria**:

- Near Raqqah, a strike destroyed three ISIL cranes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, a strike destroyed an ISIL tanker truck.
- Near Manbij, eight strikes engaged seven ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions, a logistical hub, a vehicle bomb, an anti-air artillery system, and two vehicles.
- Near Mar'a, a strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.

Coalition military forces used rocket artillery and fighter and remotely piloted aircraft to conduct eight strikes [in **Iraq**], coordinated with and in support of the Iraqi government:

- Near Hit, a strike destroyed two ISIL buildings and two vehicles.
- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a financial storage center, and destroyed an assembly area, a command and control node, a rocket system, five rocket rails, two fighting positions, a bulldozer, and a vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged two separate ISIL tactical units and destroyed three buildings, two mortar caches, a vehicle, and a mortar system.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes engaged an ISIL weapons cache and a building.
- Near Tal Afar, a strike produced inconclusive results.

[Pentagon](#), 4 September 2016.

5 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 4, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted three strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, six strikes destroyed eight ISIL trailers, three oil pump jacks, and 42 oil tanker trucks.
- Near Manbij, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two vehicles and a fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL communication towers.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an assembly area, a fighting position, and two vehicles.

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

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

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

6 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 5, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed two ISIL oil pump jacks, an oil tank, and a headquarters building.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed 13 ISIL oil tanker trucks and a tractor trailer.
- Near Manbij, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket rail and a cave entrance.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed two ISIL fighting positions, two tunnel entrances, an observation post, and a rocket firing position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an assembly area, a fighting position, a vehicle, and a headquarters building.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed a rocket system.

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

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

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

7 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 6, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and attack aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed five ISIL oil tanker trucks.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil tanker trucks.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three fighting positions and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a rocket cache, two buildings, and three bunkers.
- Near Hit, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle and a building.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a tunnel entrance, a vehicle, and three heavy machine guns.
- Near Mosul, six strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five vehicles, two dozers, a front-end loader, an excavator, inoperable coalition equipment, and damaged a tunnel.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three vehicles, two dozers, and eight rocket rails.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle, a building, and a mortar system.

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

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

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

8 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 7, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using rocket artillery and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an oil tanker trailer, an oil workover rig, and a vehicle.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a mortar system and a vehicle.
- Near Dayz Az Zawr, one strike destroyed four ISIL oil tanker trucks.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.

Iraq

- Near Albu Hayat, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two bunkers and two vehicles.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building.
- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL financial center and destroyed a weapons storage facility.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle, 12 rocket rails, four rocket systems, and an assembly area.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance and suppressed a mortar position.

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

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

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

Sometime on 8 or 9 September, CENTCOM reorganized their website, with a different style of URL for press releases about airstrikes. The links for 6 Sep 2016 and earlier press releases *no* longer function. **BOO!** Broken links frustrate readers of documents.

9 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 8, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, bomber, 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, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle and an anti-air artillery system.
- Near Dayz Az Zawr, six strikes damaged 10 ISIL supply routes.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

Iraq

- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an artillery cache.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed two ISIL rocket rails and a fighting position.
- Near Mosul, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position, a tunnel entrance, and a VBIED factory.
- Near Tallafar, one strike destroyed an VBIED factory.

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

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

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

10 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 9, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes against 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 six strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed 16 oil tanker trucks, four tanker trailers, seven pump jacks, an oil workover rig, and a wellhead.
- Near Dayz Az Zawr, four strikes engaged four ISIL supply routes.
- Near Mar'a, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three vehicles, two buildings, a cargo container, and a tractor-trailor.
- Near Hit, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an assembly area, a vehicle, two mortar systems, a weapons cache, a tunnel entrance, six

- rocket rails, and suppressed a mortar system.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed three ISIL vehicles and an anti-air artillery system, and suppressed two mortar systems.
- Near Sinjar, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed a tunnel, two assembly areas, a mortar system, and a fighting position; and suppressed a mortar position.

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

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

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

11 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 10, coalition military forces conducted 24 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 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 attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadadi, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed a heavy machine gun, a weapons cache, a vehicle, and two fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two supply routes and a vehicle.
- Near Dayz Az Zawr, eight strikes destroyed 55 ISIL oil tanker trucks and 13 supply routes.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL anti-air artillery system.

Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a boat.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four assembly areas.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; damaged four tunnels; and destroyed 18 rocket rails, three vehicles, a financial center, and a weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and a weapon system.
- Near Samarra, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Tallafar, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance.

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

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

The Pentagon posted no press release about airstrikes on 11 Sep.

12 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 11, coalition military forces conducted [25] strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted [18] 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 and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadadi, nine strikes engaged eight ISIL tactical units and destroyed 14 fighting positions, two bulldozers, a command and control node, a VBIED, a vehicle and a VBIED facility.
- Near Ar Raqqa, six strikes destroyed 10 ISIL supply routes, three oil pump jacks, and other oil drilling equipment.
- Near Dayz Az Zawr, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil tractor trailers.
- Near Dayz Ar Zawr, two strikes destroyed four ISIL supply routes.
[added 14 Sep]

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four fighting positions.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six rocket rails, a mortar system, two vehicles, 11 assembly areas, a tunnel entrance, a VBIED, a VBIED factory, and a command and control node.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a tunnel entrance and a checkpoint.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED factory.
- Near Tal Afar, 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](#), 12 September 2016.

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

13 September 2016: airstrikes

On Tuesday, 13 September 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq

and Syria:

On Sept. 12, coalition military forces conducted 24 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber, fighter, rocket artillery and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed 10 ISIL oil tanker trucks.
- Near Al Shadaddi, seven strikes engaged seven ISIL tactical units and destroyed a VBIED, three vehicles, and a command and control node.
- Near Ar Raqqa, five strikes engaged two ISIL weapons caches and destroyed 11 supply routes.
- Near Dayz Ar Awr, one strike destroyed three ISIL oil tanker trucks.
- Near Mar'a, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system and a mortar cache.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ammo caches and two buildings.
- Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed three ISIL headquarters buildings.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed four ISIL headquarters buildings, a vehicle, and a VBIED.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position, a building, and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position and a tunnel entrance.

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

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

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

14 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 13, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted three 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 destroyed five ISIL supply routes.
- Near Al Shadaddi, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed five vehicles and a VBIED.
- Near Ar Raqqa, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle, seven supply routes, and an oil well head.
- Near Dayz Ar Zawr, three strikes destroyed four ISIL oil tanker trucks, an oil tanker trailer, five vehicles, and an oil well head.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions, three mortar systems, and damaged another mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed a vehicle, two tunnel entrances, and four assembly areas.

Additionally, due to a delayed strike assessment two strikes near Dayz Ar Zawr that were conducted on Sept. 11 were not reported on the Sept. 12 strike release. The correct assessment reads:

- Near Dayz Ar Zawr, two strikes destroyed four ISIL supply routes.

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

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

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

I added the correction to the 12 Sep report, quoted above.

15 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 14, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, bomber, 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, seven strikes destroyed 21 ISIL supply routes, an oil well head, and two oil tanker trucks.
- Near Dayz Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil well head and an oil tanker truck.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two fighting positions and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes engaged an ISIL chemical weapons storage facility and destroyed a rocket system, a rocket rail, and a mortar system.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL IED factory.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three mortar systems, a fighting position, four rocket rails, a tunnel, and inoperable coalition equipment.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL tractor trailer, a front-end loader, and a fighting position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, two headquarters buildings, and a VBIED factory; destroyed 25 watercraft, a headquarters building, and a VBIED factory; and suppressed a mortar position.

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

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

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

16 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 15, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, six strikes destroyed five ISIL supply routes, two oil well heads, six oil tanker trucks, a bulldozer, and a bobcat.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Dayz Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed eight ISIL oil tanker trucks and seven oil well heads.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a bunker.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an artillery system, a vehicle, a tunnel entrance and damaged another vehicle.
- Near Bashir, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL logistics facility.

- Near Qayyarah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building, a vehicle, a fuel truck, and five rocket rails.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two mortar systems and a weapons cache.

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

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

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

17 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 16, coalition military forces conducted 25 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 18 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, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, five strikes damaged 10 ISIL supply routes and destroyed two oil well heads.
- Near Al Shadaddi, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed six fighting positions, two vehicles, a weapons cache, and a front-end loader.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL training compound, an oil well head, an oil pump jack, and two oil storage tanks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike damaged five ISIL supply routes.
- Near Mar'a, six strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units, three fighting positions, two tunnels, two command and control nodes, and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Hit, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building.
- Near Mosul, two strikes destroyed eight ISIL fighting positions and damaged a tunnel entrance.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle, a weapons cache, and 29 watercraft.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a staging area and destroyed a fighting position and a building.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike damaged an ISIL tunnel.

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

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

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

18 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 17, coalition military forces conducted [20] strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 13 strikes using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted [7] strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed an ISIL oil pump jack, and two oil well heads and damaged seven supply routes.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed two ISIL tactical vehicles.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed seven ISIL oil tanker trucks and damaged eight supply routes.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes engaged four ISIL tactical units and destroyed an artillery system, and three fighting positions and damaged a fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, three strikes destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and two VBIED facilities.
- Near Hit, two strikes destroyed an ISIL headquarters building, a command and control node, and a weapons facility.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle, two mortar systems, and an artillery system.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.

Additionally, near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike, believed to have engaged an ISIL fighting position, may have mistakenly struck a Syrian military unit and destroyed Syrian military vehicles. The incident is under investigation.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely. [Central Command](#), 18 September 2016. CENTCOM miscounted the number of airstrikes in Iraq, which I corrected above.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 18 September 2016. The Pentagon version omits the 13th airstrike in Syria that may have struck Syrian army soldiers.

On 17 September, there was an accidental U.S. airstrike on Syrian army soldiers near Deir Ezzor, which killed approximately 90 Syrian soldiers. See the discussion [above](#).

The Russian military reported:

On September 17, two F-16, two A-10, and an attack UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] of the US Air Force carried out strikes on positions of the government troops located in 6 km to the south from the Deir ez-Zor airfield. The strikes have been stopped by the demand of the Russian party.

ISIS insurgents launched offensive simultaneously with the strikes in this area. Offensive of the terrorist grouping has been stopped in course of the tough combat. Russian Aerospace Forces supported the government troops.

The American air strike on positions of the Syrian government troops killed 62 people, injured 98 ones, and destroyed 11 pieces of military hardware.

"Bulletin of the Russian Centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in the Syrian Arab Republic (September 18, 2016)," [Russian MoD](#), 20:00 GMT, 18 Sep 2016.

19 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 18, coalition military forces conducted 28 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes using attack, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed two ISIL oil tanker trucks and an oil tanker trailer and damaged three supply routes.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike destroyed an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL VBIED factory and an oil tanker truck.
- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed a vehicle, a command and control node, and an artillery system.
- Near Mar'a, eight strikes engaged five ISIL tactical units and destroyed seven fighting positions, three IEDs, three vehicles, a mortar system, and a command and control node.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL IED factories.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike destroyed an ISIL building.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two vehicles, a fighting position, a mortar system, and two tunnel entrances.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an improvised weapons facility, a VBIED factory, an ISIL headquarters building, and two vehicles and suppressed a rocket launcher system.

- Near Ramadi, two strikes destroyed an ISIL headquarters building, a mortar system, two supply caches, and four rocket rails.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and suppressed a mortar system.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a medium machine gun and suppressed a rocket-propelled grenade system.

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

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

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

20 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 19, coalition military forces conducted 29 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, bomber, and fighter against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL well head.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL barracks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed seven oil tanker trucks and damaged two supply routes.
- Near Mar'a, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a command and control node and three IEDs.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, three strikes destroyed an ISIL bunker and two command and control nodes.
- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Fallujah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged four ISIL tactical units and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and a communications facility and destroyed a vehicle, a heavy weapons system, and a checkpoint.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a staging area and destroyed two heavy machine guns, a weapons cache, two command and control nodes, and two logistics hubs.

- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle storage facility.
- Near Sinjar, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a weapons cache and suppressed a mortar position.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system and a supply cache.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL tunnel entrance, a vehicle, a supply cache, a mortar system, a building, and nine fighting positions.

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

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

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

21 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 20, 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 attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed 23 ISIL oil tanker trucks and four well heads.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes damaged nine supply routes.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three mortar systems and two fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED facility.
- Near Albu Hayat, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a VBIED.
- Near Bashir, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle and an anti-air artillery system.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed a second tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Qayyarah, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed six vehicles, six watercraft, two VBIEDs, and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a staging area; and destroyed a vehicle, a building, a mortar system, a fighting position, a fuel

- tanker, and two rocket rails.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed two ISIL improvised weapons facilities.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two vehicles and a weapons cache.

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

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

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

22 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 21, coalition military forces conducted 29 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 16 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 attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil well head.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike damaged an ISIL supply route.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL weapons factory and barracks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, four strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle, four oil tanker trucks, an oil tanker trailer, two oil well heads, and damaged six supply routes.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and damaged a checkpoint.
- Near Mar'a, seven strikes engaged seven ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions, a vehicle, and an anti-air artillery system.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a repeater tower and a bunker.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged four ISIL tactical units and destroyed three weapons caches, and suppressed a sniper firing position.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed 38 vehicles, four watercraft, and a land bridge; damaged a culvert entrance; and suppressed a tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two vehicles, two supply caches, and a fuel tank.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle and an artillery system.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a checkpoint.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 22 September 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 22 September 2016.

23 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 22, coalition military forces conducted 30 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 14 strikes using attack, bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil well heads.
- Near Al Shaddadi, one strike destroyed inoperable Coalition equipment.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed two ISIL pump jacks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, seven strikes damaged 14 ISIL supply routes.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an IED and a fighting position.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two fighting positions, a vehicle, and a rocket rail.
- Near Hit, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Mosul, seven strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed an IED factory, a weapons cache, and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two vehicles and a weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four mortar systems, two vehicles, and a supply cache.
- Near Sinjar, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and suppressed a heavy machine gun.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL weapons cache and a vehicle.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.
[Central Command](#), 23 September 2016.
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 23 September 2016.

24 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 23, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, six strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two IED manufacturing facilities, two oil well heads, three pump jacks, and a vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed an ISIL vehicle, two oil well heads, and three oil tanker trucks and damaged a supply route.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Mar'a, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three fighting positions.

Iraq

- Near Al Baghdadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket cache.
- Near Kisik, two strikes suppressed two ISIL mortar positions.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two fighting positions, a rocket rail, and a tunnel.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL chemical weapons factory.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two mortar systems.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed eight rocket rails, three rocket systems, and a vehicle.

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

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

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

25 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 24, coalition military forces conducted 27 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 13 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed seven oil tanker trucks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, five strikes destroyed seven ISIL oil well heads and damaged two supply routes.
- Near Manbij, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed six fighting positions, two weapons caches, and a mortar system.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a VBIED, a vehicle, and a heavy machine gun.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed a watercraft, two vehicles, a VBIED, and damaged a vehicle.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL watercraft.
- Near Mosul, six strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; destroyed two vehicles, two tunnels, and an anti-air artillery system; and damaged four fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three vehicles, a heavy machine gun, and an anti-air artillery system.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, four strikes destroyed three ISIL headquarters buildings, a weapons cache, and a mortar system.

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

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

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

26 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 25, coalition military forces conducted 27 strikes against 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 17 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed five ISIL oil tanker trucks and two oil well heads.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed nine oil well heads and an oil tanker truck.

- Near Manbij, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed four fighting positions and a tank.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Hit, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a staging area and destroyed three ISIL-held buildings.
- Near Kisik, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle, a tunnel, and a watercraft.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed two weapon caches, two fighting positions, and two tunnels; and suppressed a mortar system.
- Near Qayyarah, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed three rocket rails, three vehicles, two mortar systems, a rocket system, a fighting position, and a weapons cache.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed two ISIL machine guns.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed two ISIL vehicles and an ISIL-held building.
- Near Tal Afar, 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 September 2016.

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

27 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 26, coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil well heads.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed three oil pump jacks.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed five oil tanker trucks, a vehicle, and a front-end loader and disabled a bridge along an ISIL supply route.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two fighting positions.

- Near Mar'a, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions and three improvised explosive devices.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED facility.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and a rocket rail.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and damaged two fighting positions.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle, and an ammunition cache.
- Near Sinjar, one strike suppressed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four vehicles.

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

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

Not posted at the Pentagon.

28 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 27, coalition military forces conducted 22 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 12 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two vehicles.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL pump jack.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed 12 oil tanker trucks, two oil well heads, and disabled a bridge along an ISIL supply route.
- Near Manbij, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed five fighting positions.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed five fighting positions and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED facility.

- Near Kisik, one strike produced inconclusive results.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, suppressed a mortar system, and destroyed an anti-air artillery system and a tunnel.
- Near Qayyarah, two strikes destroyed two ISIL vehicles and a mortar system.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Sultan Abdallah, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system and damaged an excavator.

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

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

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

29 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 28, coalition military forces conducted 18 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted eight 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 attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed two ISIL oil tanker trucks, an oil well head, and a pump jack and damaged three supply routes.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed two ISIL oil well heads.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an oil tanker truck.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Mar'a, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an IED, a fighting position, and a mortar system.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED facility.
- Near Bayji, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Kisik, two strikes destroyed an ISIL fighting position and suppressed two ISIL mortar firing positions.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed a front-end loader, a weapons cache, and a vehicle.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle and two trench systems.

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

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

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

30 September 2016: airstrikes

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

On Sept. 29, coalition military forces conducted 24 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, coalition military forces conducted 17 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, coalition military forces conducted seven 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 disabled a bridge along an ISIL supply route.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes destroyed five ISIL oil pump jacks, three oil tanker trucks, and an oil well head.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, four strikes damaged four ISIL supply routes and disabled a bridge along an ISIL supply route.
- Near Manbij, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two VBIED facilities, a VBIED, a logistics node, and a fighting position.
- Near Mar'a, five strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three VBIEDs, three fighting positions, and a weapons cache.
- Near Washiyah, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED factory.

Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun cache.
- Near Bashir, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and two staging areas and destroyed an excavator.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; destroyed six ISIL-held buildings, two compounds, and a vehicle; damaged a tunnel; and suppressed a mortar system.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed two fighting positions, two buildings, and an artillery system; damaged a trench system; and suppressed a tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

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

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

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

Terrorism & Migration in Europe

Islamic Terrorism in Europe

History in my previous essays:

- My [first essay](#) tersely — and incompletely — recounts a history of Islamic terrorism from 1972 to 2013.
- My essay for [June 2014](#) mentions the Islamic terrorist attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels on 24 May 2014, and an attack in France on March 2012.
- My essay for [Jan 2015](#) describes the Islamic terrorist attacks in France on 7-9 January.
- My essay for [Feb 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Copenhagen on 14 Feb.
- My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions a 15 y old girl in Denmark who stabbed her mother to death after repeatedly watching on the Internet (YouTube) videos of ISIL executions with her 29 y old boyfriend who was a so-called "refugee" from Iraq. That essay also mentions an Iraqi terrorist in Berlin who was killed by police in an attack on 17 Sep 2015.
- My essay for [November 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Paris that killed 130 people on 13 Nov 2015.
- My essay for [December 2015](#) describes an Islamic terror attack in San Bernardino, California on 2 Dec 2015.
- My essay for [January 2016](#) describes Muslim immigrants running amok in Cologne, Hamburg, and at least five other European cities on the night of 31 Dec 2015.
- 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.
- My essay for [August 2016](#) describes an ISIL attack on two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium and how Canadian police prevented one ISIL bombing in London, Ontario.

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 disenchanting with their new home, and some will become radicalized. The radicalization will most likely occur via the Internet, but could also occur from personal contact with Islamic radicals in Europe.
2. It is possible that some Islamic terrorists will enter Europe along with migrants. These could be terrorists sent to recruit more fighters for ISIL or Al-Qaeda. Or they could be Europeans returning from battle in Syria, but using a new name to avoid criminal prosecution for fighting in Syria.

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

In mid-September 2015, I wrote that some "migrants will become disenchanting with their new home". This has already happened. On 19 October 2015, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Syrians who arrived in Uruguay in November 2014 have complained, and "many

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

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

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

On 13 September 2016, [Reuters](#) reported that only 63 refugees have been employed by the top 30 companies in Germany, because of refugees' weak knowledge of the German-language and because of refugees' lack of job skills.

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](#).

On 4 September 2016, there was an state parliament election in Angela Merkel's home state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) captured 30.6% of the vote. In an upset, anti-immigrant party, Alternative für Deutschland, came in second place with 20.8% of the vote. Merkel's party, the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), came in third place with 19.0% of the vote. [dpa](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

Paris, France arrests

On the morning of 4 September 2016, police in Paris France found a parked car without license plates near Notre Dame Cathedral. The trunk of the car contained 6 cylinders that contained an undisclosed gas, three cans of diesel fuel, and pages with writing in Arabic. There was *no* detonator. On the evening of 4 Sep, 14 hours after police found the car, the owner of the car told police his 19 y old daughter, an Islamic radical, was missing.

On 6 September, police arrested a man and a woman (Ornella G.). On 8 September, police arrested the daughter (Ines Madani), along with 4 other suspects. The total of 7 arrested suspects include 5 women and 2 men.

Women Suspects

On 9 September, Francois Molins, the Paris prosecutor, held a press conference. The Associated Press reported:

"In the last few days and hours a terrorist cell was dismantled, composed of young women totally receptive to the deadly Daesh ideology," Molins said, using another term for the IS group.

The women who spearheaded the failed plot included a 19-year-old whose father owned the abandoned Peugeot car. Her written pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State group was found by police, a security official said Friday [9 Sep].

The teen, Ines Madani, stabbed a police officer with a knife and was shot in the leg Thursday evening [8 Sep] in a raid south of Paris, police said.

....

One of the women detained in a police raid, referred to as Sarah H. and who was wearing a veil, was betrothed separately to two French extremists who carried out deadly attacks this year, the Paris prosecutor said.

Sarah H. was engaged to Larossi Abballa, who killed two police officials in Magnanville in June and filmed the aftermath on Facebook Live before dying in a police raid.

She was also betrothed to Adel Kermiche, who slit the throat of an elderly French priest during morning Mass in July before being killed by police, Molins added. He didn't say when she was engaged to either man.

Lori Hinnant & Thomas Adamson, "Woman behind failed Paris attack engaged to priest-killer," [Associated Press](#), 17:17 GMT, 9 Sep 2016. (No longer at AP website, replaced by later version.)

Cable News Network reported:

Three women arrested in raids this week in France were part of a terror cell directed by ISIS from Syria, Paris prosecutor Francois Molins said Friday [9 Sep]. One of the women had a letter in her purse swearing allegiance to ISIS, Molins said. In the letter, she said she was answering the call of Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, according to Molins. Adnani, one of the highest-ranking figures in ISIS, was killed in late August. The letter also said that "I am attacking you in your lands in order to terrorize you," according to Molins.

The prosecutor said one of the terror cell members, identified as Sarah H., was supposed to marry Larossi Abballa, the man who killed two police officers in Magnanville, France, in June. After police shot Abballa, she then was supposed to marry Adel Kermiche, who killed a priest in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, France, in July. Kermiche was also killed.

Camille Verdier, Steve Visser, & Margot Haddad, "French prosecutor: Women who planned attack were directed by ISIS," [CNN](#), 17:39 GMT, 9 Sep 2016.

Reuters reported:

[A 23-year-old Frenchwoman] Sarah H "is known to intelligence services as being particularly linked to Islamist movements," the prosecutor, Francois Molins, said. "She was previously betrothed to Larossi Abballa, the man responsible for the attack in Magnanville, and Adel Kermiche, who was behind the attack in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray."

Abballa was killed by security services after murdering a police commander and his partner in June in Magnanville, an attack claimed by Islamic State. Kermiche and Abdel-Malik Nabir Petitjean were killed in July after slitting the throat of a French priest in a church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in the name of the group.

The three women were determined to carry out Islamic State's "deadly ideology", Molins said, and had been given direction by members of the militant group in Syria.

Another man, Mohamed Lamine A, who was due to marry Sarah H, was also arrested on Thursday. That man was also connected to the Abballa attack, according to Molins, who identified him as the brother of a friend of the police killer.

John Irish, "Woman in foiled Paris attacks 'betrothed' to killers of police, priest," [Reuters](#), 20:32 GMT, 9 Sep 2016.

My comment about Sarah H. is that behind every successful Islamic terrorist is a woman. It also appears that ISIL is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity terrorist group that now trains women to kill. (I am being facetious.)

Purpose ?

Note that the car with the gas cylinders was parked in a no-parking zone near a famous landmark in the busy city of Paris. The illegally parked car had its amber hazard lights blinking, and the car had *no* license plates. Clearly, the driver was trying to attract attention to the car, which is bizarre.

However, there were no explosives and *no* detonator in the car, which may mean the car was *not* an attempted bomb. But [FRANCE24](#) reports that a half-smoked cigarette and a piece of material soaked in a flammable liquid was found in the car, which may have a crude attempt to detonate one of the gas cylinders.

Also, the French Interior Ministry said the intended target was a railroad station, not the cathedral where the car was parked. It is unclear what was the purpose of parking this car near the cathedral.

Bibliography for Paris arrests

In chronological order.

- "Police seek woman after car with gas cylinders found in Paris" [Reuters](#), 19:00 GMT, 7 Sep 2016.
- "Couple held after gas canisters found near Paris' Notre Dame," [Associated Press](#), 19:22 GMT, 7 Sep 2016.
- "Gas tanks and Arabic documents found in unmarked car by Paris' Notre Dame cathedral spark terror fears," [The Telegraph](#), 07:27 GMT, 8 Sep 2016.
- "Three suspected female militants seized in France, policeman stabbed," [Reuters](#), 21:50 GMT, 8 Sep 2016.
- "7 detained over gas canisters found near Paris' Notre Dame," [Associated Press](#),

22:32 GMT, 8 Sep 2016.

- "Prosecutor: Failed Paris car bomb plotted by IS-guided women," [Associated Press](#), 22:27 GMT, 9 Sep 2016. ("[Mollins] said Sarah H., who was shot in the leg during the raid, had stabbed a police officer through the open window of a car, while Ines [Madani] stabbed another officer as she tried to escape.")
 - "Five women held over botched attack near Paris cathedral," [FRANCE24](#), 9 Sep 2016. ("Paris prosecutor François Molins said Friday that five women have been detained in connection with a botched attack near Notre Dame Cathedral, adding that the plot is evidence of the Islamic State (IS) group's intent to use women as 'combatants'.")
 - "Arrested French women, directed by Islamic State, planned Paris attack," [Reuters](#), 01:19 GMT, 10 Sep 2016. (Paris Prosecutor François Molins said: "The transition to action by these young women, who were directed by individuals within the ranks of Islamic State in Syria, shows that this organisation wants to create female fighters." "The Interior Ministry said the intended target had been Gare de Lyon, a mainline train station in central Paris,")
 - "Paris judge charges woman in female 'terror commando' probe," [Associated Press](#), 21:16 GMT, 10 Sep 2016.
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New Jersey & New York City attacks

At 09:30 EDT on Saturday morning, 17 September 2016, a pipe bomb detonated in Seaside Park, New Jersey, at the site of a charity race to benefit U.S. Marines. No one was injured, but the race was canceled. There were three bombs in one plastic garbage can, but only one bomb detonated.

At 20:30 EDT on Saturday night, 17 September 2016, a bomb exploded in a metal trash Dumpster in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan in New York City. A total of 29 people were injured. Then police found a second bomb in a pressure cooker, four blocks from the first bomb. Muslim terrorists used pressure cooker bombs at the Boston Marathon in April 2013.

At 20:45 EDT on Sunday night, 18 September 2016, five pipe bombs were discovered in a backpack near a train station in Elizabeth, New Jersey. When an FBI robot cut one of the wires on one bomb, the bomb exploded.

These three events initially appeared unconnected, but around 07:45 on Monday morning, 19 September, police announced that an Islamic terror cell was apparently responsible for all

three events. Police were searching for Ahmad Khan Rahami, an immigrant from Afghanistan, who lives in Elizabeth, NJ. At about 11:00 on 19 Sep, Rahami was found sleeping in the doorway of a tavern in Linden, NJ. When awakened by police, Rahami pulled out his pistol and shot two policemen. Rahami was shot in the leg and taken into custody. Police later said that there was *no* terror cell and that Rahami alone had made all ten bombs found in Seaside Park, Chelsea, and Elizabeth. On 20 Sep, prosecutors revealed quotations from Rahami's handwritten diary that showed he was an Islamic terrorist.

Whoever made the bombs was only weakly competent. Only one of three bombs exploded in Seaside Park, NJ. Only one of two bombs exploded in Chelsea. The intact bombs enabled law enforcement to have examples for forensic analysis and fingerprints, instead of examining only shrapnel from exploded bombs.

There is speculation by the mayor of Elizabeth that the bomber put the five pipe bombs in a trash can to "dispose of evidence, because law enforcement ... was getting close". [Asbury Park Press](#). Rahami lives in Elizabeth, a half-mile from where the bombs were found. [NY Times](#).

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St. Cloud, Minnesota attack

At 20:15 CDT on Saturday night, 17 Sep 2016, a man stabbed 10 people in a shopping mall in St. Cloud, Minnesota. (Early reports said 8 people were wounded and taken to a local hospital, but one wounded man drove himself to a hospital in Long Prairie and so he was not initially included in the list of victims. A tenth victim appeared on 19 Sep.) The Associated Press reported the police chief said the stabber "made at least one reference to Allah and asked a victim if he or she was Muslim before attacking them." The attack ended when an off-duty policeman shot and killed the stabber. Three victims remained hospitalized 24 hours later.

The following morning, the ISIL Rasd news agency — Reuters says Amaq — claimed the attacker was a "soldier of the Islamic State" who had answered ISIL's call to attack nations who were part of the U.S.-led anti-ISIL Coalition.

The following afternoon, the stabber was identified by journalists as Dahir A. Adan, a 22 year-old immigrant from Somali, who had lived in the USA since 2001. The stabber wore the uniform of a private security guard during the attack at the shopping mall. Adan was formerly a part-time security guard, who quit in June 2016.

There is an intriguing pattern of Islamic terrorists in the USA working as security guards. Omar Mateen, who killed 49 people in June 2016, had been a security guard for 9 years. Ahmad Khan Rahami (see above) had formerly worked as a security guard. And now Adan has formerly worked as a security guard.

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- "FBI head: Extremism apparent influence in Minnesota attack," [Associated Press](#), 15:38 EDT, 28 Sep 2016. (FBI Director James Comey told the House Judiciary Committee that Adan "appears to have been motivated 'by some sort of inspiration from radical Islamic groups'.")
- "FBI: Minnesota mall attacker newly interested in Islam," [Associated Press](#), 19:24 EDT, 6 Oct 2016. ("The man who stabbed 10 people at a Minnesota mall had become interested in Islam in the last several months, withdrew from his friends and encouraged female relatives to be more religious, the FBI said Thursday [6 Oct].")

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 a radical 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. 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. Sadly, there was *no* reasonable hope of satisfying any one of the demands of the HNC and other opposition groups, so the peace negotiations in Geneva were dead.

The new agreements between Russia and the USA on 9 September 2016 for a nationwide ceasefire and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid everywhere in Syria gave another glimmer of hope. But there were hundreds of violations of the new ceasefire during the first week, and the ceasefire collapsed on 18 Sep. On the night of 21 Sep, Assad and Russia began a ferocious new assault on Aleppo that extinguished the ceasefire. A major goal of the 9 Sep agreements was delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo, but there were *no* deliveries to Aleppo during September 2016, as another indicator of the failure of the new agreements. During 20-30 Sep, international diplomats frantically attempted to resuscitate the dead ceasefire, but failed.

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 October 2016, the Geneva negotiations about Syria were dead, with the last meeting in April 2016. There was a brief cessation of hostilities in March and April, but then the situation in Syria became worse and worse, with *no* reasonable hope of 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, and again on 12 Sep 2016. On the night of 21 Sep 2016, Assad — with the assistance of Russian warplanes — began a ferocious assault on the city of Aleppo.
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.

Note that there is *no* single villain who is responsible for the continuing Syrian civil war. Assad is blameworthy. The rebels/jihadists who refuse to negotiate are blameworthy. Russia is blameworthy, especially for airstrikes in Syria beginning 30 Sep 2015. Other foreign meddlers have also enabled the civil war to continue.

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. My essay for [March 2016](#) (see section titled "Why wait for Assad to leave before fighting terrorist groups?") explains why ISIL and Nusra will persist after Assad is removed.

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 301,000 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 at 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.

This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria37.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to historical documents.

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