

# Syria & Iraq: December 2016

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## Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 37 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 That webpage also includes links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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.

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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. Beirut and Damascus are +2 hours from GMT. Baghdad and Moscow are each +3 hours from GMT.

Every day, I checked the websites of

- the Associated Press,
- Reuters in the United Kingdom,
- [Al-Arabiya](#) middle east section,
- the Pentagon and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM),
- the webpage for the [Spokesman](#) of the United Nations Secretary General and his daily press briefing,
- 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 6 December 2016, the search at Associated Press's *Big Story* website contained no new articles. The loss of the AP's *Big Story* means fewer reports of atrocities in Iraq, and fewer reports of the battles in Mosul and Aleppo. Instead of *Big Story*, I cited AP articles that appeared in their top ten international news. On the evening of 23 December, I noticed that the search was again functional at *BigStory*, but news articles from 6 to 16 December were missing.

On the night of 5 December 2016, the most recent document at the English-language homepage of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is dated 9 November 2016. On 12 December, I noticed that their English-language homepage was again functional.

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

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### **Terse Summary of Syria Fighters**

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

1. The so-called "rebels" are moderates, many of whom are part of the Free Syrian Army. In 2011, these moderates wanted to continue a secular government in Syria, but without Assad.
2. The "jihadists" want to impose an Islamic government (i.e., Sharia law) on Syria. The Islamic Front is a large group of jihadists, formed on 22 November 2013. Ahrar al-Sham is one of the major organizations in the Islamic Front.
3. And two Al-Qaeda affiliated groups fighting in Syria:

- a. the Nusra Front, which wants to establish an Islamic emirate in Syria. 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.

### Government

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

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## Chemical Weapons

Beginning in October 2013, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued monthly reports on chemical weapons on Syria. 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.

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. On 24 August 2016, the third report of the JIM (see below), United Nations Security Council document S/2016/738, at ¶58, said: "there was sufficient information to conclude that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was the only entity with the ability, capability, motive and means to use sulfur mustard in Marea on 21 August 2015."

During the battle for Aleppo that began in July 2016, there were occasional allegations that either the Syrian government or insurgents used chemical weapons in Aleppo city.

For example,

- On 10 August 2016, "At least four people died and many suffered breathing difficulties when a gas, believed to be chlorine, was dropped alongside barrel bombs on a neighbourhood of the Syrian city of Aleppo on Wednesday [10 Aug], [the manager of Al Quds hospital in Aleppo] and [Syria Civil Defence] told Reuters." [Reuters](#).
- The Syrian Civil Defence said on 6 September 2016 "government helicopters had dropped barrel bombs containing chlorine on the Sukari neighborhood in eastern Aleppo." 80 people were wounded by the gas. [Reuters](#). The [Associated Press](#) reported: "In Tuesday's [6 Sep] attack, a medical report from one of the hospitals in the besieged eastern rebel-held part of Aleppo .... said at least 71 persons, including 37 children and 10 women, were treated for breathing difficulties, dry cough, and that their clothes smelled of chlorine."
- On 30 October 2016, "Syrian state media said militants had fired shells containing chlorine gas at a residential area of the government-held western part of the city, al-Hamdaniya. Rebels denied that, and said government forces had fired poison gas [chlorine] on another frontline." [Reuters](#).
- On 20 November 2016, "Two medics said the al-Baytounji family [of 6 people] had suffocated to death because the barrel bomb, which fell in the Sakhour district at about midnight [on 19 Nov], had been laced with chlorine gas." [Reuters](#). [Al-Arabiya](#) published an unconfirmed photograph of these 5 corpses in eastern Aleppo city, who allegedly had been killed by chlorine gas. The sixth fatality was the mother, who died later "from shock." [CNN](#) reported that a rescuer took coins from a pocket of a victim and the coins were tarnished, apparently by chlorine gas.

On 27 November, the Turkish government alleged that "Syrian opposition fighters had been exposed to chemical gas during a Daesh missile attack." Allegedly, "22 fighters ... were observed showing symptoms of chemical gas exposure in northern Syria's Khalidiyah region." [Anadolu Agency](#). My comment is that dumbass government bureaucrats and journalists are too stupid to realize that *all* gases are composed of chemicals, including the normal atmosphere. They should have said "poisonous gas" or "chemical weapons".

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### ***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 2015, 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 2015, 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 2016. [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." But not only was it possibly to deny, but also Russia denied that Assad had used chemical weapons, as mentioned below.

The third JIM report is United Nations Security Council document S/2016/738.

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 2016 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.

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### 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](#).

The fourth report was provided to the United Nations Security Council on Friday, 21 October. The Security Council is scheduled to discuss the report on 27 October. The fourth report concludes that Assad's government was responsible for a third attack: dropping chlorine on Qmenas in Idlib province on 16 March 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).



The fourth JIM report is United Nations Security Council document S/2016/888.

Reuters reported on the closed-door meeting of the U.N. Security Council on 27 October.

France, Britain and the United States hope to persuade Russia to agree to a 12-month extension to the mandate of the [JIM] inquiry, which expires on Oct. 31, before starting negotiations on a draft resolution to punish those blamed for such attacks.

"The conclusions of the JIM (Joint Investigative Mechanism) are not definitive, have no legally binding force and cannot serve as accusatory conclusions for taking legal decision," Russian U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told the council, according to a copy of his remarks.

"Damascus should carry out a comprehensive national investigation on chemical incidents confirmed by the JIM," he said, adding that while Russia is still studying the latest report, most cases in the international inquiry's report were "full of contradictions and therefore, unconvincing."

The United States has circulated a draft resolution to the council to renew the mandate for the inquiry and the council could vote on the measure as early as Monday [31 Oct], diplomats said.

Michelle Nichols, "Russia says Syria should look at gas attacks, dimming sanctions hopes," [Reuters](#), 22:01 GMT, 27 Oct 2016.

My comment is that after a 13-month investigation, Russia still refuses to believe that Assad is responsible for dropping chlorine gas on civilians. More investigation is unlikely to convince Russia. Russia's made an absurd suggestion that Damascus should investigate itself — a criminal suspect has an obvious bias that would reduce the credibility of any conclusion that they are *not* responsible for war crimes.

On 31 October 2016, the United Nations Security Council voted to extend the JIM mission until 18 November 2016, while discussions of a one-year extension continue. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

### **JIM extended until November 2017**

On 17 November 2016, the United Nations Security Council extended the mission of the JIM until 17 November 2017. [U.N.](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Here is the bad news. The fourth report of the JIM says that "the Mechanism closed its office in The Hague on 23 September 2016" and "The Mechanism also closed its liaison office in Damascus". S/2016/888 at ¶43 (21 Oct 2016). This is really poor planning. The Security Council should have renewed the JIM in September, to avoid closing and then re-opening offices.

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## **ISIL Releases Chemical Weapons in Iraq**

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

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

**Introduction:  
ISIL used mustard in Iraq  
on 11 August 2015**

On 11 August 2015, ISIL allegedly fired mortar shells containing mustard against the Kurdish Peshmerga in Makhmur, Iraq. My essay for [August 2015](#) cited 12 news articles on that incident. My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions speculation that either (1) ISIL manufactured the mustard (at the University of Mosul?), (2) ISIL stole the mustard from Assad's warehouses in Syria, or (3) ISIL stole the mustard from old Iraqi stockpiles produced under Saddam Hussein's rule.

From 31 July to 4 Sep 2015, General Kevin J. Killea — chief of staff, Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve — gave a few press briefings at the Pentagon. In his [21 Aug 2015](#) briefing, General Killea said: "[we] were able to take the fragments from some of those mortar rounds and do a field test, a presumptive field test on those [mortar shell] fragments and they showed the presence of HD, or what is known as sulfur mustard."

In Killea's next — and final — briefing, on [4 Sep 2015](#) Laurent Barthelemy from Agence France Presse (AFP) asked General Killea about the alleged use of mustard gas at Makhmur, Iraq, and specifically what were the results of laboratory tests. General Killea responded that there had been a "field test" of evidence collected at the site, and "those materials have now been packaged up, and they have been shipped to what we call a gold-level laboratory. It's an internationally recognized laboratory for complete and thorough analysis so that we can ultimately get to conclusive results on what — what that material was." The results were supposed to be available in "a couple of more weeks" after the 4 Sep press briefing. But General Killea did no further briefings, and when Col. Warren resumed the briefings on 1 Oct, journalists failed to ask about the results of the laboratory tests on the evidence from Makhmur.

My 10 November 2015 search of press releases and briefing transcripts at the Pentagon website for the query "Mustard Makhmur" found only the two briefings by General Killea that were cited above.

On 20 October 2015, [Reuters](#) reported: "A team of inspectors from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will go to Iraq next week to help determine if the blistering agent sulphur mustard was used in the battlefield, three sources told Reuters. .... The OPCW team's mandate will be limited to the single allegation of use in August against the Kurdish Peshmerga forces, which was allegedly fired using mortar rounds."

On 15 February 2016, [Reuters](#) reports that OPCW had concluded that mustard gas was used by ISIL in Iraq during August 2015. This one news story ends four months of silence by

journalists on this topic. 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 have 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](#).

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## **Syria**

### **Futile Peace Negotiations in Syria**

### **Disorganization of the Syrian National Coalition**

### **& Politics of the Peace Process**

My [previous essays](#) on Syria explain why I believe peace negotiations are futile with the current conditions in Syria. The following information continues this history of frustrated negotiations.

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### **Diversions**

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

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## Deaths in Syria

On 13 December 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a new cumulative death toll for Syrian civil war.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 312,001 persons since the rise of the Syrian revolution on 18 March 2011 — the date of the first person killed in Daraa countryside — until today December 13<sup>th</sup> 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 90506 civilians, including:
  - 15948 children
  - 10540 females over the age of 18
- Syrian fighters of the rebel and Islamic factions and Syria Democratic Forces of which YPG is its backbone, in addition to other Syrian fighters of other factions and organizations: 50606
- Defected soldiers and officers: 2602
- Regime soldiers and officers: 60309
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, al-Ba'eth battalions, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the “Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta”: 42627
- Militiamen from Hezbollah guerrilla: 1387
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Filastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 5330
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian and many other nationalities of fighters fighting with ISIS, al-Nusra Front, Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham organization, al-Khadra'a Battalion, the Islamic Turkestan Party, Junud al-Sham al-Shishan and the Islamic movements: 54951
- Unidentified dead people documented by photos and videos: 3683

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was able to document the **death of 14638 detainees**, including 111 children under the age of eighteen, and 54 citizen women over the age of eighteen since the start of the Syrian revolution in March 18<sup>th</sup> 2011 until December 13<sup>th</sup> 2016, from the 60,000 prisoners. The Syrian Observatory for human rights received confirmed information from reliable sources within the

regime's security branches, most importantly Air Force Intelligence and State Security in addition to reliable sources within Sednaya military prison, confirming their death within these branches and Sednaya prison during the past five years, either as a result of direct physical torture, or due to the deprivation of food and medicine.

These statistics do not include also the more than 5000 abductees from the civilians and fighters inside ISIS jails from Deir Ezzor tribes who were kidnapped from their areas.

These statistics also do not include the fate of more than 4500 captives and missing of the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them, or the fate of 1500 kidnapped persons by the rebel and Islamic factions, the "Islamic State" organization, Fath al-Sham Front on charges of loyalty to the regime.

These statistics also do not include hundreds of non-Syrian Kurdish fighters who were killed fighting with YPG in Syria.

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimate the real number of casualties of the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them of Syrian, Arab or Asian nationalities, the rebel and Islamic factions, the "Islamic state" organization, Jund al-Sham, Fath al-Sham Front, Jund al-Aqsa organization, al-Umma Brigade, al-Battar battalion, al-Mohajereen and al-Ansar army, and the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them of Syrian, Arab and Asian nationalities to be approximately 80,000 more than the documented numbers, due to the extreme discretion by all parties about the human losses caused by the conflict and due to the difficulty of communication in Syria.

And we in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights consider the silence of the international community for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria encourages the criminals to kill more and more Syrian people, because they have not found anyone that deter them from continuing their crimes that injured more than 2 million people; some of them with permanent disabilities, and more than 12 million Syrian people were displaced both internally and externally, and destroying the infrastructure and private and public properties.

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 450 thousand were killed and more than two millions were injured in 69 months of the start of the Syrian revolution," [SOHR](#), 13 Dec 2016. [Formatting as indented list and boldface added by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

In the total of 312001, the SOHR did *not* include the dead detainees that the SOHR had documented. Adding the 14,638 dead detainees, and the estimated 5000 abductees, 6000 captive and kidnapped, plus 80,000 fighters, the total dead is approximately 418,000. There is *no* hint in the SOHR article of how they reached a total of 450,000 in their headline.

The SOHR headline claims 450,000 dead, which is about 40% more than the number of documented dead people. My essays for [May 2016](#) and [September 2016](#) comment on the estimated actual number of deaths, which is significantly greater than the number of documented dead people.

The SOHR continues to bemoan "the silence by the international community". But Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and the USA have all been vocal in the United Nations during December 2016. The real problem is that the international community has been impotent.

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On 31 Dec 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll for the 2016 year.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented death of 49742 persons since the 1st of January 2016 until today the 31st of December 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilians: 13617 civilians, they are: 2885 children, 1855 females over the age of 18, and 8877 men. And the civilian casualties were as follows:
  - 10485 citizens, they are 2372 children, 1489 women and 6224 men were killed in air, artillery, missile and shell strikes and other circumstances.
  - And 1758 persons, they are 384 children, 302 women and 1072 men were killed in the fall of shells gunfire and by the hands of the opposition factions.
  - And 1374 persons including 129 children, 64 women and 1181 men were killed by the hands of the "Islamic State" organization and in explosions and gunfire by the organization.
- Syrian fighters who oppose the regime: 8130
- Defected from the regime forces: 40
- Regime soldiers and officers: 6685
- Combatants from Popular Defense Committees, al-Ba'eth battalions, National Defense Forces, al Shabiha, pro-regime informers and the "Syrian resistance to liberate the Sanjak of Alexandretta": 6201
- Militiamen from the Lebanese Hezbollah: 189
- Pro-regime Shia militiamen from Arab and Asian nationalities, Al Quds Al Filastini Brigade and other pro-regime militiamen from different Arab nationalities: 1117
- Arab, European, Asian, American and Australian and many other nationalities of

fighters fighting with ISIS, Fath al-Sham Front (al-Nusra Front previously), Junoud al-Sham battalion, Jund Al-Aqsa battalion, Jund al-Sham organization, al-Khadra'a Battalion, the Islamic Turkestan Party, Junud al-Sham al-Shishan and the Islamic movements: 13297

- Unidentified dead people documented by photos and videos: 466

These statistics do not include tens of thousands of missing people inside the prisons of the regime forces and its security branches, nor others who gone missing when the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them stormed several areas in Syria and committed massacres there.

[These statistics do not include] abductees from the civilians and fighters inside ISIS jails from Deir Ezzor tribes who were kidnapped from their areas.

These statistics also do not include the fate of hundreds of captives of the regime forces and the militiamen loyal to them, or the fate of hundreds of kidnapped people by the rebel and Islamic factions, the "Islamic State" organization, Fath al-Sham Front.

Also the statistics do not include thousands of fighters of the rebel and Islamic factions, the "Islamic State", Fath al-Sham Front, Syria Democratic Forces, YPG and the gunmen loyal to these parties of who were kidnapped during the clashes between these parties, they also do not include thousands of kidnapped civilians and fighters in the prisons of the "Islamic State".

We at the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights consider the silence of the International community for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria encourages the criminals to kill more and more Syrian people, because they have not found anyone that deter them from continuing their crimes that injured more than 2 million people; some of them with permanent disabilities, and more than 12 million Syrian people were displaced both internally and externally, and destroying the infrastructure and private and public properties.

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 60 thousand were killed in 2016 and we still wait for an international trial for the criminals," [SOHR](#), 31 Dec 2016. [Formatting as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

I do *not* understand why SOHR says "about 60,000 killed" in their headline, when they documented approximately 50,000 deaths.

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On 1 Jan 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll for the month of December 2016.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented death of 3117 persons in the month of December 2016. The casualties are as follows:

- Civilian casualties: 1116 civilians, including 247 children under the age of eighteen, and 130 female citizens over the age of 18, they were killed as follows:
  - 372 citizens including 85 children and 45 citizen women killed in raids by Russian and Syrian warplanes' bombing and helicopters' barrel bombs.
  - 220 people including 42 children and 26 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.
  - 5 persons including a woman were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons
  - 152 persons including 40 children and 21 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells and targeting by the rebel and Islamic Factions and the "Islamic State" organization
  - 176 including 40 children and 20 women were killed in shelling by Turkish warplanes,
  - 15 including 1 woman were killed by the gunshots of the Turkish border guards
  - 21 persons including a woman were executed by the "Islamic State" organization,
  - 73 including 8 children and 7 women were killed in bombing by warplanes of the international coalition,
  - 9 people were killed in the explosions of booby trapped vehicles and explosive belts detonation,
  - 9 including 3 children died due to poor health conditions and the bad living conditions and the lack of medication,
  - 3 including a woman person was killed by the Syrian Democratic Forces,
  - and 76 including 29 children and 7 citizen women were 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 Movements and organizations: 517
- Defected soldiers and officers: 3
- The regime forces: 351
- Members from Popular Committees, NDF and militiamen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 379
- Militiamen from the Lebanese Hezbollah: 6
- Non-Syrian Pro-regime mostly Shia militiamen: 28
- Unidentified casualties: 18
- 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: 702

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights believe that the number of casualties

in the ranks of the rebel and Islamic factions and the “Islamic State” organization is 200 more than the number documented we were able to document, because of the extreme secrecy by the targeted parties about their death toll.

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 3100 killed in December 2016," [SOHR](#), 1 Jan 2017. [Formatting as indented list by Standler.]

When I add the indented list of civilian deaths, I get a total of 1131, *not* 1116.

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I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of death tolls announced by SOHR, beginning 31 Aug 2013. The total number of people who have died during the Syria civil war that began in March 2011 is now *more than* 312,600.

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## 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.

My essays for [September 2016](#), [October 2016](#), and [November 2016](#) tersely chronicle the continuing Turkish invasion of Syria, as well as Erdogan's continuing purge of alleged coup supporters. My essay for September also mentions slow progress on constructing a wall along the Turkish-Syrian border, which wall has been needed since mid-2013.

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### **December 2016: Turkish invasion of Syria**

On 8 December, Turkey announced it was sending 300 additional soldiers into Syria. [Reuters](#).

On 19 December, a 22 year old Turkish policemen assassinated the Russian ambassador to Turkey at an art gallery in Ankara. The assassin shouted: "Don't forget Aleppo! Don't forget Syria! Allahu akbar! We are the descendants of those who supported the Prophet Muhammad, for jihad." Police later killed the assassin. [Anadolu Agency](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

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

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

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

On 25 April 2016, Obama stood in Hannover, Germany and gave a speech "to the people of Europe". 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.

On 24 November 2016, a U.S. Navy explosive disposal expert, Senior Chief Petty Officer

Scott C. Dayton, was killed by an improvised explosive device in Ayn Issa in northern Syria. He was the first U.S. citizen killed in Obama's war in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Pentagon](#)(26Nov); [Washington Post](#).

On 10 December, the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced the deployment of an additional 200 U.S. Military personnel to Syria, to assist in the liberation of Raqqa from ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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## Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

### Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

After Assad began an assault on eastern Aleppo city on 15 November 2016, it is more clear than ever that Assad is slowly winning the Syrian civil war.

Let us recognize reality. Assad is firmly in command of the Syrian government. The rebels and jihadists have attempted for more six 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.

It is really quite remarkable that Assad — with the assistance of only Russia and Iran — has

managed to defeat a large number of insurgents backed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Kuwait, the USA, and Western Europe. The Russian veto in the U.N. Security Council has prevented the United Nations from doing anything significant to end the Syrian civil war. Assad's victory is partly a result of the disorganization of the rebels and jihadists, and the lack of consensus by the foreign meddlers who support these insurgents. Assad's victory is also a consequence of Russia has used their significant airpower to blast insurgents into oblivion (beginning 30 Sep 2015), and — quite properly — *no* one wants to challenge the Russian military involvement. It is *not* worth starting World War III over an insignificant nation like Syria.

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## Peace Negotiations for Syria

### Future of Assad must be decided by Syrians *not* by foreign meddlers

On 31 October 2015, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, indirectly criticized the obsession of Obama — and also indirectly criticized leaders of Western Europe, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, etc. — about the removal of Assad. Ban in Geneva said: “I believe that the future of Syria, or the future of all these peace talks, the Syrian-led negotiation, should not be held up by an issue of the future of one man. Basically I believe that it is up to the Syrian people who have to decide the future of President Assad.” [Reuters](#). Agence France-Presse reported that Ban in Madrid said: “It is totally unfair and unreasonable that the fate of one person takes the whole political negotiation process hostage. It is unacceptable. .... The future of Assad must be decided by the Syrian people.” [Al-Arabiya](#). See also [Voice of America](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

On 16 December 2015, Ban Ki-moon reiterated what he said on 31 October: “It is unacceptable that the whole Syrian crisis and the solution to the crisis has to be dependent on the fate of one man.” [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

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.

On 10 October 2016, U.N. Secretary General again said: "The future of one person, like President Assad, should not block this process." [Deutsche Welle](#).

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## Peace Negotiations in Geneva Died in April 2016

### 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*.

My essay for [September 2016](#) chronicled the creation of new agreements by Russia and the USA on 9 Sep, the hundreds of violations during the first week of the new ceasefire, the collapse of the new ceasefire on 18 Sep, and the failure of diplomats to resuscitate the new ceasefire. The situation on the ground in Syria actually worsened after the new ceasefire became effective, as Assad and Russia began a ferocious new assault on the city of Aleppo on the night of 21 Sep. I characterized the ISSG as a "complete failure". I concluded that the Syrian peace negotiations in Geneva were dead for the foreseeable future.

My essay for [October 2016](#) chronicled the failure of the United Nations to do something about Syria: a veto by Russia in the U.N. Security Council on 8 October, a unilateral Russian/Assad ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-22 October that was *not* reciprocated by insurgents, and on 20 October the U.N. Secretary General requested the U.N. General Assembly pass a resolution on Syria (but the General Assembly apparently ignored the request until 9 December).

My essay for [November 2016](#) chronicled the total failure of the United Nations to do something about the crisis in Syria.

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### 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.

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### **Negotiations between Russia & USA About Syria**

On 9 September 2016, Kerry and Lavrov agreed on a new ceasefire in Syria, which was scheduled to begin at sundown on 12 September. The new so-called ceasefire was frequently violated by both sides, and the new ceasefire totally collapsed in less than one week. On 21 September, Assad and Russia began an intense campaign of airstrikes on Aleppo city. By the end of September 2016, Kerry began to realize that he had wasted several months of time negotiating with Lavrov. (See my essay for [September 2016](#).) On 3 October, Kerry angrily declared an end to bilateral negotiations between the USA and Russia about the civil war in Syria. On 15 October, Kerry and Lavrov met in Lausanne together with foreign ministers from Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, Jordan and Egypt. (See my essay for [October 2016](#).) But the Lausanne-format negotiations produced *no* results.

After the 3 October declaration of *no* more bilateral negotiations between the USA and Russia, on 22 November Kerry had a telephone conversation with Lavrov to discuss the situation in Syria. [Reuters](#). On 2 December, Kerry met one-on-one with Lavrov in Rome. [State Dept.](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Why is Kerry violating his 3 October policy of not talking to Lavrov? I suggest Kerry now wants to show that he and Obama are still relevant, despite a new U.S. president on 20 Jan 2017. See, e.g., [State Dept.](#), where Kerry said: "And nobody's waiting for the next administration."

My comment is that Kerry is *really slow* to understand that (1) the Russians are supporting Assad's military victory in the Syrian civil war, and (2) Russia is *not* sincere about either ceasefires or delivery of humanitarian aid. The Russians have been stringing Kerry along, since the creation of the ISSG in October 2015, 14 months ago. The Russians want to negotiate, so they can blame the U.S. Government for the failure of negotiations, and so the Russians can issue propaganda about seeking peace. Moreover, Kerry himself in October 2016 called the Russians war criminals, which adds a moral dimension to negotiating with the barbaric Russians.

After the Lavrov-Kerry meeting in Rome, on 5 December Lavrov announced that Russian and U.S. experts will meet in Geneva and begin to discuss an agreement to allow insurgents to leave eastern Aleppo city. Lavrov's announcement seems to have surprised the U.S. State Department. [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#). These discussions will begin on 10 December. [TASS](#); [RBTH](#).

On 7-8 December, Kerry met twice with Lavrov, this time in Hamburg, Germany. [State Dept.](#).

On 11 December 2016, the insurgents in Aleppo claimed that Russia and the USA reached an agreement in Geneva, as described [below](#). *If* the insurgents accept the agreement and depart from eastern Aleppo city, then Assad will control all of Aleppo city. However, the Russian foreign ministry denied that an agreement had been reached. Apparently, the U.S. gave insurgent groups a copy of a draft U.S. proposal.

On 12 December 2016, after only 3 days of negotiations in Geneva, Lavrov declared the talks in Geneva were at a "dead end". [Reuters](#). Also, Lavrov declared the the U.S. Government was protecting the Nusra terrorist group, so Nusra could "topple" Assad. [RIA-Novosti](#).

On 14 December 2016, Lavrov declared that negotiations with the U.S. Government about Syria were "fruitless gatherings". [RIA-Novosti](#). My comment is that Lavrov proposed the negotiations with the U.S. on 5 December.

#### **Russia rejects USA, Russia chooses Turkey**

On 14 December 2016, a meeting was scheduled in Moscow for 27 December, in which Russia, Iran, and Turkey would meet to solve the problem of the Syrian civil war. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [RIA-Novosti](#). I have two comments. First, notice that Russia is now negotiating with Turkey, instead of with the USA. Second, notice that Assad is omitted from the meeting, which seems strange, given that Assad is the lawful ruler of Syria and the person who invited Iran and Russia to help fight the insurgents in Syria.

On 15 December 2016, [Reuters](#) posted a terse one-sentence news article that said: "Russia and the United States have suspended talks on ways to resolve the crisis in Syria's largest city of Aleppo, TASS news agency cited a Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov as saying on Thursday [15 Dec]." My comment is that the suspension will have *no* effect, because the talks were not only fruitless, but also negotiations between the insurgents, Turkey, and Russia solved the problem on 13-14 December, as explained [below](#).

On 16 December 2016, Russian president Putin announced that he and Turkish president Erdogan were working to hold Syrian peace negotiations in the city of Astana, Kazakhstan. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is that Lavrov has been rudely criticizing de Mistura during the past months, because de Mistura has not scheduled peace negotiations in Geneva. Putin may now be trying to take the ball away from de Mistura. Reuters said the Putin/Erdogan agreement was "a snub to Washington". But Astana is hardly the most desirable location for negotiations. Moscow or Istanbul would be better.

Later on 16 December 2016, at 19:15 GMT, a spokeswoman for the HNC told the [Associated Press](#) that the HNC is "completely in favor of those talks, but we want them under U.N. auspices." She also said Astana is not "the appropriate place."

On 18 December 2016, Russia rescheduled the 27 Dec meeting in Moscow to 20 Dec.

On 20 December, Russia announced it had agreed on the "Moscow Declaration" with Iran and Turkey. However, Mohammad Alloush of the HNC called that declaration a "crime". [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 23 December, Russia says a nationwide ceasefire in Syria will be discussed at the meeting in Astana, sometime in mid-January 2017. [Reuters](#). Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Assad agree to hold talks in Astana. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is that Russia now needs to find an opposition delegation to attend and agree to a nationwide ceasefire. The insurgents will then ignore the ceasefire.

On 29 December, Russia, Turkey, and seven groups of insurgents negotiated a nationwide ceasefire in Syria to begin at midnight on 29 December 2016. See [below](#). Neither the U.S. nor the U.N. were involved in the negotiations.

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### **5 December 2016: U.N. Security Council Fails Again**

Egypt, New Zealand, and Spain drafted a U.N. Security Council Resolution that demanded a 7-day ceasefire in Aleppo city, delivery of humanitarian aid, and evacuation of wounded from eastern Aleppo city. On the afternoon of 5 December 2016, 11 nations voted in favor of the resolution, but Russia, communist China, and Venezuela voted against. The Russian and Chinese vetoes defeated the draft resolution. This was the sixth time the Russians had vetoed a resolution on Syria and the fifth time the Chinese had vetoed a resolution on Syria. [U.N.](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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### **8 December 2016: U.N. Security Council Meeting**

On 8 December, de Mistura was in New York City, where at 15:00 he briefed the United Nations Security Council in a session that was closed to the public. [U.N.](#)

After the meeting, de Mistura told journalists that "... perhaps now is the time to actually either look seriously at a possible renewal of looking where and how we can have political discussions" with Assad's delegation and the opposition delegation. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). De Mistura was responding to an announcement by Russia that Assad would observe a ceasefire in Aleppo city. But, as described [below](#), the announced ceasefire did *not* occur.

The United Nations did *not* post a transcript of de Mistura's press conference.

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### **9 December 2016: U.N. General Assembly**

On 13 October 2016, Canada — joined by 69 other nations — called for a U.N. General Assembly meeting on Syria. [CBC](#).

On 20 October 2016, Ban Ki-moon addressed the United Nations General Assembly, and asked them to solve the problem of the Syrian civil war, because the U.N. Security Council had failed. Ban specifically mentioned prosecution for war crimes:

I regret that the Security Council has failed to discharge its responsibilities to uphold peace and security for Syria.

I am troubled that regional rivalries have taken primacy over the needs of the Syrian people.

I am appalled that the Syrian parties continue to place their faith in rockets, guns and barrel bombs.

There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis.

....

No country's destiny should rest on the fate of any single individual. [reference to whether Assad resigns or stays, as insurmountable obstacle in Geneva negotiations]

My Special Envoy continues to work intensively to re-convene formal talks. We must be ready to move quickly, in a concerted manner.

Grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have been committed in Syria. Some of these may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. I call on all of you to cooperate and fulfil your collective responsibility to protect.

Accountability is a responsibility we must all uphold. Failing to do so would deny Syrians justice and healing.

Members of the Government who gave orders or were part of the chain of command must be brought to account. Others on the battlefield must also be brought into the halls of justice.

Most immediately, I have established an internal United Nations Board of Inquiry to investigate the tragedy involving a United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent relief operation to Urum al-Kubra on 19 September.

Ban Ki-moon, "Secretary-General's remarks to Informal Meeting of the General Assembly on the Situation in Syria [as delivered]," [U.N.](#), 20 Oct 2016.

Ban was wrong on 20 October, when he said: "There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis." Assad is clearly winning the Syrian civil war, with the assistance of Russia and Iran, and with the impotence of the United Nations. Ban's 20 October request to the General Assembly seems to be a last gasp by a departing Secretary General.

On 2 December 2016, 74 nations, "more than a third of the 193-member General Assembly[,] this week asked for a formal meeting to be held on Syria." Canada has drafted a resolution on Syria for the U.N. General Assembly to consider. [Reuters](#); [CBC](#). This is a continuation of a

20 October 2016 meeting of the General Assembly, in which Ban asked the General Assembly to solve the Syrian problem, because the U.N. Security Council had failed.

On 9 December 2016, 122 nations in the General Assembly voted for the nonbinding Resolution 71/130 drafted by Canada, which:

1. "Demands an immediate and complete end to all attacks on civilians and civilian objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, as well as an immediate end to all sieges in the Syrian Arab Republic, including in Aleppo"
2. "Also demands the immediate cessation of hostilities, as described in Security Council resolution 2268 (2016), as well as rapid, safe, sustained, unhindered and unconditional humanitarian access throughout the Syrian Arab Republic for the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and all humanitarian actors"
3. "... requests the Secretary-General, through his good offices and the efforts of his Special Envoy for Syria, to resume the formal negotiations between representatives of the Syrian authorities and the opposition under the auspices of the United Nations, based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 and relevant Security Council resolutions, with a view to a lasting political settlement of the crisis, as soon as possible, and urges the representatives of the Syrian authorities and the opposition to engage in good faith in these negotiations"
4. "Emphasizes the need to ensure accountability for crimes involving violations of international law, in particular of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, through appropriate, fair and independent investigations and prosecutions at the domestic or international level, ...."
5. Requests the U.N. Secretary General to report in 45 days (i.e., 23 Jan 2017) on the failure of this Resolution.

Reuters gamely says: "General Assembly resolutions are non-binding but can carry political weight." In other words, this General Assembly Resolution is even less significant than the routinely ignored Resolutions of the U.N. Security Council.

Matthew Rycroft, the United Kingdom Ambassador to the United Nations, said this Resolution was "too little, too late".

Amongst the 13 rogue nations who voted against this Resolution were: China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Syria, and Venezuela.

Less than 3 days after this General Assembly Resolution was passed, it was either forgotten or ignored.

**Bibliography:** [U.N. News](#); [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

Although the U.N. General Assembly met in New York City, *The New York Times* did not report the passage of the General Assembly's Resolution on Syria.

On 21 December 2016, I looked at the U.N. website to find the full-text of the 9 December Resolution 130 by the General Assembly. In the long list of General Assembly Resolutions, the most recently posted online is Resolution 45 that passed on 5 December. The U.N. is *not* promptly posting online the text of General Assembly Resolutions. However, the General Assembly passed a whopping 192 resolutions in 22 days from 30 Nov to 21 Dec. This Resolution was finally posted on the Internet on 3 Jan 2017.

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### 10 December 2016: Paris Meeting

On 23 November, the French Foreign Minister proposed a conference of anti-Assad governments sometime in "early December". [Reuters](#).

On 6 December, [Reuters](#) tersely reported: "France, a staunch backer of the anti-Assad opposition, will convene foreign ministers of like-minded countries in Paris on Saturday [10 Dec] to try to come up with some form of strategy in the wake of the Aleppo onslaught, although few diplomats expect anything concrete to be achieved."

On the night of 9 December, Kerry held a "meet and greet" at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, where he said:

.... I know people are tired of these meetings. I'm tired of these meetings. And people are sort of, "Oh, another meeting. Okay. This one will end the same way the other one did." I get it, folks. I'm not born yesterday. But what am I supposed to do? Go home and have a nice weekend in Massachusetts while people are dying? Sit there in Washington and do nothing? That's not the way you do business. That's not what the United States does, it's not what people of decency do, and that's not what we do if we keep faith where those before us have always proved that you've got to keep. Whether it's keeping fighting or keeping talking, you've got to keep on keeping in order to keep faith. That's what diplomacy is about. It's about trying. And I hope that in the next days, as I said, we can find some way to get to the table. The most important thing to me was to get to the table. Whether they're fighting or not fighting or anything else, let's have a serious discussion about how to end this war.

John Kerry, "Remarks at a Meet and Greet With the Staff and Families of Embassy Paris," [U.S. State Dept.](#), 9 Dec 2016.

Kerry is full of idealism about more meetings and more diplomacy. Let me say the obvious: diplomats have tried to end the Syrian civil war for five years, but the diplomats have repeatedly failed. The United Nations is currently on its third special envoy for Syria, after the two previous envoys resigned in frustration. Most importantly, the people of Syria have *not* been helped by the failure of diplomats. Why did the diplomats fail? One reason is that foreign meddlers sent weapons and ammunition into Syria, supporting either the insurgents or Assad, and continuing the civil war for at least six years. These same foreign meddlers hypocritically sent diplomats to meetings, where sanctimonious speeches were given about the need for peace. The resolution is simple: *stop* supporting the insurgents, and recognize

Assad as the legitimate leader of Syria. Despite Assad's misconduct, Assad is the least-worst leader for Syria, and certainly better than either ISIL or Nusra.

On 10 December, before the meeting in Paris, there was an announcement at the English-language website of the French Foreign Ministry:

Jean-Marc Ayrault, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development, will receive the representatives of the group of like-minded countries,

- his German counterpart, Frank-Walter Steinmeier,
- his American counterpart, John Kerry,
- his Qatari counterpart, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani,
- his British counterpart, Boris Johnson,
- his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu,
- as well as representatives of
  - Saudi Arabia,
  - the United Arab Emirates,
  - Italy,
  - Jordan
- and Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,

on December 10, 2016, at 8:30 am at the Quai d'Orsay for a ministerial meeting on Syria.

Dr. Riyad Hijab, General Coordinator of the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition, and Brita Hagi Hasan, Aleppo city council president will meet with the participants.

The meeting will be co-chaired by Jean-Marc Ayrault and his Qatari and German counterparts.

The latest developments make the international community's mobilization more necessary than ever.

The minister and his guests will discuss the tragic humanitarian situation in Aleppo and the urgent response needed by the international community.

They will also discuss the strategy to be adopted following Daesh's retreat in order ensure the successful governance and stabilization of the liberated territories.

Lastly, they will take stock of efforts to resolve this crisis which has dragged on for too long. One year after it was launched, the Vienna process [ISSG] has stalled and it is imperative that we continue our collective efforts to find a political solution.

"Syria — Ministerial meeting of the group of like-minded countries (Paris, December 10, 2016)," [France Diplomatie](#), 10 Dec 2016.

On the morning of 10 December, during the meeting in Paris, the Associated Press reported: Prospects look increasingly grim for the Western-backed opposition forces after five

years of civil war, as Syrian forces backed by Russia and other allies have taken control in recent days of nearly all of the rebel stronghold in eastern Aleppo.

Speaking in Paris on Friday night [9 Dec], Kerry acknowledged "people are tired of these meetings. ... But what am I supposed to do? Go home and have a nice weekend in Massachusetts while people are dying?"

After days of intense bombing, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Samantha Power, acknowledged this week that diplomacy has "not delivered for the people of Aleppo." Speaking to The Associated Press in Paris, she blamed Russia for vetoing U.N. efforts to ensure humanitarian aid, and expressed frustration at past efforts to negotiate solutions with Russia.

anonymous, "Syria: Kerry, Diplomats Seek Support For Aleppo's Opposition," [Associated Press](#), 10:38 GMT, 10 Dec 2016.

After the meeting in Paris, there was a press conference. Here is a tiny bit of what was said. [FOREIGN MINISTER AYRAULT:] And what Mr. Hijab said is that the opposition which he represents is ready to return to the table of negotiations without any precondition. This is an offer of peace that needs to be taken into account.

....

[SECRETARY KERRY:] So our teams, along with representatives from the United Nations and other international organizations, are meeting in Geneva today [10 Dec], and they will meet very shortly in order to try to flesh out the details of a possible — I emphasize possible — way of trying to save lives, save the lives of everybody — fighters, people who are innocently caught in between. And I'm hopeful that these talks could try to find a way forward, though I cannot stand here and tell you they will.

Now, what is it that complicates these talks? Well, here it is. The fighters, who are being bombed and who have been mercilessly prosecuted by the Assad regime in ways that, as we all know, defy the laws of war, don't trust that if they indeed agreed to leave to try to save Aleppo that, in fact, it will save Aleppo or that, in fact, they will be, in fact, unharmed and free to move and able to go to a destination where they also will not be immediately attacked. The choice for many of them as they think about it today is die in Aleppo or die in Idlib, but die. That's the way they see the choice. And it seems to me that the regime and Russia have a fundamental responsibility here that if they are trying to effect a genuine transition and a genuine reach to get to the talks in Geneva and a genuine cessation of hostilities to permit people to move, they need to provide guarantees and allow guarantees to be put in place that make certain that people are not marching into a massacre.

....

[SECRETARY KERRY:] So I urge — I'll speak for myself — I urge to Dr. Hijab and the opposition to think about how they could help save Aleppo and save the lives of many people by being willing to negotiate — not any concession, not a capitulation, not giving in, but actually start what we have been unable to start for these years,



which is a genuine discussion about the political solution, about the transition, about the new constitution, about election, about the Syrian people being able to do what we have promised they could do in both communiqués from the ISSG and what we promised at the United Nations Security Council, that the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria.

....

QUESTION: Yes, Karen de Young from *The Washington Post*. Secretary Kerry said yesterday and repeated again today that the world was tired of meetings. He said he himself was tired of meetings. And many of you have pointed out the fact that over many of these years of meetings you haven't really changed the situation on the ground. Syria is being destroyed, more people are dying, and these meetings haven't seemed to accomplish very much.

I wonder if you can tell us specifically what you accomplished today and what your level of optimism is that it will actually make a difference. And also, Secretary Kerry, I wonder if you could tell us what your expectation is for some kind of results to come out of the meetings in Geneva. Thank you.

SECRETARY KERRY: I think — well, I think the only piece that I'm being asked about per se, I think, is the expectations out of Geneva. I have no way to predict the expectations out of Geneva. I mean, my expectations are pretty constrained because I think issues were raised here in the meeting today that we will need to raise in the meeting in Geneva that will take a little moment for people to digest and see if we can get a decision or two regarding some of these ideas that were put on the table here.

"Joint Press Availability with French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed al-Thani," [U.S. State Dept.](#), 10 Dec 2016.

At 21:00 GMT on 10 December — and again at 19:00 GMT on 11 December — I looked at the homepage of the French Foreign Ministry, but there was *no* communiqué from the meeting in Paris. Instead, Jean-Marc Ayrault is focused on the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 12 December.

On 13 December, just three days after the Paris meeting, whatever happened at the Paris meeting had already been forgotten. And without a written communiqué from that meeting, there is nothing for historians to read.

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### 13 December 2016: U.N. Security Council Meeting

On the morning of 13 December, Assad was about to liberate the final sliver of eastern Aleppo city from Nusra and other insurgents. Then unconfirmed reports of atrocities by Assad's army and allied Shiite militia began to appear. The Associated Press tersely reported:

The U.N. human rights office said it had received reports of pro-government forces killing at least 82 civilians in four neighborhoods of the rapidly-shrinking rebel enclave, including 11 women and 13 children. Spokesman Rupert Colville, speaking to

reporters in Geneva, said the reports described pro-government forces entering homes and killing civilians "on the spot."

A news release by the U.N. human rights office in Geneva said that multiple sources reported dozens of civilians were shot dead Monday by government forces and allied militiamen in the Kallaseh and Bustan al-Qasr neighborhoods of eastern Aleppo.

....

Several residents and opposition activists in Syria told the AP that government forces carried out summary killings of rebels in neighborhoods captured on Monday, but the Syrian military denied the claim, saying such allegations were "a desperate attempt" to gain international sympathy.

None of the residents witnessed the alleged killings, and the reports came amid deepening chaos in the remaining rebel-held areas. Mohammed Abu Rajab, the administrator of the last remaining clinic in rebel-held parts of the city, said the dead and wounded were being left in the streets.

Zeina Karam & Edith M. Lederer, "Rebels to evacuate Aleppo in surrender deal as fighting ends," [Associated Press](#), 24:28 GMT, 13 Dec 2016.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a press release, part of which said:

The UN Human Rights Office has received credible reports of scores of civilians being killed — either by intense bombardment or summary execution by pro-Government forces. Dozens of bodies reportedly litter the streets of a number of east Aleppo neighbourhoods, with residents unable to retrieve them due to the intense bombardment and fear of being shot. Government forces and their allies are also reportedly entering civilian homes and killing people. Multiple sources have reported that pro-Government forces killed at least 82 civilians, including 11 women and 13 children, in the Bustan al-Qasr, al-Ferdous, al-Kallaseh, and al-Saleheen neighbourhoods yesterday [12 Dec]. Thousands of people who remain in areas under the control of armed groups are at risk of grave violations, including detentions, torture and killings.

“The crushing of Aleppo, the immeasurably terrifying toll on its people, the bloodshed, the wanton slaughter of men, women and children, the destruction — and we are nowhere near the end of this cruel conflict. What can happen next, if the international community continues to collectively wring its hands, can be much more dangerous. What is happening with Aleppo could repeat itself in Douma, in Raqqa, in Idleb. We cannot let this continue,” Zeid said.

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, "Syria: Aleppo terror and slaughter must be halted — Zeid," [OHCHR](#). 13 Dec 2016.

France and the United Kingdom called an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council. The 100-minute meeting began at 12:13 EST (17:13 GMT) on 13 December, and was attended by both the U.N. Secretary General and de Mistura. But during the U.N. meeting, the insurgents accepted a Russian offer for the insurgents to withdraw from Aleppo, and go to northern Idlib province. (See [below](#).) The ceasefire and withdrawal meant that the problem was solved and the United Nations diplomats were rescued from another ignominious failure.

The U.N. issued a [report](#) on the emergency meeting. Presumably, humanitarian aid to the ruins of eastern Aleppo city will begin soon.

Text of de Mistura's remarks to journalists on 13 Dec is quoted [below](#).

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### **19 December 2016: U.N. Security Council Resolution**

On Friday, 16 December 2016, France called another emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council about the crisis in eastern Aleppo city, including the [problems](#) with a ceasefire and evacuation of civilians. France proposed a draft resolution that would send U.N. observers to Aleppo city. [Reuters](#); Russian declared on 17 December that it would veto the French draft resolution. On the afternoon of 18 December, France and Russia reached a compromise. A meeting was scheduled to begin at 09:00 EST on Monday, 19 December, to vote on the compromise resolution. [NY Times](#)(18 Dec); [Washington Post](#)(AP 18 Dec); [Reuters](#).

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2328 was unanimously approved on the morning of 19 December. [U.N.](#)

One of Russia's objections was that it would take months to assemble a team of observers. But the United Nations already has more than 100 personnel in Syria, most of them Syrian citizens, who could be used for monitoring.

The reasons behind the new U.N. Resolution were expressed on 16 December by Samantha Power, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations:

Hi, everybody. Members of the Security Council, as you know, were just briefed by Under-Secretary-General O'Brien on the humanitarian devastation in eastern Aleppo. He also briefed us, of course, on the status of ongoing efforts to evacuate civilians, which are touch and go.

Unfortunately, this effort appears to have stalled due to violent and reprehensible acts by Iranian-backed militias and other Assad regime allies. Thanks to the brave and determined work of the ICRC, the Syrian NGOs who are operating on the ground, the UN, and countless other humanitarian groups, we understand that more civilians did manage to get out overnight. And I would just here applaud those Syrians in particular who are working in bitter cold, with very few resources, with the constant specter and threat of bombardment hanging over their heads, to get as many people out of eastern Aleppo who want to leave as possible. These are remarkable individuals — they are nameless, they're faceless, but that is how those who have gotten out have gotten out; it's because of the work of these individuals.

....

The reports of attacks on fleeing civilians are horrifying:

- firing upon weak, starving, and wounded civilians;
- disappearing men and boys;
- forcing others to join the regime's forces on the front lines

— these are despicable acts. They are contrary to the laws of war, and they need stop immediately. And the permanent members of this United Nations Security Council who have blocked unity on Syria and on Aleppo need to make these crimes stop. Russia has helped deliver Aleppo to the Syrian government. Surely Russia, in exchange, can secure actually safe corridors for civilians who wish to leave.

....

... the least that Russia can do is ensure that UN monitors, ICRC monitors, and others are present with civilians so that men between 18 and 40 stop getting disappeared, stop getting pulled off busses, stop getting taken to undisclosed locations or to the front lines. Surely, that is not too much to ask after this horror that has been inflicted on these innocent civilians. Thank you.

Samantha Power, "Remarks at the UN Security Council Stakeout Following a Meeting on the Situation in Aleppo," [USUN](#), 16 Dec 2016. [Indented list formatting added by Standler.]

Most of the negotiations were in closed sessions of the Security Council or in private meetings, which are not reported.

I am skeptical that this Resolution will have any effect in Syria. Previous U.N. Security Council Resolutions on Syria have been ignored by Assad and his allies, and also ignored by the insurgents. Furthermore, a series of ceasefires in Syria — either arranged by Russia/USA or unilaterally declared by Assad/Russia — were all repeatedly violated. There is *no* reason to believe this Resolution will be obeyed.

### **21 December 2016: U.N. General Assembly Resolution 71/248**

In a surprise, on 21 December 2016 the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/71/248 to establish a forensic investigation that will document violations of international humanitarian law (i.e., war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria). This new investigation will "closely coordinate" with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which was established by the U.N. Human Rights Council in 2011.

The 193 nations voted 105 for, 15 against, with 52 abstentions.

Russia vociferously objected to the Resolution, which Russia claimed would interfere with ongoing work by the U.N. Security Council. The Truth is that Russia has already vetoed 6 draft resolutions about Syria in the Security Council. There is *no* reasonable hope that Russia would allow the Security Council to pass a resolution investigating war crimes in Syria.

Resolution A/RES/71/248 was part of a package of 36 resolutions drafted by the Second Committee of the General Assembly, and all adopted by the General Assembly on 21 December 2016.

**Bibliography:** [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 11 January 2017, the text of this important Resolution has *not* yet been posted at the website of the United Nations.

### **31 December 2016: U.N. Security Council Resolution 2336**

On 29 December, Russia, Turkey, Assad, and seven groups of insurgents negotiated a nationwide ceasefire in Syria to begin at midnight on 29 December 2016. See [below](#). The United Nations was *not* involved in the negotiations.

I posted a copy of the *draft* ceasefire agreement at [rbs0.com](#). On 8 January 2017, I searched Google for the query:  
full-text ceasefire agreement Syria  
but I did *not* find the text of the final ceasefire agreement on the Internet.

In the first week of January 2017, the United Nations posted on the Internet [S/2016/1133](#), which is a Russian memorandum that contains the official text of five documents. However, not even the U.N. Security Council was allowed to see the text of the ceasefire agreements. Instead, S/2016/1133 contains separate statements by the Russian and Turkish governments that describe the alleged features of the ceasefire agreements. I quoted those two statements in my HTML webpage that is cited in the previous paragraph.

On 5 January 2017, a news article in [Gulf News](#) explains that there are four written agreements:

1. an agreement by Russia, Turkey, and Assad to send delegations to the peace conference in Astana sometime in January 2017
2. an agreement by 13 groups of insurgents, Russia, and Turkey "to join the political process and unite their efforts with Moscow and Ankara in the war against Al Nusra and Daesh, with no mention of Al Assad's fate." The insurgents agreed to send a delegation to the peace conference in Astana.
3. an agreement by Russia and Turkey to monitor the ceasefire in Syria. This agreement is quoted in S/2016/1133, with a copy at [rbs0.com](#)
4. an agreement by Russia and Turkey about the ceasefire in Syria. This agreement was signed by *neither* the insurgents *nor* Assad's government.

On 30 December 2016, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations presented the ceasefire agreement to the U.N. Security Council for endorsement.

As you know the very important documents were issued in Astana yesterday [29 Dec] after a long effort by Russia and Turkey, the documents establishing cessation of hostilities in Syria and also committing the government of the opposition to enter into direct talks in Astana late January. So, together with the delegation of Turkey here yesterday night we circulated those documents, as official documents of the Security Council, and we prepared a brief resolution, draft of the Security Council to endorse those documents. We circulated the draft last night. Today at the consultations I'm going to present it to Counsel members more formally. And we hope that tomorrow morning [31 Dec] we can go for a vote to adopt it unanimously, for the Security Council also to join in this important process.

Vitaly Churkin, "Remarks to the press by Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, before the Security Council consultations on Syria," [Russian Mission](#), 30 Dec 2016.

In a closed meeting of the Security Council on Friday, 30 December, member nations requested changes in Russia's draft resolution. A vote was scheduled for Saturday, 31 December, at 11:00 EST (16:00 GMT).

Russia's draft Resolution "endorses" their ceasefire agreement. Members of the Security Council, including New Zealand, insisted the endorsement be deleted, because of a lack of clarity in the interpretation of the ceasefire agreement. Instead the Resolution "welcomes and supports the efforts by Russia and Turkey to end violence in Syria and jumpstart a political process". [U.N.](#); [U.S. Mission](#); [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 5 January 2017, the United Nations posted a copy of Resolution 2336 at its website.

My comment is that this Resolution is meaningless. The Resolution did *not* endorse the ceasefire. The calls for delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria will be ignored, just as previous Resolutions on humanitarian aid were ignored. This Resolution is about as meaningful as a Happy Birthday card from your local insurance agent. Russia wanted the United Nations to endorse the magnificent Russian ceasefire in Syria, so the U.N. issued a mechanical, perfunctory congratulation.

### **December 2016: Resumption of Intra-Syrian Negotiations?**

When the HNC walked out of the Geneva negotiations in April 2016, the HNC issued four pre-conditions (i.e., demands) that must be satisfied before the HNC would return to negotiations. The HNC apparently gambled that de Mistura would wave his magic wand and satisfy the four conditions. What actually happened during May-November 2016 is that the situation on the ground in Syria became more worse, and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that *at least* 31,400 people died in Syria during those 7 months with *no* negotiations. But on 10 Dec 2016, Hijab, the head of the HNC, now wants to negotiate without pre-conditions.

In my opinion, what is really needed is for the so-called moderate rebels to surrender to Assad's army, then be integrated into Assad's army to fight the jihadists and terrorists (i.e.,

Nusra and ISIL).

On 8 December 2016, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that "Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Thursday [8 Dec] called on UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura to abandon attempts to obstruct negotiations on Syrian settlement and to fulfill his responsibilities." They quoted Lavrov as "calling on Staffan de Mistura to stop sabotaging political negotiations". My comment is that de Mistura is *neither* "obstructing" *nor* "sabotaging" the Intra-Syrian negotiations — the problem is that the HNC refuses to attend negotiations. Although de Mistura *could* reconstitute the opposition delegation to remove the HNC, that would surely upset Saudi Arabia and many other foreign meddlers in Syria. Removing the HNC would likely also remove many of the insurgent groups from representation in the opposition delegation, which could make the outcome of negotiations more difficult to implement in Syria.

On 20 November and 8 December 2016, de Mistura hinted that the peace negotiations in Geneva should resume soon. But, as explained [above](#), the HNC currently does *not* have a delegation to send to negotiations.

On 9 December 2016, the Syrian Arab News Agency published the following, which I quote in its entirety.

The Syrian Arab Republic is ready for resuming the intra-Syrian dialogue without external interference or preconditions, an official source at the Foreign and Expatriates Ministry said Friday [9 Dec] in response to the statements of UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, in New York.

De Mistura did not set a date for the resumption of this dialogue since it was stopped last May, the source said in a statement to SANA.

In statements to reporters following the UN Security Council closed door-meeting on Thursday [8 Dec], de Mistura called for resuming dialogue in Syria. "The time has come to consider renewing the political talks," he said.

"Foreign Ministry: Syria is ready to resume intra-Syrian dialogue without external interference or preconditions," [SANA](#), 9 Dec 2016.

"Without pre-conditions" probably means without the four pre-conditions of the HNC, when they walked out of the indirect negotiations in April 2016 and never returned. "Without external interference" *may* mean without Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and/or Qatar influencing the opposition delegation.

On 12 December, Riad Hijab (head of the HNC) met with French president Francois Hollande. Reuters reported:

Syria's chief opposition coordinator Riad Hijab said on Monday [12 Dec] that defeat in Aleppo would not weaken the resolve of opponents of President Bashar al-Assad to remove him from power.

"If Assad and his allies think that a military advance in certain quarters of Aleppo will signify that we will make concessions, then (I say) that will not happen. We will not make any concessions," Hijab told reporters after meeting French President Francois

Hollande.

John Irish & Jean-Baptiste Vey, "Syrian opposition says won't make concessions despite Aleppo's fall," [Reuters](#), 14:56 GMT, 12 Dec 2016.

The Associated Press tersely reported:

Hollande said "there cannot be any solution without a cease-fire," after a meeting in Paris Monday with Riad Hijab, head of the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee.

....

Hijab said, "if the regime is making progress in Aleppo districts, that doesn't mean we will offer concessions" on the opposition demand that Assad leave power.

"The Latest: Syria Claims 99 Percent Control Of Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 18:15 Beirut time (16:15 GMT), 12 Dec 2016.

Later, Reuters reported:

Riad Hijab, Syria's chief opposition coordinator, said the rebels' defeat in Aleppo would not weaken the resolve of Assad's opponents, or push them to water down the demand that he quit. "If Assad and his allies think that a military advance in certain quarters of Aleppo will signify that we make concessions, then (I say) that will not happen," he told reporters after meeting French President Francois Hollande.

Laila Bassam & Lisa Barrington, "Syrian general says Aleppo offensive in final stages," [Reuters](#), 02:06 GMT, 13 Dec 2016.

Hollande appears to accept the HNC's pre-condition of a ceasefire, before the HNC will negotiate. Hijab continues his intransigent demand that Assad resign, despite the fact that Assad is slowly winning the Syrian civil war. Losers (e.g., HNC) are *not* in a position to make demands. Moreover, who rules Syria should be determined by *all* of the citizens of Syria in an election, *not* by the HNC.

On 13 December, after a U.N. Security Council meeting, de Mistura spoke to journalists and made a few terse remarks about resuming negotiations:

**QUESTION:** On Aleppo, is this the end for any hope for a peace process in Syria? Do you think that there is a chance in the upcoming couple of months we will have any talks after Aleppo?

**de Mistura:** This is not the end of any peace process, perhaps it should actually be the opposite. Every conflict sadly has a military acceleration but this in particular we all know cannot be ending with the "Battle for Aleppo." We can continue for many years in a form of low-intensity guerrillas and so on. So this is actually the best moment to insist that a peace process needs to be restarted but to do so we need everyone to want to talk about a political process starting with the government and everyone else.

Secondly, we are intending to do all necessary preparatory meetings in order to make sure that when the people decide to come, they will want not to talk about procedures or agendas, but rather about [U.N. Security Council Resolution] 2254, in other words the political process. So we should be looking at this as a tragic opportunity for



accelerating the political process.

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

Most of the remainder of this press conference is quoted [below](#).

On 14 December, Lavrov said that the HNC had "dragged out" the renewal of the Intra-Syrian negotiations. Lavrov declared: "We have long been ready for the United Nations to resume talks. However some whimsical people have been delaying the talks, they formed the so-called High Negotiation Committee. It is one of the groups of Syrian opposition, mainly consisting of emigrants, which does not have any influence on what is going on 'on the ground' in Syria, however they are receiving strong support from the so-called Group of Friends of the Syrian People ... The Committee says that they will not start talks with the government until [President] Bashar Assad leaves." [RIA-Novosti](#) (ellipses in original).

On 19 December 2016, de Mistura announced that the peace negotiations would resume in Geneva on 8 February 2017. [U.N.](#); copy at [U.N. Geneva](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that the new negotiations are scheduled to begin approximately one year from when negotiations first began on 29 January 2016. Nothing was accomplished during the negotiations during February-April, and there have been *no* negotiations in the eight months since April 2016. I expect the negotiations in 2017 will also accomplish nothing, because the parties are pursuing a military solution, and because the insurgents are *not* willing to accept Assad as leader of Syria.

My other comment is that de Mistura likely scheduled his negotiations in Geneva to frustrate the Russian/Turkish plan to sponsor negotiations that was announced three days earlier, on 16 December. By scheduling negotiations 51 days in the future, de Mistura can *hope* the situation on the ground will then be conducive to negotiations.

The 22 December 2016 press briefing by de Mistura is quoted [below](#), where he mentions the 8 Feb 2017 Intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva.

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## No Meeting of the ISSG

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](#).

My essay for [August 2016](#) says "It appears that the ISSG is dead."

On 20 and 22 September, there were meetings of the ISSG in New York City, on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly meeting, for a total of less than 3.5 hours. The ISSG failed to resuscitate the dead new ceasefire agreements that were announced by Lavrov and Kerry on 9 Sep. The ISSG also failed to issue any communiqué from the September 2016 meetings. See my essay for [Sep 2016](#).

The ISSG failed to meet during October, November, and December 2016, despite a worsening crisis inside Syria. My conclusion is that the ISSG is dead.

I have collected the full-text of statements issued at ISSG meetings in my document at [rbs0.com](#) These meaningless statements are now only of historical interest.

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## Continuing Civil War in Syria

### Introduction

Full-text of agreements on a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria is posted at [rbs0.com](#) The first two agreements collapsed before or during September 2016. The third agreement began on 30 Dec 2016, as described below.

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.

My essay for [September 2016](#) chronicles the hundreds of violations of the new ceasefire during 12-19 Sep, the ferocious new assault on Aleppo by Assad and Russia that began on the night of 21 Sep, the complete failure to deliver humanitarian aid in Aleppo during September, the delivery of humanitarian aid to a mere six towns in Syria during September, and the surrender of Moadamiyeh on 1 Sep. Also, I collect reports of bombing of hospitals and medical clinics in Syria.

My essay for [October 2016](#) chronicles a unilateral Russian/Assad ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-22 October that was *not* reciprocated by insurgents.

My essay for [November 2016](#) mentions a one-day ceasefire by Russia and Assad in Aleppo city on 4 November, which was *not* reciprocated by insurgents. I also chronicled Assad's renewed military campaign to liberate Aleppo, beginning on 15 November. The United Nations failed to deliver any food or medicine to Aleppo city since early July 2016, so starvation began in late November. This section of my essay was previously titled "Reports of Violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement". But on 6 October 2016, de Mistura correctly said: "we don't have any more a cessation of hostilities".

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### **1-10 December 2016 Liberation of Aleppo**

On 1 December, de Mistura and Jan Egeland held a press conference after the weekly meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force created by the ISSG. In my opinion, de Mistura said nothing substantive, so I am omitting his remarks here, to avoid wasting space.

We presented figures to the members of this task force, of the International Syria Support Group, that were not good. In the whole month of November, which was a crucial month to preposition supplies to the most affected victims of this war, as winter is coming, we only reached 8 per cent of the people in the besieged areas in November. The one glimmer of positive news was that we reached all of the Four Towns, under the Four-Towns Agreement, including Madaya, Foah and Kafraya, and Zabadani, where needs were enormous.

What do people tell us when they come out after having been able in the middle of the night, of reaching a place like Madaya, is that the desperation has never been at that level, people are exhausted, they are malnourished, they are really without hope. I feel strong sense of responsibility here, we failed these people who are now besieged.

The December plan has not yet been approved by the government. So on the 1st of December if we don't have an approval of the plan to deliver in the month, it means that we lose a big part of the month. And at the end of this month things will slow down because of the bureaucracy and so we will not be so active.

So our message to these countries who can influence all of the parties on the ground including the government was: now is the time that the foreign ministers, their heads of government, start making messages to the parties in Syria, including the government.

We reviewed the vaccination campaign this year. UNICEF and WHO has done a herculean effort to reach 2 million children. Three times we tried, first one, 80 per cent of all of the children were reached, against all odds. Second time, only 25 per cent and now the last round, which is still ongoing, only about 16-17 per cent. It is an indication that the war, the parties, the horrors are preventing our humanitarian work. And those who are suffering the most are the most vulnerable, the children. Epidemic disease will be just around the corner if we cannot do these vaccinations.

Aleppo was discussed in detail. Of the 27,000-30,000 people who have come, who have shifted from being on the opposition-controlled in the besieged east Aleppo and are now in government-controlled areas, or the Kurdish areas, we are reaching them. The UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent are reaching these people, we are scaling up, we are strengthening our presence in west Aleppo as we speak.

Those we are not reaching are the people still in besieged eastern Aleppo. We had hoped to get the message that the Russian Federation and the government of Syria will allow a pause in the fighting for us to access east Aleppo and evacuate the people out, we did not get it. However, the Russian Federation announced that there are four humanitarian corridors and that they want to sit down now in Aleppo with our people there to discuss how we can use the four corridors to evacuate people out, especially we have at least 400 wounded that need immediate medical evacuation. But also to use these corridors to get medical supplies and food in.

Operations are now happening in basements without anesthesia. Imagine having your child rushed to an unsanitary basement and then being operated upon without anesthesia. These are the conditions today in east Aleppo.

We hope to be able to remedy that and we are starting today to discuss the opportunity that the corridors might bring.

Maybe final concern: protection. There are no more vulnerable people probably on earth than the civilian population in Aleppo and they are extremely vulnerable for possible actions by the armed opposition groups as they try to leave and by all of the groups that will meet them as they leave. They are many concerns, our appeal was to

all members of the task force: hold the men with arms and power back, these people need protection. Thank you.

....

The number of people who have fled, according to what has been registered and these are figures from yesterday, some 18,000 we have registered in the government-controlled areas, who came from east Aleppo; it could be higher today, plus some 8,500 in the Kurdish-controlled Sheikh Maqsood area. So that would make 27,000 or so all together. It could be slightly higher.

On the corridors, I mean, really, a humanitarian corridor can work if all the armed actors respect it. If now the Russians say these are four corridors we will make sure that these corridors the Russian government side will respect them as being safe, we now feel confident that the armed opposition groups will do the same. Earlier we have not been able to do what, we had hoped for east Aleppo and we had issues on both sides, now I think it's dawned upon all sides the urgency of the situation. I am hopeful that we can get things done here but we are still working for a pause in the fighting that is our primary objective.

Jan Egeland, "Transcript of joint Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura And UN Senior Adviser, Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 1 Dec 2016.

Egeland implored "foreign ministers, their heads of government" to force Assad and the insurgents to allow delivery of humanitarian aid. My comment is that this is a futile call, similar to what Ban Ki-moon and de Mistura have been saying for *many* months. The fact is that the foreign meddlers in Syria are comfortable, well-fed, safe, and *not* sincerely concerned about the plight of the Syrian people. In my opinion, the continued shipment by foreign meddlers of weapons and ammunition to insurgents in Syria is like pouring gasoline on a fire.

On 1 December 2016, — as noted by de Mistura and Egeland in their press conference — approximately 30,000 civilians had fled from eastern Aleppo city, beginning around 26 November. [Reuters](#). On 1 December, airstrikes on Aleppo city were prevented by "thick cloud cover and rain", but Assad's artillery continued to shell insurgents. [Reuters](#).

On 1 December, all of the insurgents in Aleppo city formed a unified command, called the "Aleppo Army". Abu Abdelrahman Nour, commander of the Jabha Shamiya rebel group, was appointed leader of the Aleppo Army. [Reuters](#); [Middle East Eye](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On Friday, 2 December, at the Daily Press Briefing at United Nations headquarters in New York City, the spokesman for the Secretary General said:

Turning to Syria, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in Aleppo City, where an estimated 31,500 people are displaced from areas in eastern Aleppo retaken by the Government of Syria. This includes around 26,500 people displaced to Government-held areas or Sheikh Maqsood, as well as some 5,000 people who are displaced within eastern Aleppo.

The UN and partners are scaling up their humanitarian response in Aleppo and

responding to the needs of the newly displaced in all areas they can access with shelter, food, and health assistance. Today, three UN inter-agency teams are being dispatched to assess the needs of the newly displaced who have arrived from eastern Aleppo.

The protection situation for civilians remains precarious. Reports have emerged of the detention of people crossing into Government-held areas, while 45 civilians were reportedly killed by shelling on 30 November as they attempted to cross into west Aleppo.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 2 Dec 2016.

On 2 December 2016, approximately 2000 insurgents and their families departed from al-Tal, a town 10 km north of Damascus, in yet another surrender in Syria. [Reuters](#).

On 3 December, Assad's army pushed about 1 km deeper into eastern Aleppo city. [Associated Press](#).

On 3 December, Nour, commander of the Aleppo Army that was formed on 1 December, was "seriously wounded". [Reuters](#).

On 4 December, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Aleppo city's old cemetery was filled in 2015, and the new cemetery was filled last week. Corpses now rot on city streets, or are buried in backyards.

On 4 December, [Reuters](#) reported: "Western and regional states backing the rebellion against President Bashar al-Assad appear unwilling or unable to do anything to prevent a major defeat for those fighting to topple the Syrian leader.... Rebel groups in Aleppo [e.g., Zakaria Malahifji of the Fastaqim group] have told the United States they will not leave their shrinking enclave".

On 4 December, Russian and Assad's airstrikes in Idlib province killed at least 73 people, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. [Reuters](#).

On Monday, 5 December, at the Daily Press Briefing at United Nations headquarters in New York City, the spokesman for the Secretary General said:

Also on the humanitarian front, just an update on our operations in Syria; on Friday [2 Dec], the UN received a Note Verbale from the Government of Syria indicating that it has approved the December convoy plan for deliveries to hard-to-reach and besieged areas, including eastern Aleppo. This will enable the UN to initiate convoy preparations in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), including administrative procedures with the authorities.

On 2 December, the UN conducted two inter-agency missions to assess the humanitarian situation in the cotton factory shelter in Jibreen and Hanano in east Aleppo. Hanano is an area of eastern Aleppo which has been retaken recently by the Government forces.

Neither the UN nor the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have had access to the part of eastern

Aleppo under continued control by armed opposition groups. The UN and Syrian Arab Red Crescent have only access to Government of Syria controlled areas. The UN is continuing negotiations to get access to people in need in eastern Aleppo in areas still under control of armed groups.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 5 Dec 2016.

On 5 December, Agence France-Presse reported that the insurgents continued to refuse to leave eastern Aleppo city. AFP said: "Yasser al-Youssef of the Nureddine al-Zinki rebel group said any proposals 'for the exit of rebel groups would be unacceptable. It is for the Russians to leave Aleppo, and for the sectarian militias to leave Aleppo and Syria and stop interfering in the internal affairs of Syrians,' he told AFP." [Al-Arabiya](#).

On the night of 5 December 2016, the most recent document at the English-language homepage of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is dated 9 November 2016. However, the SOHR has been posting English-language [reports](#).

On 5 December, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the deaths of 288 civilians in Idlib province from 22 October 2016 until 5 December 2016. [SOHR](#).

On Tuesday, 6 December, at the Daily Press Briefing at United Nations headquarters in New York City, the spokesman for the Secretary General said:

I was asked yesterday about the Board of Inquiry looking into the attack on a humanitarian convoy in Urum al-Kubra in Syria [on 19 September]. I can inform you that the Government finally approved some members of the Board of Inquiry to visit Damascus. Some Board members travelled there over the weekend to meet with Government officials. The Government also approved them to visit Aleppo to meet with other officials, but not to visit the site of the attack on the aid convoy. The Board of Inquiry is working on a visit to Aleppo. The Board is expected to submit its report later this month.

Also on Syria, the United Nations is extremely concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the besieged neighbourhood of Al Waer in Homs as a result of sporadic fighting since mid-November. Dozens of people have reportedly been killed and a health centre was damaged. Some 50,000 people remain besieged in Al Waer. Recently, administrative and security procedures on the delivery of aid have also increased, leading to a reported deterioration of conditions on the ground. Al Waer was last reached with humanitarian assistance through inter-agency convoys on 26 October. The UN stands ready to provide immediate assistance through inter-agency convoys to people in need, in line with the December plan.

The UN is also very concerned about the safety and security of civilians in the four besieged towns of Madaya and Zabadani in rural Damascus and Foah and Kafraya in Idlib Governorate. Credible reports indicated the death of four people and injury of twenty in Madaya following attacks on the town. There have also been reports of people killed and injured in Foah and Kafraya, as well reports that the only hospital in Foah is becoming inoperable as a result of hundreds of rockets shelled at both locations.

The latest figures are that an estimated 31,500 people from east Aleppo remain displaced within the entire city of Aleppo over the past six days. The UN and partners continue to respond to the needs of the newly displaced in all areas they can access and are increasing protection services in the shelter facilities currently being used. We are also increasing emergency preparedness in the event of further displacement, with food and current supplies available in west Aleppo, with more supplies that could be brought in quickly from Damascus, Homs, and Tartous.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 6 Dec 2016.

On 6 December, Assad's army pushed deeper into eastern Aleppo city and journalists began to report that Assad was close to victory in Aleppo. Reuters reported that Assad captured the neighborhoods of al-Shaar, Marja, and Karm al-Qaterji. The Associated Press reported that Assad now controlled 73% of eastern Aleppo city, while Reuters said Assad controlled 2/3 of eastern Aleppo city. A "local media activist" told the Associated Press that "Morale has hit rock bottom." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 7 December at 10:00 GMT, the Associated Press reports that Assad has captured *all* of the historic old city in eastern Aleppo. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AP). The [New York Times](#) reported: "A rebel fighter with the Nour al-Din al-Zenki group, reached in a hiding place near the Old City, said that several neighborhoods had fallen and that defeat appeared inevitable. 'Aleppo has fallen,' he said. 'If there are no U.N. initiatives, I expect the regime will exterminate us all.' "

Later on 7 December, the insurgents in Aleppo proposed a 5-day ceasefire, with evacuation of approximately 500 wounded from eastern Aleppo city. But the insurgents continued to refuse to leave eastern Aleppo city. Russia and Assad insist that the insurgents agree to leave, before any ceasefire occurs. [Reuters](#).

I remind the reader that Russia and Assad had unilateral ceasefires in Aleppo on 20-22 October and again on 4 November, but the insurgents refused to allow evacuations of wounded.

On the night of 7 December, 118 patients were evacuated by the Syrian Red Crescent from the Dar Al-Safaa hospital in eastern Aleppo city, along with 30 other civilians. The thirty include 6 orphaned children who were wandering in the streets. [ICRC](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 8 December, Jan Egeland spoke to journalists after the weekly meeting of the humanitarian aid task force in Geneva.

Thanks really for waiting. We just finished a difficult humanitarian taskforce meeting. Why is it difficult, because the member states that are supposed to help us get access to civilians in the crossfire are poles apart in how they regard what is happening in Syria. We are not having a united humanitarian diplomacy on the parties and we see that in a diminishing access on the ground.

The December plan for access cross front line was approved finally by the government



of Syria and we had 800,000 of the 930,000 people we asked to get access to, were granted permission for.

For the first time, east Aleppo is on the list of places that were granted approval to, of course it was not approved in the November plan when we had a greater potential of crossing a stable frontline, today that is not the case in east Aleppo.

We are as concerned for the wellbeing of the civilians in al-Waer and in the Four Towns: Madaya, Zabadani, Foah and Kefraya, now perhaps, even as in parts of Aleppo. Therefore the shadow of the dramatic situation in Aleppo but the situation there is terrible as well. There is more fighting, we visited al-Waer with a team just yesterday, and they reported of very bad conditions; and the shelling on the Four Towns by Hezbollah on Madaya and Zabadani, and the armed opposition groups on Foah and Kefraya has become intense and it is related to Idlib.

We tried to get access to east Aleppo every single day since it was besieged on the 7th of July. We had three major plans and initiatives, all of them have failed, and most recently our four-point plan for assistance in and evacuations out.

I have never been in my many many years of humanitarian negotiations in as difficult negotiations and as frustrating talks that produced nothing in spite of thousands of contacts with all of the parties and it is with bitterness and frustration that we have to report that we have not been able even to evacuate the wounded.

Why is that? Well because we need the government of Syria, military and political. We need the Russian Federation, we need the various constellation of the armed opposition groups, we need the opposition health directorate and others, to all agree on: where, how, under what conditions, what guarantees, for what protection standards and logistics, they all need to agree on all of these things. If only one disagrees, the whole thing falls.

We thought we would be able to do evacuations at the end of this week, I personally felt confident that this would be happening actually as we speak. The most recent of these talks really broke down when a field hospital of the Russian military in west Aleppo was hit on the 6th of December, then that broke down, we are not giving up, we even got reports that we immediately conveyed today during the meeting of several hundred children, sick and wounded, that need to get out and we have now medical heroic doctors in east Aleppo who will do everything to get them out.

Now the one possibility would be to get these humanitarian corridors become corridors, but as we said to Russia and to all of the armed actors there, a humanitarian corridor is only a humanitarian corridor if there is ceasefire in and around the corridor, there has to be a pause, at the moment, those who tried to go through the crossing points, tried to escape, are caught in cross-fire, they are caught in shelling, and they risk being hit by snipers, is very hard to see and know from where the fire comes. It is a very intense battle scene.

Frontlines have changed, every single day of late, which means that the civilian

population has dramatically shifted in its location, some have come out, very many we think are now cramped together, in the remaining area, which may be only 25% of what it was in November.

Many have wanted to go to Idlib, we were ready to evacuate also to Idlib, which is opposition held, but the local council in Idlib has informed us that they cannot receive anymore, it is so full of internally displaced in Idlib and the fighting and the attacks are also so bad there.

We continue having contacts with armed opposition groups, they've come with proposals for pause and proposals for evacuations, those have been transmitted to the Syrian government and to the Russian Federation. We need all sides to agree, if we are to help the population.

Maybe final point, in addition to us renewing our call for a pause, we need a pause for the sake of the civilian population of east Aleppo, the remaining ones, so that they can come out without being attacked. Secondly, we need to have a better protection system for those who come out. There are reports that people, their ID cards taken, that some are arrested, of mal-treatment. This is not confirmed, but how can we confirm one or the other when we do not have full access in this area? The UN staff do not have full access in government controlled areas, of west Aleppo, including the areas that have shifted control, some say Aleppo is falling, some say Aleppo is liberated. We see that front lines are shifting and people are now accessible but then we need access. These are the things we have asked for from the various sides.

Finally, winter is now in Aleppo, it is freezing cold at night. We do have food for hundreds of thousands of people through this winter, we can provide water and emergency relief and we are, with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and other partners. We are very nervous of our ability to provide winter shelter with all of these hundreds of thousands of people who are in a totally war-ravaged area.

....

The US-Russia, let's hope they will produce something, because we've only had bad news for a long time, that could be a glimmer of hope if the Co-Chairs again become Co-Chairs of these efforts and the whole point of having Co-Chairs is that they are pulling together, and they haven't been for quite some time, so let us hope that this is the beginning of something better.

Jan Egeland, "Note to Correspondents: Transcript of press encounter by UN Senior Adviser, Jan Egeland," [U.N.](#), 8 Dec 2016.

My comments: Egeland says the USA and Russia "are poles apart" and *not* "pulling together". Well, one would expect that when Russia is engaged in committing war crimes and supporting Assad the Barrel Bomber, while the USA supports Freedom and Democracy. *<sarcastic smirk>* Egeland notes that Russia refuses to allow a ceasefire. Russia does not want a ceasefire, because the insurgents will regroup during a ceasefire. I am sorry to hear that Egeland is frustrated dealing with barbaric insurgents, Assad and Russia.

On 8 December, RIA-Novosti reported that Russia announced that Assad's army would cease fire in Aleppo city:

The Syrian army suspended combat operations in Aleppo on Thursday [8 Dec], Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"Combat operations by the Syrian army in east Aleppo have been suspended because the largest operation of evacuation of civilians from east Aleppo is being carried out. A column of about 8 thousand people, it's a tremendous operation," Lavrov said.

The Russian foreign minister said that Western states have not proposed any concrete steps to solve the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo.

"Syrian Army Suspends Combat Operations in Aleppo — Lavrov," [RIA-Novosti](#), 17:48 GMT, 8 Dec 2016.

On 8 December, Reuters reported that Russia announced that Assad's army had ceased fire in Aleppo city:

Russia's RIA news agency quoted Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as saying the Syrian army, which has captured territory including Aleppo's historic Old City in recent days, had halted military activity to let civilians leave rebel-held territory.

However, Reuters reporters in a government-held part of the city said bombardment could still be heard after his remarks were published. Washington said it had no confirmation that the army had ceased fire.

Laila Bassam & John Davison, "Syrian army's Aleppo advance slows, but victory in sight," [Reuters](#), 21:06 GMT, 8 Dec 2016.

On 8 December, the Associated Press reported on the Russian announcement of a unilateral ceasefire by Assad in Aleppo:

Russia said the Syrian army was suspending combat operations in Aleppo late Thursday [8 Dec] to allow for the evacuation of civilians from besieged rebel-held neighborhoods, but residents and fighters reported no let-up in the bombing and shelling campaign on the opposition's ever-shrinking enclave.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, speaking in Germany after talks with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, said military experts and diplomats would meet Saturday [10 Dec] in Geneva to work out details of the rebels' exit from Aleppo's eastern neighborhoods, along with civilians who were willing to leave the city.

Lavrov said the Syrian army suspended combat action late Thursday to allow some 8,000 civilians to leave the city in a convoy spreading across a five-kilometer (three-mile) route. However, opposition activists said there was no halt to the government offensive.

"Battles are intense," said a message from a rebel operation room shared with The Associated Press. Other residents reported warplanes firing from machine guns at rebel positions and artillery shells falling in the remaining rebel-controlled districts.

Sarah El Deeb & Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia Says Aleppo Combat Suspended, Residents

Say No Let-Up," [Associated Press](#), 21:38 GMT, 8 Dec 2016.

At 23:00 GMT on 8 December, the English-language website of the Syrian Arab News Agency does *not* mention any ceasefire in Aleppo, but earlier SANA spewed the following propaganda:

The Syrian Army continues the operations to evacuate the citizens from the armed terrorists-controlled eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo in coincidence with the quick advance it achieved in regaining control and restoring security and stability to those neighborhoods.

The army also is doing its best to allocate safe corridors to the locals and transport them to makeshift centers set by Aleppo governorate in Jibrin and Hanano Housings neighborhoods.

A number of citizens, who managed to escape the besieged neighborhoods, expressed pleasure and joy to reach the safe areas controlled by the Syrian army where all their needs have been provided.

"Coinciding with its achievements in Aleppo Eastern neighborhoods, the Syrian Army continues operations of evacuation of citizens and transporting them to safe areas," [SANA](#), 8 Dec 2016.

My comments: One needs to ask *why* Russia is negotiating with the USA about insurgents in Aleppo. The U.S. Government is *not* involved in the city of Aleppo, and the U.S. now has essentially *no* influence with the insurgents in Syria. I suggest that Russia wants to *appear* committed to peace, especially after the blistering criticism by Egeland and de Mistura, and journalists' reports of the humanitarian disaster in Aleppo city. And Kerry is willing to negotiate with Russia, because Kerry wants to appear relevant in the last two months of Obama's presidency. Further, when the negotiations fail, Russia can blame the U.S. for failing to convince the insurgents to accept the Russian/American agreement.

Note that Russia announced that Assad's army would observe a ceasefire, but the Associated Press reported that there was *no* ceasefire — meaning the Russian announcement was false. At 23:30 GMT on 8 Dec, there was *no* mention of a ceasefire at the English-language website of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), the propaganda outlet for Assad's government. *If* Assad had really ordered a ceasefire for humanitarian purposes, I would expect SANA to be boasting about the humanitarian ceasefire. Further, I find it suspicious that Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, is announcing what Assad's army is doing. Assad's army is quite capable of speaking for itself, through SANA.

If there are negotiations about Aleppo, then the negotiations *should* be between Assad's government and the insurgents in Aleppo. But Assad wants to exterminate those insurgents and permanently solve the Aleppo problem. And the insurgents are probably unwilling to speak directly to a representative of Assad's government — just as the HNC refused to meet face-to-face with Assad's delegation in Geneva during 2016.

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On 9 December, the nonexistent ceasefire (i.e., airstrikes and artillery shelling) by Assad continued, as Russia now claimed that 8461 people had fled from eastern Aleppo in the past

24 hours with the help of the glorious Russian military. RIA-Novosti reported:

A total of 8,461 city residents have left the besieged city, the Russian Defense Ministry said.

"In the past 24 hours alone, from areas in Aleppo that are still under the control of militants, with the assistance of the Russian center of reconciliation, 8,461 city residents left, including 2,934 children," the center said in a Friday [9 Dec] statement released by the ministry.

According to the statement, over a dozen militants who had been operating in Aleppo received amnesty after laying down arms.

"Fourteen militants, laying down arms, walked out to the western part of the city towards Syrian troops. In accordance with the decision of the Syrian president all of them were granted amnesty," the Russian center for Syrian reconciliation said.

"Almost 8,500 Citizens Leave Militant-Held Areas of Aleppo Thanks to Russian Help," [RIA-Novosti](#), 05:24 GMT, 9 Dec 2016.

At 14:32 GMT on 9 December, Reuters reported:

The Syrian army pressed an offensive in Aleppo on Friday [9 Dec] with ground fighting and air strikes in an operation to retake all of the city's besieged rebel-held east that would bring victory in the civil war closer for President Bashar al-Assad.

"The advance is going according to plan and is sometimes faster than expected," a Syrian military source told Reuters, adding that the Syrian army and its allies had recaptured 32 of east Aleppo's 40 neighbourhoods, about 85 percent of the area.

Reuters witnesses, rebels and a monitor on Friday confirmed the military thrust. There were no reports the Syrian army had made significant gains.

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Thursday that the Syrian army had halted military activity to let civilians leave rebel-held areas, RIA news agency reported.

But there was no sign on the ground that fighting had slowed and after Lavrov's announcement, the army and its allies tried to advance on two fronts, a Turkey-based official with the Jabha Shamiya rebel group told Reuters.

"Helicopters, warplanes and rocket bombardment like every day. Nothing has changed," the official said, describing the situation as of 9:30 a.m. local time. The official added that despite the bombardment, "the guys are steadfast".

Russia's air force and Iran-backed Shi'ite militias are also fighting in Aleppo on the government side. Rebel leaders have given no sign they are about to withdraw as the civilian population is squeezed into an ever-decreasing area.

The Russian military said on Friday it had helped more than 8,000 Syrian citizens flee parts of eastern Aleppo still controlled by rebels in the last 24 hours, including almost

3,000 children. This could not be independently verified.

....

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict, said government rocket attacks took place overnight into Friday morning on frontline areas of east Aleppo.

"There are aerial raids on the city's neighbourhoods with highly explosive incendiary bombs, barrel bombs and artillery shelling," a fighter with the Nour al-Din al-Zinki rebel group on an eastern Aleppo frontline told Reuters. ....

Zakaria Malahifji, head of the political office of the Aleppo-based Fastaqim rebel group, speaking from Turkey told Reuters: "Lavrov spoke yesterday and his words were a lie. The bombardment did not stop at all through the night."

During a tour of Old Aleppo on Friday, which the Syrian army took control of this week, Reuters journalists counted the sound of nine air strikes in about half an hour. Laila Bassam & Lisa Barrington, "Syrian government forces press attack in east Aleppo," [Reuters](#), 14:32 GMT, 9 Dec 2016.

At 15:19 GMT on 9 December, Zeina Karam, the Beirut bureau chief for the Associated Press, wrote:

Hundreds of Syrian civilians streamed out on foot from the eastern part of the city of Aleppo on Friday [9 Dec] in the wake of the relentless campaign by government troops and their allies to drive rebels from their rapidly crumbling enclave.

....

The exodus came a day after Russia announced that the Syrian army was suspending combat operations to allow for the evacuation of civilians from besieged rebel-held districts, but residents and medics inside eastern Aleppo said there was no letup in the bombardment.

"Bombing is truly round the clock," said Ziad Mohammed, a lawyer and father of three, still living in eastern Aleppo's al-Mashhad neighborhood. "There are no hospitals, the remnants of the dead fill the streets and the wounded have to fend for themselves."

Mohammad, an outspoken government opponent, said he and many of those remaining were bracing themselves for certain death. "If staying here means dying here, then standing by my principles will have been enough," he said.

Earlier this week, efforts to evacuate hundreds of wounded people faltered, despite pleas from medical officials. A hospital administrator in eastern Aleppo said medics have submitted lists of patients who need to be evacuated from hospitals.

"There hasn't been a response yet, and the shelling continues," he said, speaking on

condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Rebel defenses have collapsed in the face of a wide-ranging government offensive preceded by an intensive aerial campaign. More than three-quarters of the rebel sector has now fallen, including the symbolically important ancient Aleppo district.

Zeina Karam, "Syrian Civilians Leave Crumbling Rebel Enclave In Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 15:19 GMT, 9 Dec 2016.

On Friday, 9 December, the Russian Ministry of Defence announced that Assad now controlled 93% of eastern Aleppo city. [RIA-Novosti](#); [SANA](#).

On Saturday, 10 December, airstrikes and artillery continued to pound eastern Aleppo city, but Assad's army did *not* advance. [Reuters](#).

### **ISIL recaptures Palmyra**

Assad had liberated Palmyra on 27 March 2016. On 8 December, ISIL began a surprise assault on Palmyra. On 10 December, ISIL recaptured most of Palmyra. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 11 December, Assad's army fled from Palmyra. The [Washington Post](#) said: "Victory in the symbolically significant city [of Palmyra] would mark a startling reversal of the militant group's fortunes after months of setbacks and suggests that the Islamic State remains a resilient force. .... The assault on Palmyra also serves as a reminder that the Syrian army, despite substantial gains against rebel forces in recent weeks, is thinly spread, suffering from shortages of manpower and weary after more than five years of war."

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### **11-12 December 2016 Liberation of Aleppo**

At 17:58 GMT on 11 December, Reuters reported that insurgents in Aleppo said Russia and the USA had reached an agreement in Geneva:

The rebel groups in Aleppo have yet to respond to the proposal, [three opposition officials with Aleppo rebel groups] said. The proposal promised rebel fighters a "secure" and "honourable" withdrawal from the city, they said.

If rebels accept the proposal, it would restore Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's full control over rebel-held areas of eastern Aleppo, his biggest victory yet in the civil war that has shattered his country.

....

A draft of the proposal sent to Reuters from two of the rebel officials said the Syrian government and its allies would give a public guarantee that fighters and civilians leaving the city would not be detained or harmed, and guarantee the safety of civilians who wish to remain in the city.

It would require fighters from the jihadist group formerly known as Nusra Front to head to the northwestern province of Idlib. But it would allow fighters from other groups to go to other destinations including areas near the Turkish border to the northeast of Aleppo, which are held by groups fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army.

Implementation would be carried out over a 48-hour period, and U.N. oversight would be sought. Fighters would be allowed to take their light weapons with them, but must leave heavy weapons behind, the proposal said.

Tom Perry & Suleiman al-Khalidi, "Exclusive: U.S. and Russia propose safe exit for Aleppo rebels — opposition officials," [Reuters](#) 17:58 GMT, 11 Dec 2016.

But RIA-Novosti reported the deputy Russian foreign minister denied that Russia and the USA had reached an agreement in Geneva.

Russia and the United States have not agreed on letting Syrian militants leave the besieged areas of East Aleppo, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said Sunday [11 Dec].

Earlier in the day, media reports said the United States and Russia had agreed to open up evacuation routes for civilians and lightly-armed militants in eastern Aleppo. Reports cited a Syrian opposition official who stated the agreement would be implemented within two days, but that the rebels had not yet accepted the proposal.

"What is reported by western agencies is not necessarily true... Issues of militants leaving are the subject of separate agreements with the United States, this agreement has not yet been reached mainly due to the fact that the United States insists on unacceptable parameters in terms of a ceasefire which would, in fact, provide full freedom of movement to those who the Syrian forces are currently fighting," Ryabkov told RIA Novosti.

....

"No joint proposal on any agreements to be put on the table and to be considered by the opposition exists. It is not clear what kind of sources are used by those who are heating up the media in this way," the deputy minister said, stressing that Russian forces in Syria are doing everything possible to allow safe passage out of Aleppo to all those seeking to leave the city.

Ryabkov also said that Saturday's Russia-US expert level meeting on Syria in Geneva has not yielded any agreements and progress is slow.

"There is some progress, but there are no agreements... We are still facing the situation where the United States are trying to use this channel to influence the situation on the ground for its own benefit," Ryabkov told RIA Novosti.

"Russia, US Not Yet Agreed on Aleppo Militant Withdrawal — Deputy FM," [RIA-Novosti](#), 18:18 GMT, 11 Dec 2016. [Three dot ellipses in original.]



On 12 December, the the Spokesperson for the U.N. Secretary-General issued a statement, which I quote in its entirety:

The Secretary-General is alarmed over reports of atrocities against a large number of civilians, including women and children, in recent hours in Aleppo. While stressing that the United Nations is not able to independently verify these reports, the Secretary-General is conveying his grave concern to the relevant parties. He has instructed his Special Envoy for Syria to follow up urgently with the parties concerned.

The United Nations underlines the obligation of all parties on the ground to protect civilians and abide by international humanitarian and human rights law. This is particularly the responsibility of the Syrian Government and its allies.

"Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Aleppo, Syria," [U.N.](#), 12 Dec 2016.

On 12 December, the Associated Press reported more gains by Assad:

The Syrian military said on Monday [12 Dec] it has gained control of 98 percent of eastern Aleppo, previously a rebel-held enclave, reducing the rebel territory to a small sliver packed with civilians and fighters squeezed under fire.

A Syrian rebel spokesman said opposition fighters are retreating in eastern Aleppo under intense government fire that is putting thousands of civilians at risk, calling the collapse "terrifying."

The military statement came hours after Syrian forces — aided by Shiite militias from Lebanon, Iraq and Iran — took Sheik Saeed, one of the largest neighborhoods in the southern part of the rebel territory, tightening the noose on the enclave.

....

Most of the remaining civilians have now gathered in two or three neighborhoods, packing thousands in a small space and threatening large casualty tolls in any new attack, [an anonymous insurgent in Aleppo] said.

Sarah El Deeb, "Syrian Troops Say They Control 98 Percent Of Eastern Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 12:59 GMT, 12 Dec 2016.

In the afternoon of 12 December, Reuters reported:

The Syrian army and its allies are in the "final stages" of recapturing Aleppo after a sudden advance that has pushed rebels to the brink of collapse in an ever-shrinking enclave, a Syrian general said on Monday [12 Dec].

A Reuters journalist in the government-held zone said the bombardment of rebel areas of the city had continued non-stop overnight, and a civilian trapped there described the situation as resembling "Doomsday".

....

Rebels withdrew from all districts on the east side of the Aleppo river after losing Sheikh Saeed in the south of their pocket in overnight fighting, the Syrian Observatory

for Human Rights said. It meant their rapidly diminishing enclave had halved in only a few hours and Observatory director Rami Abdulrahman described the battle for Aleppo as having reached its end.

....

Rebel groups in Aleppo received a U.S.-Russian proposal on Sunday [11 Dec] for a withdrawal of fighters and civilians from the city's opposition areas, but Moscow said no agreement had been reached yet in talks in Geneva to end the crisis peacefully.

[An official from Jabha Shamiya] blamed Russia for the lack of progress in talks, saying it had no incentive to compromise while Assad was gaining ground. "The Russians are being evasive. They are looking at the military situation. Now they are advancing," he said.

Laila Bassam & Lisa Barrington, "Syrian general says Aleppo offensive in final stages," [Reuters](#), 16:06 GMT, 12 Dec 2016.

At night on 12 December, the Associated Press reported:

Syrian rebels retreated from former strongholds in eastern Aleppo in a "terrifying" collapse Monday [12 Dec], holding onto a small sliver of territory packed with fighters and thousands of civilians as government troops pressed on with their rapid advance.

The Syrian military said it had gained control of 99 percent of the former opposition enclave in eastern Aleppo, signaling an impending end to the rebels' four-year hold over parts of the city as the final hours of battle played out.

....

Russia, a key ally of Assad, refused an American proposal for a temporary halt to the fighting to allow the safe departure of those remaining in rebel-held areas, said a U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly. The proposal came during weekend talks in Geneva between U.S. and Russian experts that had been billed as an 11th-hour attempt to ease Aleppo's endgame.

Osama Abo Zayd, a legal adviser to the Free Syrian Army rebel coalition, said some fighters had agreed to evacuate but that the Russians had demanded that all militants surrender, something he said was impossible.

....

A rebel fighter, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals, said most of the remaining civilians were massed in two or three neighborhoods, raising the specter of mass casualties if they are targeted by airstrikes or artillery. He said the collapse of the Sheik Saeed neighborhood meant the loss of the rebel enclave's last mill and grain warehouse.

Sarah El Deeb & Zeina Karam, "Syria Rebels Retreat In Aleppo In 'Terrifying' Collapse," [Associated Press](#), 20:55 GMT, 12 Dec 2016.

### 13 December 2016: remarks by de Mistura

After the U.N. Security Council meeting on 13 December, de Mistura spoke to journalists: Good afternoon, you had the opportunity of talking to the ambassador of the Russian Federation and I would like to give you a very short summary because this time it was the Secretary-General himself who spoke to the Security Council. I will make some additional or complementary points.

The first one is the situation in eastern Aleppo is indeed very concerning, we don't need to underestimate that the area which is still under the control of the armed groups is estimated probably to very few kilometres, four or five kilometres maximum but even less than that. The number of civilians is a major reason of concern for us and the figures are floating because none of us is inside but there has been an estimation of up to 50,000 civilians and they are the ones we are particularly concerned about. As for the number of fighters, well there is an estimation that there are still 1,500 fighters of which probably 30 percent of them is Nusra. All these are figures that you have to take very cautiously because we are not inside the area. You heard the SG Ban Ki-moon who has been underlying the importance of everyone, particularly the government — since they are the ones who are gaining terrain and advancing — to ensure the respect of humanitarian laws and the respect of civilians. There have been as you know reports about people found dead in the streets and on the squares. We do not have evidence, we have to admit that, of who was the one who did it? [i.e. we do not know who caused the deaths of these people.] But the fact is that there have been bodies in the streets and in the squares including civilians like women and children.

What has the UN done? First of all, we are ready, we have beefed up our people and our team and we have beefed up our capacity for responding. But I have to say one thing: we don't have access to the actual locations, we have been asking for that and we have not received it. We would like to be present when the evacuation of the civilians takes place and we would like to be present when the Armed Opposition is withdrawing. In that context there are two groups and two different operations which have been planned. We were informed at the Security Council by the Russian ambassador that indeed they have reached an agreement — and I'm quoting the Russian ambassador as we need to verify that on the ground — with the armed opposition, and that it is imminent if not already taking place, some beginning the withdrawal of the armed opposition. It is not clear to me yet whether they will be allowed to withdraw with their light weapons — which was one of the issues that have been discussed — or without their weapons. We also understand that they are being helped to withdraw towards Idlib not to other locations. But we are still insisting that also civilians who may want to go with them or go elsewhere, people like volunteers, should have been allowed to do so, apart from the massive civilian movement that is expected to take place.

Bottom line from us is that we need access. When there are rumours or announcements that things have gone badly, if we were there, we would have been able to witness, like

the ICRC, what has been happening or not, plus to reassure the people, when this is happening, that we are there with them. So far, that has not been the case.

Next point, there was a clear reference to something else that has happened recently: Palmyra. And there was a major concern expressed by everyone, that in fact the takeover of Palmyra while we are all focusing on Aleppo, and by ISIS on top of it, has been a major blow and needs to be taken into account in what is the fight against terrorism.

Last point, the bottom line is that we have gone into a very low point, we were all hoping that Aleppo will not end up in ruins and I want to show you a picture that you have not seen [he holds a picture]: this is Aleppo today or perhaps a few days ago. This is a satellite picture taken by the UNITAR. All you see in red is totally destroyed, and what you see in yellow is substantially destroyed and the rest, not yet. You can see the level of destruction, you can understand why we are insisting and asking that the so-called "Battle for Aleppo" ends as quickly as possible and hopefully the last moments of it will be without the suffering we are seeing so far, which means evacuation of the civilians, welcome by the UN as well, voluntary withdrawal of the fighting groups — which seems to be taking place, and then humanitarian aid. If that takes place we would have avoided what I have been saying could have been happening by Christmas: the total destruction, the whole map becoming red and that would be something that we would never forgive ourselves for.

**QUESTION.** Ambassador Churkin said that people are being allowed, the fighters are being allowed to leave, many of them going towards Idlib. Are you concerned now that Idlib will be the next target of the military offense of the Syrian Government?

**SdeM.** Yes, I am. It looks like a possibility in view of the substantial number of people, even from other locations, which have been going there, but at this moment our focus is on Aleppo because this is where there still is a large population enduring such a tragedy.

**QUESTION.** Are you working on strategy to prevent Idlib from becoming the next Aleppo?

**SdeM.** We are, we are working on that.

"Transcript of stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura,"  
[U.N. Geneva](#), 13 Dec 2016. [Brackets in original] [One spelling error corrected and two dashes added by Standler.]  
[Copy](#) at U.N. in New York City.

### 13-22 December 2016 Insurgents Withdraw From Aleppo City

For months the insurgents in Aleppo have boasted that they would *never* withdraw, instead they would die fighting in Aleppo. But on the afternoon of 13 December, the insurgents

accepted an agreement with Russia that will allow the insurgents to depart from eastern Aleppo. The Associated Press reported:

**[18:50 Beirut time (16:50 GMT)]** Syrian rebels say an agreement has been reached with Russia for a cease-fire in Aleppo to evacuate remaining civilians and rebels from besieged districts.

Osama Abu Zayd, a legal adviser for an umbrella group of rebel factions known as the Free Syrian Army, says the cease-fire went into effect Tuesday [13 Dec] evening. He says the first batch will begin evacuating later Tuesday.

Yasser al-Youssef, a spokesman for the Nour el-Din el-Zinki rebel group, confirmed the cease-fire and says the goal is to evacuate civilians and rebels from besieged areas.

**[21:10 Beirut time (19:10 GMT)]** Russia's U.N. ambassador says all military action in eastern Aleppo has ended and the Syrian government has re-established control over the former rebel-held area.

Vitaly Churkin spoke Tuesday near the end of an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council, saying "according to the latest information that we received in the last hour, military actions in eastern Aleppo are over."

He says that as a result, "there is no issue of some cessation of hostilities, or some special humanitarian operation." He added that "the Syrian government has re-established control over eastern Aleppo."

The Associated Press was not immediately able to confirm that the fighting had stopped or that all the rebels had surrendered.

Churkin said earlier that "all militants" and members of their families, as well as those wounded in the fighting, "currently are going through agreed corridors in directions that they have chosen themselves voluntarily, including toward Idlib," a rebel stronghold.

"The Latest: Russia says Aleppo operation has ended," [Associated Press](#), 19:14 GMT, 13 Dec 2016.

Reuters tersely reported a statement by the president of the East Aleppo local council:

"It's not the best solution ... it's the least worst," Brita Hagi Hasan [president of the East Aleppo local council] told reporters in Paris. "At the moment it's just words and still needs to be implemented."

He said five buses would initially start taking people out of the city to safety from 0500 local time [on 14 Dec] to the west of the country, but that rebel fighters remained distrustful that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces and Russia would implement their part of the bargain.

Hasan said the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) would manage the process.

John Irish & Tatiana Chadenat, "East Aleppo council head says civilians, rebels to be

evacuated early Wednesday," [Reuters](#), 17:41 GMT, 13 Dec 2016.

Reuters reported the details of the agreement:

Syrian rebels said a ceasefire with government forces in Aleppo, agreed after talks between insurgents and Damascus's ally Russia, was to begin late on Tuesday [13 Dec] and would include the evacuation of combatants and civilians. The deal, acknowledged by Russia and Syria, signals Damascus's biggest victory over insurgents fighting to unseat President Bashar al-Assad in nearly six years of civil war, driving them from their last major urban stronghold.

....

A second rebel official, from the Jabha Shamiya group, said the first group of people were due to leave the remaining eastern, rebel-held pockets of Aleppo in the coming hours [of 13 Dec]. The official said the wounded would probably leave first, and that the majority of the estimated 50,000 people still in eastern Aleppo would also depart.

A Syrian military source said the evacuation of fighters for the rebel-controlled western Aleppo countryside would start at 5 a.m. (0300 GMT) on Wednesday [14 Dec]. The source said fighters' families would also leave, but did not mention other civilian evacuations.

John Davison, Tom Perry, Suleiman al-Khalidi, & Laila Bassam, "Syrian rebels say Aleppo truce deal struck, to take effect shortly," [Reuters](#), 18:39 GMT, 13 Dec 2016.

Later on 13 December, Reuters reported the ceasefire was holding:

The agreement was a result of talks between Russia, Assad's main ally, and Turkey, a leading backer of the rebels, a Turkish government official said. The guns fell silent late on Tuesday [13 Dec] in Aleppo. A Reuters reporter in the city said no blasts had been heard after days of near constant bombardment.

Laila Bassam & Angus McDowall, "Syrian rebels prepare to withdraw from Aleppo as truce begins," [Reuters](#), 00:15 GMT, 14 Dec 2016.

On the morning of 14 December, about an hour after the evacuation of insurgents was scheduled to begin, Reuters reported a delay in the evacuation.

Sources on Tuesday [13 Dec] had given different expected start times for the evacuation. A military official in the pro-Assad alliance had said the evacuation was due to start at 5 a.m. (0300 GMT) [on 14 Dec], while opposition officials had been expecting a first group of wounded people to leave earlier.

However, none had left by dawn, according to a Reuters witness waiting at the agreed point of departure. Twenty buses were waiting there with their engines running but showed no sign of moving into Aleppo's rebel-held eastern districts.

"There is certainly a delay," said Rami Abdulrahman, director of the Syrian Observatory, a war monitor.

Officials with Aleppo-based rebel groups accused Shi'ite militias backed by Iran of obstructing the Russian-brokered deal. The pro-opposition Orient TV cited its

correspondent as saying the plan may be delayed until Thursday [15 Dec].

....

Rebel sources said the ceasefire remained in place despite the delay in the evacuation plan.

"What is stopping the agreement presently is Iranian obstinacy. But the deal still stands, the ceasefire stands until now," said a commander with the Nour al-Din al-Zinki group, speaking in a voice message to Reuters from eastern Aleppo.

Laila Bassam, Tom Perry, & Lisa Barrington, "Aleppo evacuation may be delayed until Thursday," [Reuters](#), 06:28 GMT, 14 Dec 2016. [Paragraphs reordered by Standler.]

My comment is that Reuters did *not* explain why the insurgents believe Iran sabotaged the evacuation. At 07:00 GMT on 14 December, I looked at the English-language websites of three major Iranian news agencies, but none of them mentioned the delay in Aleppo.

The Associated Press reported:

The pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV broadcast on Wednesday [14 Dec] footage of Syrian government buses idling at an agreed-on evacuation point. It was not immediately clear what has caused the delay.

The TV said it expected at least another couple of hours of delay. It said the buses are prepared to move 5,000 fighters and their families to Atareb, an opposition-held town in the northwestern Aleppo countryside.

The Syrian government or the opposition in Aleppo have not made any announcements about the delay.

anonymous in Beirut, "After Aleppo Cease-Fire, Rebel And Civilian Pullout Delayed," [Associated Press](#), 07:09 GMT, 14 Dec 2016.

At 08:00 GMT on 14 December, I looked at the English-language website of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), but it had *no* mention of the ceasefire that was agreed 15 hours earlier. Apparently, Assad's government is *not* overjoyed with Russia making an agreement with insurgents in eastern Aleppo city. When I looked again at 13:20 GMT on 14 December, there was still *no* mention of the ceasefire at SANA.

At noon GMT on 14 December, journalists reported that the ceasefire had collapsed in eastern Aleppo city, and either Syrian or Russian airplanes had resumed airstrikes in Aleppo city.

The Associated Press reported the grim news:

A cease-fire deal between rebels and the Syrian government in the city of Aleppo effectively collapsed on Wednesday [14 Dec], with fighter jets resuming deadly air raids over the opposition's densely crowded enclave in the east of the city.

The attacks threatened to scuttle plans to evacuate rebels and tens thousands of civilians out of harm's way, in what would seal the opposition's surrender of the city.

The evacuation was supposed to begin at dawn but shelling resumed in the morning

hours and buses meant to be used in the pullout of rebels and civilians returned to their depots. Activists and fighters trapped in the opposition's last sliver of territory in Aleppo said pro-government forces had struck their district with dozens of rockets since mid-morning.

They said aircraft resumed bombing shortly after noon [10:00 GMT, 14 Dec].

....

It was not clear whether the planes were Syrian or Russian. ....

A legal adviser to the rebels accused Iran of foiling the Russia- and Turkey-brokered deal by imposing new conditions on the rebels. Along with Russia, Iran backs President Bashar Assad's government and has committed advisers and elite Revolutionary Guard forces to the government's war. Turkey backs the rebels fighting to topple Assad.

Osama Abo Zaid, the adviser, said Iran was imposing new conditions for the truce, demanding the remains of Iranians killed in Aleppo be returned and that Iranian hostages held in rebel-controlled Idlib province be released. He said the conditions were "exclusively sectarian and crippling."

The Syrian government, meanwhile, withdrew its green-colored buses from the evacuation point at the edge of the city of Aleppo's opposition enclave. The Lebanese al-Manar TV, the media arm of the Lebanese militant Shiite group Hezbollah fighting alongside Assad's forces, broadcast footage of the buses leaving the evacuation point empty and said government forces had resumed fighting with rebels in the city.

....

Activists in eastern Aleppo blamed the violence on pro-government forces, saying they shot first. [Media activist Mahmoud] Raslan said he was reporting for a Turkish agency when a rocket crashed nearby at around 10:15 a.m. ....

The Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement that the rebels "resumed the hostilities" at dawn, trying to break through Syrian government positions to the north-west.

Philip Issa & Sarah El Deeb, "Aleppo Cease-Fire Collapses, Threatening Evacuation Plans," [Associated Press](#), 12:01 GMT, 14 Dec 2016.

Then the Associated Press hinted that Assad might have rejected the ceasefire, in favor of annihilating the insurgents in eastern Aleppo city.

[15:00 Beirut time, 13:00 GMT] Assad spoke to the Russia Today channel in excerpts of an interview aired Wednesday [14 Dec].

....

Assad said the cease-fire was to stop his government's advance in the city and "keep the terrorists and save them." He also said the capture of the ancient city of Palmyra by



Islamic State militants was to "distract" from the Aleppo offensive.  
"The Latest: Assad Says Cease-Fire Meant To Save 'Terrorists'," [Associated Press](#),  
12:57 GMT, 14 Dec 2016.

I looked at the English-language Russia Today website and found a terse paragraph by Assad on Aleppo:

In an interview to RT, the Syrian President warned against taking statements by western governments at face value, as in Aleppo, they seemed to care more about saving terrorists than civilians. He also slammed the lackluster reaction to ISIS's onslaught on Palmyra.

President Bashar Assad sat down for an interview with RT's Maria Finoshina as the war in Syria has hit a new critical point with the Syrian Army's liberation of Aleppo and Islamic State's (IS, ISIS/ISIL) return to Palmyra. Here's a fragment of the interview, which is to be exclusively aired on RT on Wednesday.

....

**Assad:** It's always important in politics to read between the lines, not to be literal. It doesn't matter what they [Western countries] ask. The translation of their statement is for Russia [to] "*please, stop the advancement of the Syrian Army against the terrorists.*" That is the meaning of their statement, forget about the rest: "*You went too far in defeating the terrorists, that shouldn't happen. You should tell the Syrians to stop this. We have to keep the terrorists and to save them.*"

"Assad on Aleppo to RT: 'West is telling Russia we went too far in defeating terrorists' (EXCLUSIVE)," [Russia Today](#), 10:52 GMT, 14 Dec 2016.

At 14:23 GMT on 14 December, Reuters reported:

Plans to evacuate rebel districts of Aleppo stalled on Wednesday [14 Dec] as more fighting rocked the city and insurgents appeared to have rejected new conditions imposed on the deal by Iran.

Iran, one of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's main backers in the battle that has all but ended four years of rebel resistance in the city, wanted the simultaneous evacuation of wounded from two villages, Foua and Kefraya, that are besieged by rebel fighters, according to rebel and U.N. sources. There was no sign of that happening.

....

Officials in the military alliance backing Assad could not be reached immediately for comment on why the evacuation, expected to start in the early hours of Wednesday, had stalled.

Laila Bassam, Tom Perry & Lisa Barrington, "Aleppo hit by air strikes and shelling as evacuation stalls," [Reuters](#), 14:23 GMT, 14 Dec 2016.

My comment is that in the midst of accusations by Russia and the insurgents about who first violated the ceasefire, journalists have ignored *why* Iran is able to dictate terms about an agreement to evacuate insurgents from Aleppo. Iran is supposed to be helping Assad, but

Russia and Iran now seem to be controlling the Syrian war in Aleppo. Meanwhile, Assad — the leader of Syria — seems invisible, except for sporadic interviews with journalists. Further, Iran's inclusion of irrelevant items in its revision to the ceasefire agreement is a classic technique to derail an agreement without saying "NO". I say "irrelevant" because there is *no* way the insurgents in Aleppo can release "Iranian hostages held in rebel-controlled Idlib province", which is one of Iran's irrelevant demands.

It is no secret that Iranian militias — and Iranian-supported Hezbollah militia from Lebanon — have been essential in the liberation of Aleppo. [Reuters](#). This afternoon, [Reuters](#) suggests: "The central role [Iran] has played — and the power it wields — was starkly illustrated on Wednesday when the evacuation of rebel-held districts was delayed after Tehran was said by opposition officials to have imposed new conditions."

At 16:45 in Syria (14:45 GMT), the Associated Press reported that the Russian military in Syria had announced "Syrian troops retook the Sukkari quarter, reducing the area still under rebel control to 2.5 square kilometers". [Associated Press](#).

At 23:05 in Syria (21:05 GMT), the Associated Press reported that (1) the ceasefire would resume later on the night of 14 Dec, and (2) the first group of wounded would be evacuated in the early morning of 15 Dec. Civilians and insurgents will be evacuated, beginning on 15 December. [Associated Press](#).

At 22:50 GMT on 14 December, the Associated Press reported that there were some breaches of the *second* ceasefire in Aleppo city.

However, hours after [the first ceasefire] crumbled, the rebels said the deal was back on. There was no comment from the government or its allies, and minutes after the new cease-fire was to take effect at 11:30 p.m. local time, there were still reports of shelling in the few blocks of the city under rebel control.

Three rebel spokesmen said the first group of wounded people and civilians were to be escorted out of the city early Thursday [15 Dec] morning. Rebels would follow, they said, adding that the conditions had not changed and that they had even agreed with the Russians on the exact number of buses and convoys to be deployed in the rescue.

The Syrian military media denied an agreement had been reached and said in a statement that the negotiations were "complicated."

The evacuation was to have begun at dawn Wednesday [14 Dec], but quickly derailed, descending into terrifying violence. Residents said government buses arrived in the pre-dawn hours [of 14 Dec] at agreed upon meeting points, where the wounded were first in line to be evacuated after surviving weeks of intense fighting amid destroyed medical facilities and depleted supplies. But they were turned away by pro-government militias manning the checkpoints. Then violence erupted: shelling and then airstrikes.

....

Sarah El Deeb & Dominique Soguel, "Aleppo Cease-Fire Unravels, Raising Specter Of Bloody End," [Associated Press](#), 22:50 GMT, 14 Dec 2016.

At 24:43 GMT on 14 December, Reuters reports that evacuations are scheduled to begin the

morning of 15 December.

Syrian opposition groups said an evacuation of rebel-held areas of Aleppo was back on track and expected to begin early on Thursday [15 Dec], but uncertainty persisted as a media outlet run by Lebanon's Hezbollah said truce talks faced "big complications".

....

An official with the Jabha Shamiya rebel group said implementation would begin around 6 a.m. (0400 GMT) on Thursday. He said around 1,000 wounded people would be the first to leave eastern Aleppo, and the entire evacuation should be complete within three days.

Laila Bassam, Suleiman Al-Khalidi, & Tom Perry, "Rebel officials say Aleppo evacuation plan back on track," [Reuters](#), 00:43 GMT, 15 Dec 2016.

For Jan Egeland's 15 December briefing about the work of the Humanitarian Task Force, see [below](#).

At 14:00 GMT on 15 Dec 2016, the Associated Press reported that the evacuation from eastern Aleppo city had begun:

A convoy of ambulances carrying the first group of wounded and other civilians began leaving eastern Aleppo on Thursday [15 Dec], marking the start of the long-awaited pullout from the last rebel enclave in the embattled Syrian city.

....

Ingy Sedky, Damascus spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross, told The Associated Press that 13 ambulances, each carrying two wounded people, and 20 buses, each carrying up to 50 people, left in the convoy. The evacuation included some critically wounded people. "This is the first convoy today," she said, adding that more are expected later in the day.

It was not immediately [known] whether any rebels were among those evacuating in the first batch.

....

Syrian state TV has broadcast footage showing a convoy of green-colored municipal buses rumbling toward the agreed-on evacuation point inside the opposition-held area. The Russian military, a staunch Assad ally, said 20 buses and 10 ambulances would take the rebels to the rebel-held areas in the province of Idlib later Thursday [15 Dec].

....

Separately — but in a key addendum to the deal — Syria state TV said 29 buses and ambulances were heading to two Shiite villages besieged by rebels to evacuate those critically ill and other humanitarian cases. The TV quoted Hama provincial governor, Mohammed al-Hazouri, as saying that the medical teams were heading to Foua and Kfraya for those evacuations.

The Turkey-Russia brokered truce-and-evacuations deal for Aleppo was held up Wednesday [14 Dec] over demands by Syrian government allies [i.e., Iran] to evacuate the sick and other humanitarian cases from the two villages.

....

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the fighting stopped in [Aleppo] city around 4 a.m. Thursday.

Philip Issa, "First Evacuation Underway From Last Rebel Part Of Aleppo," [Associated Press](#), 13:59 GMT, 15 Dec 2016.

At 11:53 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported that unnamed pro-Assad forces fired at a convoy of ambulances that was leaving eastern Aleppo city, wounding at least three people. My sarcastic comment is that this was a traditional Islamic farewell from Assad's people.

At 12:35 GMT on 15 Dec, [Reuters](#) reported that the "first bus convoy meant to evacuate rebels was leaving the eastern part of Syria's largest city of Aleppo, Russia's defence ministry said at around 1230 GMT on Thursday." My comment is that the convoy departed about 9 hours after the evacuation was scheduled to begin.

At 16:20 GMT on 15 Dec 2016, Reuters reported on the evacuation:

A convoy of ambulances and buses with nearly 1,000 people aboard drove out of the devastated rebel-held area of Aleppo, which was besieged and bombarded for months by Syrian government forces, a Reuters reporter on the scene said. A Syrian official source told Reuters that a second convoy was likely to bring people out on Thursday.

Laila Bassam, Suleiman Al-Khalidi, & Tom Perry, "Aleppo rebel evacuation under way after ceasefire deal," [Reuters](#), 16:21 GMT, 15 Dec 2016.

Just past midnight on 15 December 2016, Reuters summarized what happened in Aleppo on Thursday, 15 Dec.

A first convoy of ambulances and buses with nearly 1,000 people aboard drove out of the devastated rebel-held area of Aleppo, which was besieged and bombarded for months by Syrian government forces, a Reuters reporter on the scene said.

Syrian state television reported later that two further convoys of 15 buses each had also left east Aleppo. The second had reached the rebel-held area of al-Rashideen, an insurgent said.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said late on Thursday that some 3,000 civilians and more than 40 wounded people, including children, had already been evacuated.

ICRC official Robert Mardini told Reuters there were no clear plans yet for how to ship out rebel fighters, who under the ceasefire will be allowed to leave for other areas outside government control.

....

Staffan de Mistura, the United Nations special envoy for Syria, said about 50,000 people remained in rebel-held Aleppo, of whom about 10,000 would be evacuated to nearby Idlib province and the rest would move to government-held city districts.

....

A senior European diplomat said last week that the fighters had a choice between surviving for a few weeks in Idlib or dying in Aleppo. "For the Russians it's simple. Place them all in Idlib and then they have all their rotten eggs in one basket."

Idlib is already a target for Syrian and Russian air strikes but it is unclear if the government will push for a ground assault or simply seek to contain rebels there for now.

The International Rescue Committee said: "Escaping Aleppo doesn't mean escaping the war ... After witnessing the ferocity of attacks on civilians in Aleppo, we are very concerned that the sieges and barrel bombs will follow the thousands who arrive in Idlib."

Laila Bassam, Suleiman Al-Khalidi, & Tom Perry, "Buses evacuate thousands of exhausted Aleppo residents in ceasefire deal," [Reuters](#), 24:55 GMT, 15 Dec 2016.

On Friday, 16 December at 15:00 GMT, journalists reported that the evacuation of eastern Aleppo city had stalled again around noon in Syria. It is difficult to determine what happened and why, amongst all of the childish stunts, false claims, and propaganda. But apparently there were problems with the evacuation of the towns of Foua and Kfarya, so Hezbollah violated the ceasefire in Aleppo, by shelling a road used in the evacuation from Aleppo.

The Associated Press tells us:

There were differing reports on how many people had been evacuated from the [insurgent-controlled] enclave [in eastern Aleppo city] and how many remained inside, who would be in danger of being caught in the crossfire if the cease-fire falls apart. Reports by opposition activists and officials in eastern Aleppo ranged from 15,000 to 40,000 civilians still inside the tiny enclave, along with some 6,000 fighters.

....

The Lebanon-based pan-Arab Al-Mayadeen TV aired images Friday of public green buses reportedly returning evacuees to east Aleppo after the road was closed. But despite the closure, scores of people and patients were apparently evacuated before the evacuation was suspended, according to the World Health Organization.

As of 7 a.m. on Friday, a total of 194 patients had been evacuated and taken to hospitals in rebel-controlled areas of Aleppo province, nearby Idlib province or across the border into Turkey, said WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic. Among them, 65 were in critical condition, he said.

....

There have been contradicting reports of how many people were evacuated from Aleppo on Thursday. Syrian state TV said that more than 9,000 people were evacuated on Thursday alone. Syrian state TV said the evacuees included 3,475 men, 3,137 women, 2,359 children and 108 wounded people.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said about 4,000 civilians were taken out on Thursday. The Syrian state news agency said 2,300 opposition fighters and their families left Aleppo the previous night.

Russia, a key Assad ally, says that more than 6,462 people, including more than 3,000 rebels and 301 wounded, have been taken out.

Bassem Mroue, "Syrian TV, Rebels Trade Blame Amid Halted Aleppo Evacuation," [Associated Press](#), 15:03 GMT, 16 Dec 2016.

Reuters reported on the evacuations from Aleppo city:

The second day of the operation to take fighters and civilians out of Aleppo's rebel enclave ground to a halt amid recriminations from all sides after a morning that had seen the pace of the operation pick up. .... The chaos surrounding the Aleppo evacuation reflects the complexity of the war with an array of groups and foreign interests involved on each side.

....

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a monitoring group, said a total of 8,000 people, including some 3,000 fighters and more than 300 wounded, had left the city in convoys of buses and ambulances since the evacuation began on Thursday [15 Dec] morning.

....

By early Friday [16 Dec] morning, nearly 200 evacuated patients had arrived in eight "overwhelmed" hospitals in opposition-held rural western Aleppo, Idlib and Turkey, according to the WHO.

The United Nations says 50,000 people remain in rebel-held Aleppo, of whom about 10,000 would be taken to Idlib province and the rest would go to government-held city districts.

Laila Bassam, Suleiman Al-Khalidi, & John Davison, "Aleppo evacuation suspended amid dispute over villages," [Reuters](#), 15:50 GMT, 15 Dec 2016.

*Al-Arabiya* clearly explained the problem.

Syrian media sources said that General Javad al-Ghafari, commander of the Revolutionary Guards and 16 IRGC-backed Shiite militias [in Syria] wants to kill all those who are still trapped in eastern Aleppo, which is hampering the completion of the operation aiming to evacuate the rest of the civilians and fighters.

The sources said that General Ghafari has been in conflict with the Russians since the

beginning; since he didn't want civilians and opposition fighters to evacuate the besieged neighborhoods.

He hindered the Russian-Turkish agreement, where Iranian media had started to attack Russia in line with talks about this agreement.

"Iran in Aleppo: 'Kill all those who are trapped'," [Al-Arabiya](#), 13:07 GMT, 16 Dec 2016.

When I next looked at the news, at 05:00 GMT on Saturday 17 December, diplomats had been unable to restore the ceasefire and evacuations. The Turkish government was talking to the Iranian government, but there were *no* results to report. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

My comment is that the parties in Syria — insurgents, Hezbollah, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Assad — seem determined to spend more time negotiating the evacuation of eastern Aleppo city than it takes to actually remove tens of thousands of people. The negotiations would be much simpler, except that the parties are barbarians.

On Saturday afternoon, the Associated Press reported:

An agreement was reached Saturday [17 Dec] to allow "humanitarian cases" to leave two besieged government-held Shiite villages in northwestern Syria, a step that would allow the resumption of civilian and rebel evacuations from eastern Aleppo which were suspended a day earlier, Hezbollah's media arm and a monitoring group said.

... Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the evacuation of some 4,000 people, including wounded, from the villages of Foua and Kfarya was expected to start Saturday. It later reported that 29 buses were heading toward the two villages to start the evacuation process, adding that insurgents in the area rejected allowing 4,000 people to leave and saying they will only allow 400 people to be evacuated. It was not immediately clear whether the alleged evacuation limits set by the insurgents in the two villages would undermine evacuation efforts in Aleppo.

....

Hezbollah's Military Media said the new deal also includes the rebel-held towns of Madaya and Zabadani near the border with Lebanon where tens of thousands of people are trapped under siege by government forces and the Lebanese group.

....

Reports differed on how many people remain in the Aleppo enclave, ranging from 15,000 to 40,000 civilians, along with an estimated 6,000 fighters.

There also were contradictory reports on the number of evacuees who left on Thursday and early Friday from east Aleppo. Syrian state TV put it at more than 9,000 while Russia, a key Assad ally, said over 9,500 people, including more than 4,500 rebels, were taken out.

Bassem Mroue, "Deal Reached That Could Restart Aleppo Evacuation," [Associated Press](#), 14:08 GMT, 17 Dec 2016.

At 18:26 GMT on 17 December, [Reuters](#) "As darkness fell on Saturday [17 Dec] afternoon and temperatures began to fall below freezing there was no sign the evacuation was happening. A resident in Aleppo told Reuters that nobody had left the rebel-held enclave and no buses had entered. He said he had heard gunfire near where people were supposed to wait for buses." Journalists reported that there were *no* evacuations anywhere in Syria on 17 December.

On Sunday, 18 December, at 16:30 GMT, the Associated Press reported on the continuing frustration of evacuations in Syria:

A delicately timed evacuation deal involving trapped civilians and fighters in war-ravaged east Aleppo and two Syrian villages was thrown into doubt Sunday when assailants torched six buses assigned to the operation.

The buses were to take part in the evacuation of over 2,000 wounded and sick Syrians from Foua and Kfarya, two rebel-besieged villages that have remained loyal to the government in an area under opposition control in the northwest Idlib province, activists and government media reported.

....

The opposition's Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the al-Qaida-affiliated Fatah al-Sham Front was behind Sunday's assault on the buses. The insurgent group had been dragging its feet over approving the evacuation deal.

....

Most residents of the two villages are Shiite Muslims, while the most powerful anti-government groups in Idlib are hard-line Sunnis.

The identity of the group behind the attack remains unclear. A video showing armed men circling the burning buses did not reveal their affiliation.

"The buses that came to evacuate the apostates have been burned," declared the narrator of the video, as celebratory gunshots rang through the air. He warned that no "Shiite pigs" would be allowed to leave the towns.

....

Earlier in the day, dozens of buses and ambulances were poised to enter east Aleppo to resume evacuating rebel fighters and civilians from the opposition's remaining districts, pro-Syrian government media said. But the evacuations remained on hold at nightfall. Philip Issa, "Buses Assigned To Syria Evacuations Attacked, Deal Stalls," [Associated Press](#), 16:32 GMT, 18 Dec 2016.

There are two minor errors in the above-quoted Associated Press story. First, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) is independent of any insurgent group, although the SOHR is strongly sympathetic to the anti-Assad campaign. The AP should have omitted "opposition's" in front of SOHR. Second, "Fatah al-Sham Front" is *not* affiliated with Al-



Qaeda. The official affiliation ended on 28 July 2016, when they changed their name from Nusra. Nonetheless, Fatah al-Sham Front continues to be a terrorist organization, which was inspired by Al-Qaeda.

On Sunday night, 18 December, the Associated Press reported:

**[21:45 Syria time on Sunday, 18 December]** Activists say hundreds of Syrians anxiously awaiting evacuation from east Aleppo have been trapped for over eight hours in a no-man's-land between rebel and government control, without food or water.

East Aleppo resident Rami Zien, who says he is on one of the buses "stopped a no-man's land", told The Associated Press via messenger service that evacuees were stressed and frightened. .... Zien said evacuees are crammed, 70 people to a bus, with many having no room to sit. He said the Red Crescent, which is facilitating the evacuation, has been unable to provide water. He said there are between 50-to-60 buses in the convoy.

**[01:00 Syria time on Monday, 19 December]** A Syrian war monitoring group says the first convoy to evacuate civilians and fighters from eastern Aleppo in over 48 hours has arrived safely to the Aleppo countryside. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said shortly before midnight Sunday [18 Dec] that government forces allowed five buses to leave Aleppo.

Philip Issa, "The Latest: 1st Aleppo Evacuees In 2 Days Reported," [Associated Press](#), 23:25 GMT, 18 Dec 2016.

On Monday afternoon, 19 December, the Associated Press reported:

The [U.N.] Security Council on Monday approved the deployment of U.N. monitors to Aleppo as the evacuation of fighters and civilians from the last remaining opposition stronghold in the northern city resumed after days of delays.

France said the monitors were needed to prevent "mass atrocities" from being committed by Syrian government forces, especially militias. But thousands have already been evacuated and the operation will likely be over before the observers arrive.

Another evacuation is underway in two rebel-besieged Shiite villages [Foua and Kfarya], where the sick and wounded were being allowed out until gunmen torched several buses being used for the operation on Sunday [18 Dec]. That evacuation has since resumed.

.....

The evacuation of more than 2,000 sick and wounded from the besieged Shiite villages of Foua and Kfarya was tacked onto the deal at the last minute. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the pan-Arab Al-Mayadeen TV said 10 buses left with civilians on Monday.

There are also plans to evacuate hundreds of people from two Madaya and Zabadani, two besieged, rebel-held villages near the Lebanese border. The Observatory and

Mayadeen said 15 buses entered the two villages on Monday.

....

One of those who left Aleppo on Monday was Mohammed Abu Jaafar, who described a miserable five-kilometer (three-mile) trip that took more than two hours in an overcrowded state bus. He said they passed three checkpoints, one manned by Russian troops, another by plainclothes Syrian intelligence agents and the third by Syrian troops. Inside the bus, men, women and children were hungry and cold as they waited for hours in freezing temperatures, he said. "Children were screaming, and some people fainted," he said, adding that there was no baby formula or diapers.

....

The Observatory and Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu later said that since midnight Sunday, some 4,500 people have been evacuated from eastern Aleppo. Reports differed on how many people remain in eastern Aleppo, but estimates converge around 15,000 civilians and 6,000 fighters.

....

The Observatory's chief, Rami Abdurrahman, said he expected the Aleppo evacuations to be completed later on Monday. He said the evacuations will happen in three phases.

1. First, 1,250 people from Foua and Kfarya will leave in return for the government allowing half of the people still in eastern Aleppo to head to rebel-held parts of the country.
2. Then, another 1,250 people will leave from the two Shiite villages, in exchange for the departure of all remaining civilians and opposition fighters in eastern Aleppo.
3. The third phase will include 1,500 people leaving from Foua and Kfarya and, in return, 1,500 people will be allowed to leave Madaya and Zabadani.

Bassem Mroue, "UN Approves Sending Monitors To Aleppo As Evacuations Resume," [Associated Press](#), 15:25 GMT, 19 Dec 2016. [Indented list formatting added by Standler.]

After the search function ended at the Associated Press *Big Story* website on 6 December, I have linked to Associated Press top news stories, but I do not know if those links will be functional in a few months. Recently, I have noticed that Reuters is deleting news articles on Syria a day after the article was first posted. So, future historians may have difficulty in accessing original news reports on the ceasefire and evacuation from Aleppo city.

On the afternoon of 19 December, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported:  
A convoy of 25 buses of the 50 buses that entered eastern Aleppo today, have crossed Ameria-Ramosa crossing into al-Rashdin area in the western countryside, transporting 1000 rebels with their families, what rose the number of the transported since yesterday to 4500.

It is worth to mention that the number of people transported from rebels square in Aleppo since the Turkish-Russian agreement took place last Thursday [15 Dec], reached about 13,000 including 4,000 rebels.

"More than 1000 have been transported from rebels Square in eastern Aleppo, what makes it 13,000 in total," [SOHR](#), 19 Dec 2016.

At night on 19 December, Reuters reported:

An estimated total of 17,000 people have been evacuated from the enclave since Thursday [15 Dec], including 7,000 on Monday [19 Dec] [ICRC spokesman Krista Armstrong] said. "There are still 40 buses inside the enclave of east Aleppo with more people who are proceeding with evacuation. The operation is still ongoing," she said.

Senior rebel official Zakaria Malahifji of the Aleppo-based Fastaqim group said "the process is supposed to continue" throughout the night.

Angus McDowall & Ellen Francis, "Thousands evacuated from Aleppo after deal over besieged villages," [Reuters](#), 21:41 GMT, 19 Dec 2016.

On the afternoon of 20 December, the Associated Press reported:

Opposition media activist Ahmad Primo said the fleet could well be the last one to leave the city. He spoke to The Associated Press from the Rashideen crossing between government and rebel-held territory in the Aleppo countryside. Primo estimated 2,000 people remain awaiting evacuation.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 60 buses were sent to pick up 3,000 gunmen and civilians remaining.

....

The precise number of people seeking evacuation — and who have already left — has never been clear.

Observatory head Rami Aburrahman said 17,000 civilians and 5,000 fighters have left; the International Committee of the Red Cross, which has overseen the evacuations, said 25,000 have left; and the Turkish Foreign Ministry's figure is 37,000.

Lavrov said in Moscow that the evacuations could continue for another one or two days.

Philip Issa & Nataliya Vasilyeva, "Russia, Iran, Turkey Ready To Guarantee Syria Settlement," Associated Press, 14:59 GMT, 20 Dec 2016.

At night on 20 December, Reuters reported:

The Syrian army used loudspeakers to broadcast warnings to insurgents that it was poised to enter their rapidly diminishing area during the day and told them to speed up their evacuation of the city.

....

In Syria, an operation to evacuate civilians and fighters from rebel-held eastern Aleppo

has now brought out 37,500 people since late last week, Turkey said. As more buses left the city on Tuesday [20 Dec], Turkish and Russian ministers estimated the evacuation would be complete within two days.

But it is hard to know if that goal is realistic, given the problems that have beset the evacuation so far and the wide variation in estimates of how many have left and how many remain. The International Committee of the Red Cross put the number evacuated since the operation began on Thursday [15 Dec] at only 25,000.

A rebel official in Turkey told Reuters that even after thousands left on Monday [19 Dec], only about half of the civilians who wanted to leave had done so.

Insurgent fighters would only leave once all the civilians who wanted to go had departed, the rebel said. The ceasefire and evacuation agreement allows rebels to carry personal weapons but not heavier arms.

Estimates of the number of people waiting for evacuation range from a few thousand to tens of thousands.

Angus McDowall & Maria Tsvetkova, "Syrian army closes in on last Aleppo rebels," [Reuters](#), 23:10 GMT, 20 Dec 2016.

On the afternoon of 21 December 2016, the Associated Press reported:

The government agreed to allow the remaining residents — fighters and civilians — to leave as part of the agreement brokered by Russia and Turkey in Ankara last week.

An Associated Press TV crew said four buses from the opposition's last foothold in the city arrived to the western Aleppo countryside Wednesday [21 Dec], marking the first successful evacuation in over 24 hours.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 60 buses are expected to evacuate some 3,000 fighters and civilians from the opposition's last foothold in the city. It is the last convoy set to leave Aleppo before the government is expected to declare it has reassumed full control of the city for the first time since rebels carved out an enclave for the opposition in 2012.

....

Also Tuesday [20 Dec], the U.N. humanitarian aid agency said Syria's government authorized U.N. plans to send about 20 staffers to monitor evacuations from eastern Aleppo. It was not clear if the U.N. monitors would arrive before the operations were complete.

Philip Issa, "Final Round Of Aleppo Evacuations Underway," [Associated Press](#), 15:42 GMT, 21 Dec 2016.

On the night of Wednesday, 21 December, Reuters reported:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a group that monitors the war, said Assad had control of Aleppo after the last fighters were brought out of the city and only one small position on the western outskirts remained in rebel hands.

But a U.N. official in Syria, asked about the Observatory report, told Reuters: "That is not something we can confirm. Evacuations are still ongoing."

A spokesman for the Free Syrian Army rebel alliance, Osama Abu Zaid, told an Arab news channel that evacuations had been slowed by bad weather and would continue into the night.

....

People had been waiting in freezing temperatures since the evacuation hit problems on Tuesday [20 Dec], when dozens of buses were stuck in Aleppo, and the evacuation of two Shi'ite villages outside the city, al-Foua and Kefraya, also stalled. Rebels and government forces blamed each other for the hold-up.

....

So far, about 30,000 people have been evacuated from Aleppo, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Ellen Francis & Lisa Barrington, "Aleppo endgame nears as evacuation resumes," [Reuters](#), 00:12 GMT, 22 Dec 2016.

On the night of Wednesday, 21 December, the Associated Press reported:

Hundreds of rebel fighters and civilians, including small children swaddled in thick blankets, were bused out of war-ravaged Aleppo in heavy snow on Wednesday as the evacuation of former rebel strongholds entered its final phase.

Scenes of buses slowly driving out of Aleppo in a shroud of white offered an evocative finale to what has been one of the most brutal chapters in Syria's civil war.

....

The evacuations were set in motion last week after Syria's opposition agreed to surrender its last footholds in eastern Aleppo. Since then, about 25,000 fighters and civilians have been bused out, according to the United Nations. On Wednesday, buses began evacuating the last rebels and civilians, an estimated 3,000 people.

By nightfall, 25 buses carrying hundreds of people had driven in a rare snow storm from eastern Aleppo to opposition-held areas in the countryside near the city, said opposition activist Ahmad Primo, who was monitoring arrivals at the main drop-off point in the Rashideen district.

....

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross said patients and all those requiring medical care had been evacuated from the last hospital in the city's east.

....

Meanwhile, it was unclear if any U.N. observers were on the ground in eastern Aleppo on Wednesday [21 Dec] — two days after a U.N. Security Council resolution approved their urgent deployment.

Philip Issa & Karin Laub, "Aleppo Evacuations In Heavy Snow End Brutal War Chapter," [Associated Press](#), 00:44 GMT, 22 Dec 2016.

On the afternoon of Thursday, 22 December 2016, the Associated Press reported:

The evacuation of the last remaining civilians and fighters from the last rebel-held sliver of eastern Aleppo will be completed in the coming hours, the Red Cross and state TV said Thursday [22 Dec], as 4,000 people were evacuated overnight and more gunmen and civilians braved freezing temperatures to leave.

....

The evacuations were set in motion last week after Syria's opposition agreed to surrender its last footholds in eastern Aleppo. Since then, some 35,000 fighters and civilians have been bused out, according to the United Nations. The ICRC said in a statement that more than 4,000 additional fighters were evacuated in private cars, vans, and pick-ups from eastern Aleppo since Wednesday [21 Dec].

"The bad weather, including heavy snow and wind, and the poor state of vehicles mean things are moving much more slowly than expected," the ICRC statement said. "The evacuation will continue for the entire day and night and most probably tomorrow."

....

Ingy Sedky, a spokeswoman for the International Committee of the Red Cross, said the few thousand remaining people will be evacuated in 40 buses and hundreds of private cars. .... Sedky said the Aleppo operation will take place over multiple stages and will likely be completed later on Thursday [22 Dec].

Bassem Mroue, "Last Group To Be Evacuated From Syria's Aleppo Within Hours," [Associated Press](#), 14:21 GMT, 22 Dec 2016.

On Thursday, 22 December 2016 at the Daily Press [Briefing](#) at United Nations headquarters, the deputy spokesman said: "According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 21 December, 435 wounded and sick people had been evacuated, of whom 95 patients in critical conditions had been transferred to Turkey, others were transferred to hospitals in Idlib and in rural western Aleppo."

At night on 22 December 2016, the Associated Press reported that *all* of the insurgents had departed from eastern Aleppo city.

The Syrian government took full control of Aleppo on Thursday [22 Dec] for the first time in four years after the last opposition fighters and civilians were bused out of war-ravaged eastern districts, sealing the end of the rebellion's most important stronghold.

....

The announcement was made via an army statement broadcast on Syrian state TV shortly after the last four buses carrying fighters left through the Ramousseh crossing. Zeina Karam, "Syrian Government Takes Full Control Of Aleppo After 4 Years," [Associated Press](#), 20:44 GMT, 22 Dec 2016.

The Associated Press [blog](#) for Syria says the last buses departed from Aleppo city at 19:00 Syrian time (17:00 GMT).

On the night of 22 December, Reuters reported:

A week-long operation to evacuate tens of thousands of people from east Aleppo as well as two Shi'ite villages in Syria's Idlib province is complete, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Thursday [22 Dec].

"All civilians who wished to be evacuated have been, as well as wounded and fighters," ICRC spokeswoman Krista Armstrong said. The aid agency led the complex operation in snowy winter conditions with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Stephanie Nebehay, "Aleppo evacuation is complete, Red Cross says," [Reuters](#), 21:44 GMT, 22 Dec 2016.

On 22 December 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights added the civilian death toll for Aleppo city:

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2872 civilian citizens including 630 children under the age of 18 and 330 citizen women over the age of 18 — in addition to the injury of 16,000 others — since the first hours of the collapse of the Russian-American truce on 22 April 2016 until today, 22 Dec 2016.

- the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 1607 civilian citizens, including 300 children and 139 citizen women, were killed in airstrikes by the regime's and Russian warplanes and regime's helicopters on the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo city.
- the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented 282 citizens, including 60 children and 24 citizen women, killed in artillery shelling by the regime forces on places at the eastern part of Aleppo city.
- Also 923 persons, including 255 children and 158 citizen women, they were killed in the fall of shells which were launched by factions on regime forces' controlled areas in the western neighborhoods of Aleppo.
- the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 40 citizens including 9 children and 4 women; they were killed when the factions launched shells at areas in Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood which is inhabited mostly by Kurdish citizens and controlled by YPG.
- [and 20 other deaths.]

"About 19,000 killed or wounded since the collapse of De Mistura ceasefire in Aleppo city," [SOHR](#), 22 Dec 2016. [Some editing by Standler.]

On Friday, 23 December 2016 at the Daily Press [Briefing](#) at United Nations headquarters, the spokesman said: "the operation to evacuate people from eastern Aleppo ended late last night, with more than 35,000 people evacuated, including 20,000 people since resolution 2328 (2016) was passed earlier this week." More detail is at the U.N. Security Council meeting [report](#).

### **15 December 2016: remarks by Jan Egeland**

Before I quote Egeland, let me present a terse summary of facts to put the situation in perspective.

In the original agreement brokered on 13 December by Russia and Turkey, the International Red Cross was invited to participate in the evacuation of Aleppo, but the United Nations (i.e., de Mistura, World Health Organization) was *not* invited to observe. But at the weekly meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva, Russia agreed on 15 December to allow United Nations personnel to observe the evacuation.

Assad began the recent bombing and shelling of Aleppo city on 3 June 2016. On 7 July 2016, Assad effectively besieged eastern Aleppo city by cutting Castello road. And on 26 November 2016, as food and fuel were nearly exhausted in eastern Aleppo city, Assad began a ground assault on eastern Aleppo city. The United Nations has been unable to deliver food, medicine, and other humanitarian aid to eastern Aleppo city since early July. Assad and/or Russia sent airstrikes that closed every hospital in eastern Aleppo city, making it urgent that wounded and sick be evacuated from Aleppo. Nonetheless, the barbarians continued to delay the evacuation of the wounded and sick people.

It is obvious that neither Assad's government nor the leaders of the insurgent groups are cooperating with the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations. I noted the persistent lack of cooperation in my essay for [November 2016](#).

The United Nations has been saying for months that approximately 250,000 civilians were in besieged eastern Aleppo city. Approximately 50,000 fled during the past few weeks. There are allegedly a few tens of thousands of civilians currently in eastern Aleppo city. What happened to the other 170,000 civilians in eastern Aleppo city? Did these missing people never exist, or were they slaughtered by Assad?

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Because de Mistura was in New York City, Jan Egeland was the sole chairman of the Humanitarian Task Force at the weekly meeting on 15 December. Afterwards, Egeland spoke to journalists:

Thank you very much. We have tried to assist east Aleppo for several months now, we have had five major initiatives to bring relief to the besieged part of east Aleppo and to evacuate wounded and civilians from east Aleppo. They have all failed. We do hope that today we see the start of a last and successful attempt of evacuations of that troubled city.

We were invited this morning to monitor, assist the evacuation that will take place from the remaining enclave that is controlled by armed opposition groups. It is a three-



pronged evacuation, it is medical evacuation of wounded and sick, it is an evacuation of vulnerable civilians and it is an evacuation of fighters.

This is not an agreement mediated by the United Nations, it is an agreement that has been made in direct talks between the parties to this war, we were not part of it and we were only invited this morning to monitor. We do such monitoring with the good colleagues in ICRC, who are now present there with our representatives from the World Health Organization. We stand ready with a number of teams that are experts on protection, on humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. We stand ready to accompany those who are being evacuated, not only from east Aleppo but all the way to Idlib, that is controlled by armed opposition groups, that will be the destination of most of the people evacuated. We stand also ready to care for them all the way to Turkey and into Turkey if they chose that to be their final destination.

Today, Russia detailed how the evacuation would take place in the [humanitarian] taskforce and they confirmed that Russians will be monitoring that this is a swift, unbureaucratic, non-intrusive evacuation and that nothing, no harm will meet those who are evacuated.

We feel all strongly that the history of Aleppo through this war will be a black chapter in the history of international relations. It took 4000 years to build Aleppo, hundreds of generations, yet one generation managed to tear it down in four years. Aleppo, for three thousand years, gave to the world civilization and world civilization was not there to assist the people of Aleppo when they needed us the most.

We do however, now try to do as much as we can to assist all those who have come out, 50,000 have been displaced from east Aleppo, this is an estimate that we now have. Most of these have been assisted by UN relief, we are not able to provide humanitarian protection by presence to all of these people, simply because we are not allowed to move freely in the area. We can access the camps where the internally displaced now assemble, where conditions are very difficult, now we have to offer one room for every two families, so there will be ten to twelve people in each room.

I would say that the most painful experience of all of these weeks and months of work is that we haven't been able to be present when the Syrian civilians have needed us the most. There are 700,000 people in 15 besieged areas beyond east Aleppo and they are a symbol of this lack of presence, lack of protection.

All of the parties on the ground are guilty of blocking access for international humanitarian workers. I cannot recall a war where this has been such an acute problem in the last generation.

We hope this will change, we pray it will change, we are ready to assist. We heard harrowing reports now from al-Waer, in Homs, of how bad it is. We heard how bad it is in Foua, Kefraya, the Shia towns besieged by armed opposition groups. Civilians there want to evacuate, they cannot and it is equally bad in Madaya as you know, where there is no health care and a steady loss of civilian lives.

This is a pledge to be there for each and every one who needs us, we are not giving up but we need help really, we need more help from the members of the Humanitarian Taskforce, they have not been able to give us the access that we needed and therefore we have not been witnesses to atrocities that we know have been committed by all sides in this horrific war, including in east Aleppo.

....

**QUESTION:** You said most of the evacuees will move to Idlib, was that a good idea, isn't that just postponing their fate?

**Egeland:** Well, Idlib, they want to go and it is a free choice to choose where to go, they want to go to an opposition-controlled area, we have two points established in Idlib, which has been a war zone and where Russians and others assure us that there will be a pause in the fighting, when we evacuate, or rather when we assist the evacuation from these two points we will take people onwards. We have now contingencies to help 100,000 people that we could receive through those two hubs in Idlib and many of them, some would go on to Turkey, some to more quieter corners of Idlib, we need to work on how to get them out of harm's way. But I am afraid from what may come when this operation is over, both to the people of Idlib and all of the other areas that are still contested and where there are really hundreds of thousands displaced already in the middle of a war zone.

"Transcript of Stakeout by UN Senior Advisor, Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 15 Dec 2016. Copy at [U.N.](#).

### **22 December 2016: Remarks by de Mistura & Jan Egeland**

On 22 December, de Mistura and Jan Egeland gave their weekly briefing after the meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force.

**de Mistura:** Good afternoon everybody. We just ended a Humanitarian Taskforce [meeting] but of course it did cover many subjects and we have been actually also looking in particular to the issue of Aleppo, that's why I will leave to Jan most of the comments on Aleppo.

....

.... On the 6th of October, I did here in Geneva, on behalf of the UN, make a special press conference. And it was about Aleppo. And it was through you, members of the media, international media, that I made a special appeal to both Russia and to al-Nusra, in order to ensure that we will not reach the point where we would be having at Christmas, which is next week, a total destruction of one of the most ancient cities in the world, Aleppo. And that we would have been able to avoid at least the final part of what was going to look like a terrible massacre with the so-called "end of the battle of Aleppo".

I wish the Security Council would have been more united and earlier united in order to be able to address that aspect, and I wish that some of my proposals would have been picked up in a way to become operational earlier. But we still have to say that in spite of all this, if we can look at something in terms of less tragic events, is what has been happening in the last few days, in terms of the Turkish-Russian facilitated arrangement, which has been then producing a movement of evacuations that we will be able to elaborate on.

In other words, I wish we had had in October a much more effective response. We would have avoided so much suffering day and night. But in a way, we will see how it ends. It has still, I want to believe, and through you because you were the ones who launched the appeal, had produced some momentum that has also avoided, I hope that by Christmas, the last part of the battle of Aleppo, could have been a tragic Vukovar, which I hope it is not going to be.

Now the next steps of course is to look at where do the people who have been evacuated go, and whether they in winter will be actually not suffering further. Because some of them went to west Aleppo, few. Many, many have gone to the rural part of Aleppo, which is in armed group controlled areas, in armed opposition areas, and therefore, again a question of how to make sure that the humanitarian aid from the UN can reach them. And many have gone to Idlib, which could be in theory the next Aleppo. So we have to look forward. And what is the reply to that? Two: the first one is: make sure that the UN has not only access, and we will hear about that, but also the means, the capacity, the funding for the winter. We are in the winter, it is snowing in Aleppo, and [it is] very cold in the rural areas. So [we need] enough funds and capacity for the UN to reach these people while the priority remains: cessation of hostilities.

And that leads me now to the next point. As you probably have seen a few days ago, we had for the first time in a long period, a unanimous again Security Council resolution. I wish, as I told you, we could have had it when we made the appeal for Aleppo, but at least it took place. 2328 resolution, which has been the trigger for us to think now is the time, now is the time to relaunch the political process, in order to make sure that in fact there is a momentum based on this renewed unity of the Security Council. That's why, you know, and we announced it on the 8th of February, and in Geneva, here, we are planning to have the renewed relaunching of the political, intra-Syrian political process under UN auspices. The reason for doing it on the 8th of February, are many, and some of them are obviously linked to the fact that:

- a. we will have a new Secretary-General, by then firmly in hand and therefore he will be able to launch his own initiative,
- b. there are some interesting and important initiatives that are been planned in January, including what we heard about the Astana meeting. We feel that all those initiatives are useful to us, in order to be able then to have a common approach, which is the only one under [resolution] 2254, the UN one.

We will be therefore proceeding along those lines, believing that we can actually capitalize on any type of initiative that may take place between now and the 8th of February, 2017.

The bottom line remains now, humanitarian access, humanitarian aid to those who have been in need, not only in Aleppo but elsewhere as well, the cessation of hostilities — otherwise between now and when finally we will be getting the political process moving forward many others may be killed — and the momentum of the political process. That's the plan and that's where we are at the moment. Thank you.

Now the floor to Jan Egeland, and then we will take some questions.

**Jan Egeland:** Thank you Staffan. A very large, dangerous, difficult, and complex evacuation is going to its final phase today, mainly from eastern Aleppo and from the two villages Foah and Kefraya. This morning, we reckon some 35,000 people will have left eastern Aleppo in over 200 buses, it was 750 cars and trucks that had left through the Ramouseh gate, where the UN is observing. It will be probably more than a thousand cars and trucks all together, these are cars that had flat tires and not fueled, that are full of people, it is very complex.

I would like to thank, really, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the ICRC, the UN team in place going in shifts through the days and nights as well as all of the Red Cross and Red Crescent colleagues who were there to organize for the evacuation from east Aleppo.

I also like to thank the 32 Non-Governmental Organizations which have worked also with the UN in Idlib and in rural Aleppo where tens of thousands of people now from east Aleppo joined hundreds and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced already. It is a race against the clock and against the winter to provide shelter, warmth and relief to people who are sick, exhausted, malnourished from five years of war.

We need more presence in all of the areas that had war, and where there is still a lot of tension. And our presence means protection and that's the whole purpose of the Security Council resolution, monitoring will lead to protection. It is at the moment a limited but important UN contingent of 31 international and national staff dedicated to monitoring, in addition to the 100 people from the UN in Aleppo that are there for the very large assistance operation.

More people are on their way and we have requested full and unimpeded access to all areas in eastern Aleppo. We are accessing parts of eastern Aleppo; we also need to [access] the remaining parts including this area that has been the last enclave held by the armed opposition groups.

Now, to get this protection we need all of these permits that are so slow to get now from the Syrian Government, from the Governor's office, from all of these institutions in Syria that are slow to give us the access we need. We would also have liked to be part of all of the negotiations that take place that have humanitarian implications, we would have wanted to be part of the agreement that we had influence on so that we can be there from the beginning; that also goes for the ICRC and the others.

But all in all, this was the largest operation that I know of that took place and I think it

saved a lot of lives and I think it means that the end of the battle proved to be less cruel than it could have been.

Finally, there are 15 besieged areas beyond east Aleppo. And it hasn't gotten better in these areas because all eyes were on Aleppo. Only one convoy so far in December to Khan Elshih, a Palestinian village south-west of Damascus, 6,000 people got finally relief there, but all the other places have not yet gotten relief in December. November was also a very bad month.

We worked, at one point this year, to reduce the 7 steps, bureaucratic steps that we need to go through, down to 2 steps, to be able to reach areas, it is now back to 10 steps. So 2017 needs to be a year where bureaucrats and armed men and security forces stop preventing humanitarians from reaching the exhausted, hungry, worn-down civilians in this cruel war, we are ready to do our job, let us get access, let us have presence and thereby protection among civilians. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Mr. de Mistura, two questions if I may: The first is: given that Russia and Turkey seem to have taken over the political track to a large extent, how relevant is it that the United States remains as the co-chair of both the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian taskforce, as I understand. Why is the United States particularly with regards to the political transition in the United States, has there been discussion of letting Turkey serve in the place of the United States? And the second question is about, you mentioned today that the priority right now is the cessation of hostilities and stopping of the fighting, for many months you had said that the political transition in Syria was job number one, where is it now? Have you given up on that? Is that no longer an ambition of your mission?

**de Mistura:** Let me start first of all in qualifying this aspect. The other day Sergey Lavrov called John Kerry in order to debrief him about the important, and in my opinion, useful meeting which took place in Moscow. Just to indicate the importance that Russia attaches to make sure that the US and this administration in particular, John Kerry, is au courant. Secondly, no one denies, and we have always been looking for the opportunity of seeing an engagement of those countries who have a direct impact on the conflict in Syria, to be actually talking to each other in a proactive way. So when you see Turkey, who has got 900 kilometers of border with Syria and has been affected so heavily by the conflict in Syria and is now even militarily present in it, the same applies to Russian Federation and Iran, talking to each other, and producing the interest among them to support a cessation of hostilities all over the country, apart from the arrangements that have been facilitated by Turkey and Russia in their own discussions regarding Aleppo, we can only be welcoming that, and I know that was the case of the US.

Just because I have seen in some remarks and comments some question about the role of the US, well let me state, and frankly this is the right time to say: no one, no one, and particularly in the US, should be denying the enormous impact, influence and support that whatever good has happened this year, came also very much from the determination of John Kerry, on behalf of President Obama. We would not have had the Vienna process, which was a decision pushed by John Kerry, and Sergey Lavrov,

but in that order at that time, we would not have the International Syria Support Group, we would not have the two taskforces, we would not have had the February cessation of hostilities, which did work for three months and saved probably from six to eight thousand people. That doesn't mean that there are moments when in fact regional players who are heavily involved like Turkey, Russian Federation and Iran, talk to each other is a good thing.

Now regarding the UN mission in terms of aim, the aim remains a political process that becomes totally inclusive and is referring to [resolution] 2254. Now how to get there, based on realpolitik which is the one we are witnessing every day, that will be something that we will be adjusting along the lines. That's why we have been welcoming the Astana initiatives. We welcome any other initiative in that direction, so that we can wrap it up as we always hoped, with some type of totally inclusive international engagement.

"Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura and UN Senior Advisor, Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 22 Dec 2016. [Indented list added by Standler. Most of the brackets are in the original.]

Copy at [U.N.](#).

**My comments:** Note that the United Nations was *not* involved in the evacuation from eastern Aleppo city. The evacuation was the result of negotiations amongst Russia, Turkey, and the insurgents. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) assisted in the evacuation. The French-sponsored U.N. Security Council Resolution 2328 (which sent observers to Aleppo city) came too late to have an impact. It must have been painful for de Mistura to be irrelevant in the evacuations.

It would have been easier to deliver humanitarian aid to the insurgents and civilians if they had remained in one location (e.g., eastern Aleppo city). Now these people are scattered in many rural locations that will be more difficult for the United Nations to reach. However, there was *no* choice: the insurgents needed to be removed from eastern Aleppo city to end the fighting, and many civilians chose to go to insurgent-controlled areas.

De Mistura praised Kerry for beginning the "Vienna Process", which evolved into the ISSG and created two Task Forces. The Vienna Process also created the Intra-Syrian negotiations during January-April 2016. There is *no* doubt that Kerry was sincerely desiring peace in Syria, and Kerry obviously worked diligently on many days in the Vienna Process, the ISSG, and negotiations with Lavrov about a ceasefire. But the fact remains that all of Kerry's efforts were a failure:

- the ceasefires in February and September 2016 collapsed,
- the Intra-Syrian negotiations died in April 2016 when the HNC walked out,
- the ISSG is dead (*no* meeting since 22 September 2016, when the ISSG failed to resuscitate the ceasefire),
- the Lausanne-format discussions in October and November 2016 produced *no* results, and
- Assad is winning the Syrian civil war (including a recent victory in Aleppo city).

As I write this essay in late December 2016, both the U.S. diplomacy *and* de Mistura seem

increasingly irrelevant in the Syrian civil war. Instead, Russian-Turkish diplomacy seems to be in a dominant position.

There was *no* press conference by de Mistura or Egeland in Geneva on 29 December 2016.

### **23-29 December 2016 Syrians continue to kill each other**

On 23 December 2016, insurgents fired approximately ten artillery shells into Aleppo city, killing between 3 and 6 people. Also, other insurgents poured diesel oil into the water supply for Damascus, making the water undrinkable. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is what is the point of these attacks? Do the insurgents really believe they can recapture Aleppo city? It appears that the insurgents near Aleppo city are trying to kill random civilians. And how does polluting the water supply for the city of Damascus advance the cause of the insurgents? Again, it seems to be indiscriminate attacks on civilians. In all of the condemnations of Assad, diplomats and journalists overlook the fact that the insurgents engage in the same kinds of barbaric misconduct.

On 24 December 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that "122 persons were killed yesterday, including 40 members of the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them". [SOHR](#). It was a grim reminder that the barbarians in Syria continue their war.

On 25 December 2016, [Reuters](#) reported that Russian airstrikes increased in Idlib province and in rural Aleppo province during 24-25 December.

There were no daily press briefings at United Nations headquarters in New York City between Christmas and New Year's Day. On 28 December, the Secretary General's spokesman posted the following press release:

- The UN is deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation in the Wadi Barada area in rural Damascus, where intense fighting has reportedly killed scores of civilians and injured many more in the past days, resulting in the displacement of thousands and a lack of food, water and electricity among the estimated 55,000 residents.
- People in Damascus have been cut off from their main water supply since 22 December and are resorting to purchasing water from private companies, where prices and water quality are unregulated. As a result, the UN is concerned about the risk of waterborne diseases especially among children and the financial strain this will put on families.
- Over 110,000 men, women and children have been recorded as displaced from formerly besieged neighbourhoods of eastern Aleppo since 24 November. This includes almost 75,000 displaced to government-controlled areas in and around Aleppo city, and over 36,000 people in non-State armed group-controlled Idleb and rural western Aleppo. These numbers are expected to rise further as registration continues.

- The most urgent needs in all locations are shelter due to the wintery conditions and protection assistance. Since 24 December, there have been reports of children dying due to the severe cold weather and inadequate shelter conditions.
- The United Nations is aware of the reports of mass graves in eastern Aleppo, but have not been able to confirm their presence. We continue to call for full access to all areas of eastern Aleppo, to assess the situation there and provide assistance to all in need.

**"Highlights Of The United Nations System For Wednesday, 28 December 2016:**  
Humanitarian Situation Worsening, Deeply Concerning In Parts Of Syria: United Nations,"  
[U.N.](#), 28 Dec 2016.

On 29 December, [Reuters](#) reported that insurgents deliberately targeted the Wadi Barada and Ain al-Fija springs that provide 70% of the residents of Damascus with water. Water pumps and other infrastructure were damaged.

### **30-31 December 2016 Nationwide Ceasefire in Syria**

On Thursday, 29 December 2016, Russia, Turkey, Assad, and seven insurgent groups negotiated a nationwide ceasefire in Syria that will begin at midnight on Thursday. Ahrar al-Sham, a large jihadist group, did *not* accept the ceasefire. Turkey insisted on the exclusion of the Kurdish YPG — which is a U.S. ally in the fight against ISIL in Syria — from the ceasefire. Of course, neither Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (i.e., Nusra) nor ISIL are included in the ceasefire. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#)(Ahrar al-Sham).

My comment is that Assad *needs* to retake the Barada Valley area, which supplies water to Damascus. The insurgents ended the water supply to Damascus on 22 December.

The Syrian Arab News Agency reported:

SANA-Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign and Expatriates Minister Walid al-Moallem affirmed that the cessation of hostilities agreement which comes into effect tonight reflects the Syrian state and army's confidence in victory over terrorism, saying it is a real opportunity to reach a political settlement to the crisis in the country.

“The agreement came after victory in Aleppo, it reflects a fact that what follows Aleppo liberation is not the same as what was before, so it is important to have a political investment for victory in Aleppo and the first step is the cessation of hostilities,” Al-Moallem told Syrian TV in an interview broadcast Thursday [29 Dec].

He added that Syria has confidence in the Russian guarantor because it was a partner in the fight against terrorism, and this guarantor affirmed that any violation of the agreement would be confronted and that the factions that didn't sign the agreement are terrorist ones.



“There would be a mechanism for observing any violations or breaches... they will not accept any violations whether through borders or in the regions where terrorists exist,” al-Moallem said.

He added that the agreement doesn't include ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists or any affiliated groups, so there would be duties for the Syrian armed forces to be continued.

“At the same time, there is a real opportunity to reach a political settlement to the crisis in Syria that ends the bloodshed and founds for the future of the country,” al-Moallem affirmed.

"Al-Moallem: Cessation of hostilities agreement reflects the Syrian State's confidence in victory," [SANA](#), 29 Dec 2016. [ellipses in original]

De Mistura — who was *not* involved in negotiating the ceasefire — issued the following statement:

The Special Envoy welcomes the announcement of a nationwide ceasefire between the Government of Syria and armed opposition groups in Syria, to come into effect at 00:00 hours on Friday, 30 December 2016. The Special Envoy notes that a comprehensive cessation of hostilities remains a cornerstone of the framework laid down in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy hopes that the implementation of the agreement will save civilian lives, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance across Syria, and pave the way for productive talks in Astana.

The Special Envoy is of the view that these developments should contribute to inclusive and productive intra-Syrian negotiations to be convened under UN auspices on 8 February 2017.

"Note to Correspondents: Statement attributable to the Spokesperson of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria," [U.N.](#), 29 Dec 2016.

Just two hours after the ceasefire began, there were already reports of violations of the ceasefire. [Reuters](#). But eight hours after the ceasefire began, it appeared that the ceasefire was being observed in most of Syria. [Reuters](#).

I posted a copy of the *draft* ceasefire agreement at [rbs0.com](#) On 31 December 2016, the final agreement has *not* been publicly posted on the Internet.

Liz Sly, the Beirut bureau chief for *The Washington Post*, wrote an insightful article on why this ceasefire was likely to fail.

A Russian-Turkish plan to end the war in Syria got off to a shaky start on Friday [30 Dec] with the partial implementation of a new cease-fire agreement that excludes for now any involvement of the United States.

....

Turkey, which is the other main partner [with Russia] in the process, has far more leverage over the rebels than the United States ever did, above all because it controls the border they depend on for supplies of weaponry.

But continued fighting in the Damascus area marred the first day of the truce, serving as a reminder that the government of President Bashar al-Assad has always been a reluctant party to cease-fire efforts that threaten to interfere with government advances.

....

“It’s not in Assad’s interests for there to be a cease-fire, because Assad is moving slowly and steadily to secure his control over the Damascus countryside,” said Nicholas Heras of the Center for a New American Security.

....

The process therefore seems likely to be beset by many of the same problems that scuttled U.S. efforts to secure a settlement, Heras said. They include the deep divisions within rebel groups, the limits of the influence of the international powers over their allies, the lack of a clearly articulated endgame and the ubiquitous presence of the al-Qaeda affiliate [Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Nusra)] among the more moderate rebels who are party to the deal. “You don’t have the conditions for an enduring cease-fire,” Heras said.

Liz Sly, "Shaky start for new cease-fire launched in Syria without the U.S.," [Washington Post](#), 20:07 GMT, 30 Dec 2016.

About 22 hours after the ceasefire went into effect, the Associated Press reported that the ceasefire was holding.

A nationwide Syrian cease-fire brokered by Russia and Turkey that went into effect at midnight [on 29 Dec] held Friday [30 Dec] despite minor violations, marking a potential breakthrough in a conflict that has disregarded high-level peace initiatives for over five years.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported clashes early Friday between troops and rebels in the central province of Hama and near the capital, Damascus. It said that later in the day a man was killed by sniper fire in eastern suburbs of Damascus, becoming the first fatality since the truce went into effect. The group also reported an aerial attack on the rebel-held Barada Valley near Damascus.

....

Russia said the deal was signed by seven of Syria's major rebel factions, though none of them immediately confirmed it, and one denied signing it.

Bassem Mroue & Suzan Fraser, "Syria's cease-fire holding despite minor violations," [Associated Press](#), 20:10 GMT, 30 Dec 2016.

On Friday night, 30 December, Reuters had a more pessimistic report than the above-quoted Associated Press article.

The truce went into force at midnight but monitors and rebels reported almost immediate clashes, and violence appeared to escalate later on Friday as warplanes bombed areas in the country's northwest, they said.

Asaad Hanna, a political officer in the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a loose alliance of insurgent groups, told Reuters violence had reduced but had not stopped.

"We cannot be optimistic about someone like the Russians who used to kill us for six years ... they are not angels. But we are happy because we are reducing the violence and working to find a solution for the current situation," said Hanna.

....

Moscow is keen to push ahead with peace talks, hosted by its ally Kazakhstan. But the first challenge will be maintaining the truce, which looked shaky on Friday.

Syrian government warplanes carried out nearly 20 raids against rebels in several towns along the provincial boundary between Idlib and Hama, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Clashes between rebel groups and government forces took place overnight in the area, the Observatory and rebel officials said.

Warplanes and helicopters also struck northwest of Damascus in the rebel-held Wadi Barada valley, where government troops and allied forces clashed with rebels, the British-based Observatory reported.

....

An official from the Nour al-Din al-Zinki rebel group said government forces had also tried to advance in southern Aleppo province.

John Davison & Ellen Francis, "Clashes, air raids tarnish Russia and Turkey's Syria truce," [Reuters](#), 20:53 GMT, 30 Dec 2016.

On Saturday, 31 December 2016, Reuters reported the insurgents are threatening to abandon the ceasefire, unless Assad's military stops attacks.

Syrian rebel groups threatened on Saturday to abandon a two-day-old truce if violations continued, and urged the U.N. Security Council not to endorse the deal until the Syrian government and its ally Russia had shown they would respect it.

....

Factions belonging to the Free Syrian Army — a loose alliance of militias excluding more radical Islamist groups — said government forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters had been trying to push rebels back in the Wadi Barada valley, northwest of Damascus.

"Continued violations by the regime and bombardment and attempts to attack areas under the control of the revolutionary factions will make the agreement null and void," said a statement from the rebel groups.

....

FSA factions said in a separate statement later on Friday they would abandon the truce

deal if Russia did not use its influence to halt the Wadi Barada attacks by 8 p.m. (1800 GMT).

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group confirmed clashes in the area, source of most of the capital's water, and also said there had been government shelling in the southern provinces of Quneitra and Deraa.

Russia's Defence Ministry said on Friday [30 Dec] that rebels had violated the truce 12 times in 24 hours. Much of Friday's violence took place along the border between Hama and Idlib provinces in northwest Syria.

John Davison, "Syrian rebels threaten to abandon truce if violations continue," [Reuters](#), 16:21 GMT, 31 Dec 2016.

On 31 December 2016, the Associated Press reported:

Syrian rebels warned on Saturday [31 Dec] that cease-fire violations by pro-government forces threatened to undermine a two-day-old agreement intended to pave the way for talks between the government and the opposition in the new year.

Airstrikes pounded opposition-held villages and towns in the strategically-important Barada Valley outside Damascus, activists said, prompting rebels to threaten to withdraw their compliance with a nationwide truce brokered by Russia and Turkey last week [29 Dec].

Rebels also accused the government of signing a different version of the agreement to the one they signed in the Turkish capital of Ankara, further complicating the latest diplomatic efforts to bring an end to six years of war.

....

But in a statement issued by a coalition of 11 rebel factions, including the powerful Army of Islam group operating in the Damascus countryside, rebels said they could not abide by the cease-fire if the government continued its assault on Barada Valley.

The statement also complained that the government's version of the agreement signed in Ankara last week had deleted "a number of essential and non-negotiable points."

It said the opposition had agreed to a cease-fire encompassing the whole of Syria, without any exceptions to region or faction.

The Barada Valley Media Center said Lebanese Hezbollah militants were firing on villages and towns in the water-rich region as Russian and government aircraft carried out raids for the 10th consecutive day Saturday. The Lebanese militant group is a key ally to President Assad's forces.

The Barada Valley is the primary source of water for the capital and its surrounding region. The government assault has coincided with a severe water shortage in Damascus since Dec. 22. Images from the valley's Media Center indicate its Ain al-Fijeh spring and water processing facility have been destroyed in airstrikes. The

government says rebels spoiled the water source with diesel fuel, forcing it to cut supplies to the capital.

Philip Issa, "Sporadic fighting mars second day of Syria cease-fire," [Associated Press](#), 17:48 GMT, 31 Dec 2016.

At 02:26 GMT on 1 Jan 2017, [Reuters](#) reported: "two rebel officials said air raids around Wadi Barada had stopped just before 8 p.m. [on 31 Dec] and that the ceasefire therefore still held, although clashes in the area were continuing." Reuters also reported: "The British-based [Syrian] Observatory [for Human Rights] said the level of fighting had fallen on Saturday [31 Dec], and the truce was not currently at risk, although one rebel official said it was 'in serious danger'."

On the night of 31 December, the most recent article at the English-language homepage of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights is dated 26 December, which is why I have not cited them.

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### **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.

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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 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, 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."

On Saturday, 1 October 2016 at 10:30, airstrikes closed the M10 hospital in the Sakhour neighborhood of rebel-held eastern Aleppo city, after two patients were killed. It was the third attack on this one hospital during the past week. [SAMS](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 3 October 2016, the Syrian-American Medical Society reported that five airstrikes in one week had permanently closed the M10 hospital in Aleppo.

Today [3 Oct] at approximately 2:30 in the afternoon, another attack targeted SAMS's largest trauma hospital, known as M10, in eastern Aleppo City. The hospital has been attacked more than four times in one week. Today, a bunker buster bomb landed in front of the entrance, killing three maintenance workers and injuring a nurse and ambulance driver. The workers, along with medical staff, had been working to repair damage from the previous attacks, which had forced the hospital out of operation. The hospital has now been completely destroyed. Only five hospitals remain operational in besieged Aleppo to care for a population of 300,000 civilians, including more than 85,000 children. There remain only 29 doctors to treat the overwhelming number of wounded.

"Press Release: Aleppo's Largest Trauma Hospital Completely Destroyed Following Five Attacks in One Week," [SAMS](#); 3 Oct 2016.

My comment is that five attacks in one week on one hospital is strong evidence that the attacks are intentionally targeting that hospital.

Because of repeated airstrikes on hospitals in Syria, a hospital in Hama province was built under 17 meters of rock in the side of a mountain, to protect the hospital from airstrikes. But airstrikes on 2 Oct 2016 stopped the operation of that underground hospital. [Reuters](#) reports:



"massive bombs wrecked the emergency ward near the entrance, caved in interior ceilings, crumbled cement walls and destroyed generators, water tanks and medical equipment, knocking the underground hospital out of service." [UOSSM](#) reports: "One of Syria's most secure hospitals was put out of service today [2 Oct], after two waves of airstrikes caused major damage to the building. The 'Dr. Hasan Al-Araj' or 'Cave Hospital' in rural Hama, supported by UOSSM and other NGOs, is a hospital built inside a cave 50 feet (17 meters) deep inside a mountain. The hospital was directly targeted by two separate waves of airstrikes, one in the afternoon at approximately 3 p.m. and one in the evening, causing massive damage to the emergency room and major damage to other parts of the hospital, resulting in its closure. No casualties were reported, only minor injuries."

Beginning on 2 October 2016, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights suggested that Assad and Russia were targeting hospitals in rebel-controlled eastern Aleppo, to force civilians to move to areas of Aleppo that are controlled by Assad. [SOHR](#)(2 Oct); [SOHR](#)(3 Oct); [SOHR](#)(4 Oct).

On 7 October, [MSF](#) reported that "at least 23 recorded attacks on eastern Aleppo's eight remaining hospitals since the siege began in July [2016]."

On 14 October, there were airstrikes on four hospitals in Aleppo. Two physicians were wounded and an ambulance driver was killed. [MSF](#).

On 18 October, Russian warplanes bombed the al-Iman hospital in Idlib province. After the bombing, this hospital is *no* longer in service. [SOHR](#).

On 15 November, Russia and Assad bombed three hospitals in or near the village of Awaijel, west of Aleppo city. [Reuters](#).

In his 15 November 2016 report on Syria to the U.N. Security Council, Ban said:

[¶15] In blatant disregard for the protected status of medical facilities under international humanitarian law, as further articulated by the Security Council in its resolution 2286 (2016), such facilities continued to be damaged or destroyed by fighting. The United Nations and health partners received credible reports, some of which are being verified, of 25 attacks against medical facilities in October. In total, 13 of the confirmed attacks were against hospitals (6 in Aleppo governorate, 1 in Idlib governorate, 1 in Hama governorate and 3 in Rif Dimashq governorate) and a primary health-care centre in Kafr Zayta, Hama governorate, was struck twice within 72 hours.

....

.....

[¶36] The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. Horrific attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure continue unabated. Schools, hospitals and basic services have been mercilessly pummelled. Violations of the most basic tenets of international human rights and humanitarian law are rife. ....

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/962 (15 Nov 2016).

On 16 November, the Daily Press Briefing at United Nations headquarters in New York City said:

The World Health Organization (WHO) condemns the attacks on five hospitals that took place in Syria between 13 and 15 November, including three hospitals in Western Rural Aleppo and two hospitals in Idlib. At least two people were reportedly killed as a result of the attacks and 19 people were wounded, including six medical staff. Shockingly, such attacks on health in Syria are increasing in both frequency and scale. Throughout 2016, WHO and partners have documented 126 such attacks across the country.

WHO once again demands that all parties in the conflict respect the safety and neutrality of health workers, health facilities and medical supplies. The pattern of attacks indicates that health care is being deliberately targeted in the Syrian conflict.

Such targeting would be a major violation of international law.

Farhan Haq, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 16 Nov 2016.

My comment: 126 attacks in 11 months, and all the United Nations does is whine about war crimes! This is a pathetic response by the United Nations.

On 16 November, the Syrian-American Medical Society reported:

Earlier today [16 Nov], two hospitals, including a children's hospital, and the Central Blood Bank in eastern Aleppo City were reportedly hit by 10 barrel bombs, killing more than 19 people, including children, and injuring many. In the past five days, there have been 13 attacks on medical facilities across northern Syria — that's one attack every 9 hours. Six of these attacks targeted SAMS-supported facilities in the countryside of Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama. At least nine medical personnel, including three doctors, were injured over the course of the weekend, and 5 civilians were killed. Khaled Abu Ibrahim, an ambulance driver was killed by an airstrike in eastern Aleppo earlier this morning. This is an unprecedented volume of attacks on healthcare facilities.

The deliberate targeting of medical facilities and personnel has become the new normal in Syria, with 54 incidents in the past three months, 19 of which occurred in November alone. The 138 attacks since July — occurring at the rate of one attack per day — have been perpetrated by the Syrian government and its ally, Russia.

Half of the hospitals targeted this weekend suspended operations, with some reporting major destruction to their facilities and equipment. Additionally, at least five ambulances were destroyed. A SAMS-supported hospital in the western Aleppo countryside reported that the hospital incurred destruction beyond immediate repair. Most of the attacks were reportedly by air-to-surface missiles. Another two aerial attacks in the Idlib countryside reportedly involved the use of cluster bombs, which are internationally outlawed yet have been used across Syria with impunity.

"Medical Facilities Face an Unprecedented Number of Attacks as the Offensive in Aleppo Escalates," [SAMS](#), 16 Nov 2016.

On 17 November, Médecins San Frontières (MSF) issued a press release:

MSF has been able to confirm that two hospitals in besieged east Aleppo were hit by airstrikes on 16 November, one day after airstrikes were re-launched on the opposition-held area of the city.

The two hospitals which came under attack on 16 November were a children's hospital and a hospital specialising in surgery. That morning, the neighbourhood was reportedly struck more than 50 times. The paediatric hospital that was hit is the only specialised hospital for children in the besieged area of Aleppo. Hospital staff managed to move children, including premature babies, from cots and incubators to the basement of the building to shelter from the bombing.

This means that since the siege began in July, functioning hospitals in east Aleppo have been damaged in 29 separate attacks. Some hospitals have been hit multiple times and have been forced to close as a result. Both hospitals which were hit are supported by MSF, among other organisations.

"Syria: Hospital bombings in east Aleppo force staff to move children and premature babies to basement for shelter," [MSF](#), 17 Nov 2016.

On 18 November, there were more airstrikes on hospitals in eastern Aleppo city, including a pediatric hospital and a neighboring hospital that were struck on 16 November. Babies in incubators were transferred from the pediatric hospital to another hospital. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 19 November 2016, *all* hospitals in eastern Aleppo city were out-of-service, owing to recent airstrikes. [Reuters](#); [MSF](#).

On 20 November 2016, the [Associated Press](#) obtained video of Assad's war criminals bombing a children's hospital in eastern Aleppo city. The head of the children's hospital told the Associated Press: "Currently we have suspended operations as we search for an alternative location for the hospital."

On 25 November 2016, there were airstrikes on two hospitals for women in Syria, one in Idlib province and the other in the eastern part of Aleppo city. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 5 December 2016, insurgents in eastern Aleppo city used artillery to shell a Russian hospital in western Aleppo city. Two Russian nurses were killed. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 14 December 2016, the U.N. Secretary General issued his monthly report for November 2016. At ¶15 of S/2016/1057: "The United Nations and health partners received credible reports of 26 attacks against medical facilities" in Syria during November.

On 19 September 2016, there was an attack on a Syrian Red Crescent humanitarian aid convoy that was unloading at a warehouse in Urum al-Kubra, 15 km west of Aleppo city. On 21 October, an outraged U.N. Secretary General appointed an investigation. (See my previous essays.) On 16 December, the Secretary General received a preliminary report that concluded that either Russia or Assad was responsible for the airstrikes. [U.N.](#) A summary of the report was publicly released on 21 December. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#).

The summary of the report is *not* available at the U.N. website at night on 23 December, but the Associated Press reported:

A U.N. board of inquiry says it received reports that an attack on an aid convoy on the outskirts of Aleppo in September was "highly likely" to have been carried out by the Syrian air force but it was unable to reach a definitive conclusion.

A summary of the board's report released late Wednesday [21 Dec] by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also said its members "did not have evidence to conclude that the incident was a deliberate attack on a humanitarian target."

....

The board received reports that "information existed" the attack was carried out by three Syrian Mi-17 helicopters, "followed by three unnamed fixed-wing aircraft, with a single Russian aircraft also suspected of being involved," the summary said.

"However, the board did not have access to raw data to support these assertions and, in their absence, it was unable to draw a definitive solution," it said.

The board, headed by retired Indian Lt. Gen. Abhijit Guha, visited Syria from Dec. 5-9 but was not allowed to visit the scene of the convoy attack. According to the summary, it used satellite images, over 370 photos and videos, interviews with 16 people who were eyewitnesses or in the vicinity, as well as information from member states, the U.N., Syrians and others to arrive at its findings.

Edith M. Lederer, "UN board: Convoy air attack likely carried out by Syria," [Associated Press](#), 21:16 EST, 21 Dec 2016.

Later I found a copy of the summary of the U.N. report posted by [Politically Speaking](#), the online magazine of the U.N. Department of Political Affairs.

Still later, the United Nations posted a copy of the Secretary General's summary of the board's report, as U.N. Security Council document [S/2016/1093](#).

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**My comments:** Not only are hospital and medical clinic buildings being destroyed, and physicians killed, but also there are *no* deliveries of drugs and medical supplies, because of the failure to allow deliveries of humanitarian aid.

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.

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## U.N. Reports

On 22 Feb 2014, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139, which required parties in Syria to allow humanitarian aid and to stop targeting civilians. Although this Resolution was effective immediately, *all* of the parties in Syria ignored it. The U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, issued monthly Reports on the situation in Syria, beginning March 2014.

A list of all of the Secretary General's reports on Syria can be found at my [webpage](#), which has links to the original reports.

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### 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.

My essay for [October 2016](#) contains my comments on possible prosecution for war crimes.

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).

On 10 October, France publicly announced it was exploring how to refer Assad *and* Russia to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for investigation of alleged war crimes.

Reuters reported:

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry also called for a war crimes investigation last week [7 Oct].

It is unclear how the ICC could proceed given that the court has no jurisdiction for crimes in Syria because it is not a member of the ICC.

It appears the only way for the case to make it to the ICC would be through the U.N. Security Council referral, which has been deadlocked over Syria. Moscow vetoed a French resolution in May 2014 to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC.

John Irish, "France to seek ICC options for war crimes investigation in Aleppo," [Reuters](#), 10:44 GMT, 10 Oct 2016.

See also [Associated Press](#).

At a press conference on 10 October 2016, Ban Ki-moon said he was again urging that the Security Council refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

**QUESTION:** If I could ask you, Secretary-General, you have mentioned violations of international law in Yemen. In the past, you have mentioned possible war crimes in Syria. And yet on both subjects, both wars, the Security Council has no agreement at all. They can't even come up with a statement on Yemen. They can't even agree the words of a statement. What is your message to the Security Council about their duty?

**Secretary General:** I have raised and urged the Security Council already on several times that the situation in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court. I am urging this message again. As far as the Yemen situation is concerned, ....

....

**QUESTION:** My question is about the ICC, about referring the question of Syria to the ICC. Are you willing to use your Article 99 authority and bring this issue to the International Criminal Court?

**Secretary General:** I already answered. I asked and urged the Security Council to bring this matter to the ICC. I am urging again.

"Secretary-General's press encounter," [U.N.](#), 10 Oct 2016.

Again, in his 18 October 2016 report, Ban called for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Recent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including on a United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy in Urum al-Kubra on 19 September, are absolutely and utterly unacceptable. There simply can be no explanation or excuse, no reason or rationale for waging war on civilians, on doctors, on children, on teachers, on humanitarian workers trying to reach those in desperate need of assistance. For the world not to pursue the perpetrators of such brutality would be a grave abdication of duty. It would deny Syrians justice and healing. It would shred the credibility of an international community that claims to be concerned about upholding our common humanity. As I have made clear in recent statements, I am gravely concerned that some of these acts of brutality are war crimes. I am therefore, once again, urging the Security Council to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/873 at ¶36 (18 Oct 2016).

In his cover letter for the October 2016 report on the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria, Ban said:

The use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic is a matter of grave concern. I am alarmed by the weakening taboo against the use of such weapons and by the possibility of their use becoming normalized in this or any conflict, present or future. In order to avoid this intolerable outcome and to ensure that there is no impunity, it is imperative that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable. I look forward to the deliberations by the Security Council on this report.

Ban Ki-moon, "Letter dated 2 November 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council," S/2016/928, 2 Nov 2016.

In his 15 November 2016 report on Syria to the U.N. Security Council, Ban said:

[¶36] The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. Horrific attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure continue unabated. Schools, hospitals and basic services have been mercilessly pummelled. Violations of the most basic tenets of international human rights and humanitarian law are rife. The senseless killing on 26 October of scores of children in a school complex in Has, Idlib governorate, is just one of the many tragic reminders that Syrians are being robbed of their future by this conflict and those fuelling it. If such horrific acts and tactics persist despite global outrage, it is largely because their authors, whether in the corridors of power or in insurgent redoubts, do not fear accountability and justice. They must be proved wrong.

....

[¶38] .... I have repeatedly called for accountability and effective investigations into allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law, including through a referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court.

[¶39] In many of my reports to the Security Council I have made the point that what is most needed in the Syrian Arab Republic is an end to the violence, in Aleppo and elsewhere, and the restoration of a nationwide cessation of hostilities. I have urged those with influence to ensure full and unimpeded humanitarian access to all civilians throughout the country. I regret that in October the Council again failed to discharge its responsibilities to uphold peace and security for the Syrian Arab Republic. ....

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/962 (15 Nov 2016).

On 15 November 2016, Assad began a new series of airstrikes on eastern Aleppo city. On 20 November, the Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary General issued the following statement about Aleppo city:

The Secretary-General condemns the reported intense air assault over the last several days that has killed and maimed scores of Syrian civilians, including children, and left eastern Aleppo without functioning hospitals. He also condemns the indiscriminate shelling that has been reported in areas of Aleppo governorate and the western parts of Aleppo city, including strikes on schools said to have killed a number of children.

The Secretary-General reminds all parties to the conflict that targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure is a war crime. He calls on all sides to immediately cease any such attacks. Those responsible for these and other atrocities in Syria, wherever and wherever they are, must one day be brought to account.

The Secretary-General also calls on all the parties to ensure freedom of movement of civilians and immediate unhindered access to humanitarian assistance.

"Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Syria," [U.N.](#), 20 Nov 2016.

My comment is that this U.N. statement on 20 November will be ignored by everyone in Syria. The Secretary General apparently does *not* understand that Assad is successfully



pursuing a military defeat of insurgents in Aleppo city, and also starving civilians in Aleppo into submission. Why should Assad stop? Assad is slowly winning the battle for Aleppo city. Ban's call to prosecute Assad's government for war crimes at some vague future time again shows the impotence of the United Nations.

On 9 December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on Syria, which is described [above](#). The resolution makes various meaningless demands, including: “ensure accountability for crimes involving violations of international law ... committed in Syria since March 2011, through appropriate, fair and independent investigations and prosecutions at the domestic or international level.” This resolution was the result of a process begun by Canada in October 2016.

On 14 December 2016, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon issued his final monthly report on Syria before the end of his term as Secretary General. In S/2016/1057, he did *not* call for prosecution of war crimes and he did *not* mention referral to the International Criminal Court.

On 21 December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution on Syria, which is described [above](#). This resolution directs the Secretary General to create a team to investigate war crimes in Syria. However, there is still *no* forum in which to try suspected war criminals.

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## Debate in Iraq

### Death Toll in Iraq

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of monthly death tolls announced by United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) during 2013-2015.

I am no longer listing the Iraqi death toll on my HTML webpage, because the statistics from the Iraqi government are seriously incomplete and *not* credible. But, for what it is worth, the United Nations reported 386 Iraqi civilians killed in terrorism, violence, and armed conflict during December 2016. [UNAMI](#).

On 3 December 2016, UNAMI announced it would stop reporting casualty numbers for the Iraqi army, because the Iraqi army wanted to keep those numbers secret to prevent loss of morale. [UNAMI](#); [Associated Press](#). That change in reporting means that future UNAMI casualty numbers will be smaller than past numbers, making it difficult to compare monthly numbers before and after the month of November 2016.

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## Atrocities in Iraq

### Introduction

My previous [essays](#), beginning in June 2014, documented numerous atrocities by Islamic

terrorists:

- ISIL executed hundreds of captured Shiite soldiers in Mosul and Tikrit during 11-14 June 2014.
- ISIL *crucified* eight rebels near Aleppo in Syria on 28 June 2014.
- ISIL threatened genocide of Yazidis in Iraq during August 2014 and 20-22 Oct 2014.
- an attack on a Sunni mosque in Iraq on 22 Aug 2014.
- ISIL executed captured Syrian soldiers in Raqqa, Syria in August 2014.
- Shiite militias in Iraq are murdering innocent Sunnis (reports: 14 Oct 2014, 26 Jan 2015).
- ISIL burned alive al-Kasasbeh, a pilot in the Jordanian Air Force, (see my essay for [Feb 2015](#)).
- ISIL in Libya beheaded 21 Christians on 15 Feb 2015.
- and — beginning with my essay for [Oct 2014](#) — I documented some of the car bombs in Iraq that killed large numbers of people, most commonly in or near Baghdad.

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### December 2016: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

I am suspending this section of my essay in December 2016, partly because of the loss of the search function at the Associated Press *Big Story* website, which search allowed me to find news articles about atrocities in Iraq, and also allowed me to link to archival AP articles. Furthermore, I am swamped with numerous events at the United Nations, evacuations from eastern Aleppo city, and the Islamic terror attack in Berlin.

On 31 December 2016, ISIL had two suicide bombings in one market in central Baghdad, which killed a total of at least 28 people. The Associated Press adds that three more attacks in Baghdad killed an additional 8 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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### Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

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

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## 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.

My essay for [September 2016](#) mentioned that the Iraqi parliament sacked the Finance Minister. That essay also contained my final text on the absence of criminal prosecution for corrupt Iraqi army officers who hired "ghost soldiers", as well as the lack of criminal prosecution of Iraqi army officers who gave orders to flee from Mosul in 2014 and from Ramadi in 2015. Although criminal prosecution had been promised by Prime Minister Abadi, the prosecution never occurred.

My essay for [October 2016](#) mentions that Iraq's Supreme Court ruled it was unconstitutional

for Abadi to abolish three of the highest level positions in the Iraqi government. Also, the Iraqi parliament banned the sale of alcoholic beverages.

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## U.S. combat troops in Iraq

On 1 December 2015, U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, told the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee that the U.S. would send more "special operations forces" to Iraq, to engage ISIL in combat in both Iraq and Syria. My essay for [December 2015](#) reported that the Iraqis quickly objected to foreign combat troops in Iraq, and the U.S. program stalled.

On 13 January 2016, the [Pentagon](#) paraphrased what the U.S. Secretary of Defense told troops: "A specialized expeditionary targeting force announced in December is in place, preparing to work with the Iraqis to begin going after ISIL fighters and commanders". [Reuters](#) reports approximately 200 special operations troops have arrived in Iraq.

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

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

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

On 21 March 2016, the [Washington Post](#) published an article with the headline: "The U.S. military has a lot more people in Iraq than it has been saying". Obama's official upper limit is 3870 personnel, but there are now approximately 5000 personnel in Iraq.

On 18 April 2016, it was announced that the number of U.S. troops in Iraq would be increased by 217, and also that 8 Apache helicopters operated by the U.S. Army would be available to support the Iraqi army. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Reuters reported: "The increase raises the authorized troop level in Iraq to 4,087, not including special operations personnel, some logistics workers and troops on temporary rotations."

On 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](#).

On 20 October 2016, Jason Finan was killed by an ISIL roadside bomb near Mosul. He was the fourth U.S. military person to be killed in combat in Iraq. [CENTCOM](#)(20 Oct); [Associated Press](#)(night of 20 Oct); [Pentagon](#)(21 Oct); [San Diego Union-Tribune](#)(21 Oct); [Washington Post](#)(22 Oct).

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## 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.

On 1 June 2015, Abadi announced the operation to liberate Mosul had begun. But Iraqi soldiers did not arrive at the edge of Mosul until 1 November 2016, 17 months later.

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](#).)
7. On 20 September 2016, the chairman of the U.S.military's Joint Chiefs of Staff publicly said that the Iraqi army would be ready to liberate Mosul in October 2016. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
8. On 4 October 2016, Iraqi prime minister Abadi said "victory is near" in Mosul. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).
9. On 28 November 2016, Iraqi prime minister Abadi told the [Associated Press](#) "The success of liberating a huge area indicates that Daesh does not have the gut now or the motivation to fight as they were doing before." The AP also reported: "Al-Abadi stood by previous pledges that Mosul would be retaken this year, despite increasingly slow progress on the ground." That means the Iraqi army has one month in which to liberate the remaining 90% of Mosul.
10. On 27 December 2016, Abadi said: "the data indicate that eradicating ISIS is possible in a mere three months' period". Note that it took more than two months for Iraq to capture approximately 1/4 of Mosul. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

11.

## December 2016: Mosul

My essays for [October 2016](#) and [November 2016](#) have the previous history. This essay is a spare-time project for me, so I am *not* able to chronicle every detail reported by journalists during the liberation of Mosul.

By the end of November 2016, Mosul was essentially besieged, with civilians desperate for food, water, and fuel. [Reuters](#). On 4 December, the Iraqi government delivered food and water to residents of Mosul, but there was chaos. [Associated Press](#). When the United Nations made their first delivery of food to residents in Mosul, there was a riot on 8 December. [Reuters](#).

On 2 December, residents of Mosul — a city where most people are Sunni muslims — are upset that Iraqi army soldiers are spray painting Shiite religious slogans on walls of buildings in Mosul. [Reuters](#).

On 6 December, the Iraqi army seized the Salam hospital in eastern Mosul. But a fierce counterattack by ISIL forced the Iraqis to withdraw from the hospital on 7 December. ISIL was firing machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) from a building on the hospital campus, so an airstrike by the U.S-led Coalition destroyed the building. [Reuters\(6Dec\)](#); [Reuters\(9Dec\)](#).

On 17 December, [Reuters](#) published a news article with the title: "IS shows no sign of weakening as Mosul battle enters third month".

On 19 December, the [Associated Press](#) published a news article with the title: "Fight for a Mosul district shows Iraqis' slow, painful slog". Advances by the Iraqi army are now slow, and casualties are high.

On 21 December, [Reuters](#) reported: "Elite soldiers have retaken a quarter of the northern city [Mosul], but their advance has been slow and punishing." The Iraqi army is currently in "refit mode", in which they are receiving supplies and reinforcements.

On 29 December 2016, the Iraqi army resumed fighting ISIL in Mosul, after a two-week pause. [CENTCOM](#); [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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## Islamic Public Relations Problem

### Introduction

Beginning in August 2014, I have included this section in my essays. In the USA and Western Europe, many Christians do *not* personally know any Muslim person, so the only time these Christians encounter Muslims is in reading about atrocities of Islamic terrorists.

That is a public relations problem for mainstream Muslims, as the reputation of the Islamic religion is besmirched by Islamic terrorists, who act in the name of their interpretation of Islamic theology.

Then some military leaders and politicians developed the notion that Muslim clerics needed to explain *why* so-called "Islamic terrorism" was unIslamic, to stop the flow of foreigners into Syria to fight for ISIL and Nusra Front, and to stop the financial support of terrorists. This exposure of the erroneous ideology of Islamic terrorism is a different kind of public relations problem from defending mainstream Islam.

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

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.) But beginning in September 2014, Muslim clerics stopped publicly denouncing terrorism. There needs to be a consistent and continuing condemnation of terrorism by Muslim clerics, in part to discourage young Muslims from joining Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

This continuing condemnation by Muslim clerics is *not* something that is nice to have. It is an essential element in fighting against Islamic terrorism. On 3 Dec 2014, sixty nations agreed that "ideological delegitimization" was one of five "lines of effort" that would be used to defeat ISIL, see my essay for [Dec 2014](#). However, this program was quickly ignored by nearly everyone.

In the context of the Islamic terrorist attack in Paris on 7-9 Jan 2015, my [essay](#) explains two different reactions by Christian politicians to Islamic terrorism:

1. Some Christian politicians have condemned Islamic terrorism as unIslamic, but I think it is inappropriate — and *not* credible — for Christians to say what is, or is not, proper Islam. Instead, such distinctions should come from Islamic clerics.
2. Other Christian politicians carefully refuse to make a connection between Islam and terrorism. This may be "politically correct", but it is factually wrong. The facts are obvious, but I will tersely review them anyway. Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

It is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics — and Islamic opinion leaders — consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government.

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## December 2016

It was bad when Assad besieged eastern Aleppo city since early July 2016, pushing civilians into starvation. It was worse when *all* of the hospitals in eastern Aleppo city were put out-of-service by airstrikes. Insurgents refused to allow wounded people to be evacuated from eastern Aleppo city. Finally, when a ceasefire and evacuation were arranged on 13 December, Iranians, Hezbollah, and insurgents sabotaged the ceasefire and interrupted the evacuation. *All* of this misconduct is by Muslims. I would expect Muslim clerics worldwide to be loudly proclaiming that such misconduct is *not* permitted in Islam, but the clerics are silent. Meanwhile, the reputation of Islam is taking a beating, because of the misconduct of various Muslims on all sides of the Syrian civil war and the silence of Muslim clerics.

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### My Proposal

There are genuine cultural differences between mainstream Islam and Christianity. For example, Saudi Arabia does *not* issue driver's licenses to women. Women in Afghanistan wear a burqa. The effort here should *not* be to impose orthodoxy and make mainstream Islam more like Christianity. Instead, the effort here should be for Muslim clerics and other Muslim opinion leaders to cite their holy book and other theological documents to show that it is forbidden for Muslims to:

- invade nations in an attempt to spread an interpretation of Islam on other Muslims
- invade nations in an attempt to spread Islam on non-Muslims
- kill civilians (i.e., noncombatants)
- kill unarmed military prisoners
- deny water, food, and/or medical supplies to besieged cities
- impose a tax (i.e., Jizya) on non-Muslims
- sell captured women as sex slaves

In other words, the focus should be on defeating Islamic terrorism (e.g., Al-Qaeda and ISIL), and *not* on attacking mainstream Islam.

On 8 May 2015, I suggested creating hundreds of small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere to hire Arabs to counter propaganda from ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

I suggest that the U.S. government fund a hundred small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab nations to hire native speakers of Arabic-language to counter ISIL propaganda. Some of these employees could monitor social media and post counter-propaganda. Other employees could design websites that explain why ISIL is violating teachings of Islam, violating Fatwas, and list atrocities committed by ISIL. Using small companies (e.g., 30 employees per company) ensures that they are quickly adaptable to changing conditions. Using native speakers of Arabic adds authenticity. A few thousand Arabs might be able to swamp ISIL's propaganda operation.

There are millions of Arabs who have fled from their homes in Syria and Iraq, because of Islamic terrorists. Many of these refugees are either unemployed or have minimal income. Putting them to work countering propaganda on the Internet from Al-Qaeda or

ISIL would not only help defeat Islamic terrorism, but also provide much needed income to refugees.

Standler, [Syria & Iraq: May 2015](#), 1 June 2015. See end of the section on the Terror Attack in Garland, Texas.

A manager would recognize that there are economies of scale, by having *one* central office to handle payroll, benefits, etc. And I have no problem with consolidating payroll in one central office that serves all of the small companies.

A manager would also recognize cost savings by purchasing equipment and Internet access in large quantities in *one* central office, to provide *all* of the small companies. Whoa! I want managers in each small company to be able to use a credit card to *quickly* purchase whatever they need, without going through a central bureaucracy. There are security advantages when different companies use different computer operating systems, different webbrowsers, different antivirus and firewall software, and different Internet service providers. That way one computer virus, or one denial of service attack, will not affect all of the different companies.

I want the small companies to maximize creativity in attacking ISIL's message, and to maximize productivity. To do that, equipment costs would not be minimized.

I envision these small companies attacking ISIL and Al-Qaeda in four ways:

1. **Collect and display truth about Islamic terrorism:**  
Create and operate websites that
  - A. explain why ISIL and Al-Qaeda are violating teachings of Islam,
  - B. collect and display Fatwas against ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
  - C. list atrocities committed by ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
  - D. hire Muslim clerics to write blogs or essays about how terrorism is evil.Each website to have versions for Arabic, French, and English languages.
2. **Social media:** Monitor social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and refute propaganda. Cite URLs of websites that display truth about Islamic terrorism.
3. Produce press releases that can be published by newspapers or reported by radio/television stations.
4. Use ridicule and parody to humiliate ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

I have seen calls for Internet Service Providers to shut down websites that espouse Islamic terrorism. (See, e.g., plan for Europol to shut down ISIL's social media accounts. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); 22 June 2015.) I am opposed to shutting down websites for three reasons:

1. First, if we shut down a website, the terrorists will move their webpages to a new location, making the shut-down efforts futile. The goal here is *not* to inconvenience Islamic terrorists, but to defeat Islamic terrorists. Shutting down websites only inconveniences the terrorists.

2. Second, shutting down websites that we do not approve is censorship. The terrorists will respond by saying Western Civilization can not win the debate in the marketplace of ideas, so Western Civilization simply censors unapproved messages.
3. Third, as Justice Brandeis famously said: "... the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence." *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 377 (1927) (concurring opinion).

In summary, Western Civilization *can* refute the arguments of Islamic terrorism. Winning the debate is the right way to defeat Islamic terrorism.

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### **Need to Kill *Ideology* of Islamic Terrorism**

The U.S. has killed several influential Islamic terrorists:

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).
- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.
- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).
- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.
- On 15 October 2015, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).

- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December 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 2016, 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 2016, 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](#); [Reuters](#)(10 Oct).
- On 3 October 2016, a U.S. airstrike in Idlib province of Syria killed Sheikh Abu al Faraj al-Masri (real name = Sheikh Ahmad Salamah Mabrouk), an Egyptian terrorist who in the 1980s fought in Afghanistan with Ayman al-Zawahri (the current Al-Qaeda leader). Reuters says the dead Sheikh was a "prominent member" of Nusra Front in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 26 November 2016, a U.S. drone airstrike in Raqqa killed Boubaker el Hakim, an ISIL member who allegedly was involved in planning the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper offices in Paris on 7 Jan 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 4 December 2016, a U.S. drone splatted three ISIL members in Raqqa. The three were allegedly plotting attacks in foreign nations, and two of them had allegedly been involved in the Islamic attacks in Paris on 13 Nov 2015. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Aarabiya](#)(AFP).
- On 26 December 2016, a U.S. airstrike splatted "Abu Jandal al-Kuwaiti, an ISIL gang leader in Raqqah ... near Tabqa Dam, Syria. .... .. his death will degrade ISIL's ability to defend Raqqah and launch external operations against the West." [CENTCOM](#).

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 (maximum of 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.

On 25 September 2016, the Associated Press

Five years after Anwar al-Awlaki was killed by an American drone strike, he keeps inspiring acts of terror.

Investigators say a bomb that rocked New York a week ago, injuring more than two dozen people, was the latest in a long line of incidents in which the attackers were inspired by al-Awlaki, an American imam who became an al-Qaida propagandist.

....

Terror experts say al-Awlaki remains a dangerous inciter of homegrown terror. He spoke American English, and his sermons are widely available online. And since he was killed in Yemen on Sept. 30, 2011, martyred in the eyes of followers, those materials take on an almost mythic quality. His primary message: Muslims are under attack and have a duty to carry out attacks on non-believers at home.

Among the attackers who investigators and terror experts say were inspired by al-Awlaki and his videos: the couple who carried out the San Bernardino, California, shootings, which left 14 people dead in December [2015], and the brothers behind the Boston Marathon bombing, which killed three people and injured more than 260 others in April 2013.

....

The director of the Center on National Security at Fordham Law School, Karen Greenberg, .... noted her center's study of the first 101 Islamic State group cases in federal courts, updated through June, showed more than 25 percent of the cases' court records contained references to al-Awlaki's influence.

Larry Neumeister, "US terror attacks' common denominator: Anwar al-Awlaki," [Associated Press](#), 25 Sep 2016.

The Internet serves as a giant library, which is continuously available to everyone. It should be *no* surprise that the Internet gives ideas an immortality beyond the life of their author. Just as the Internet continues to spread the terrorist messages of Anwar al-Awlaki, the Internet *could* also spread the message of mainstream Islam that condemns terrorism.

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

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

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## ISIL is *not* defeated

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

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but the Iraqis have been unable to begin the liberation of Mosul.
2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.
5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at a Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing

- 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
  12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
  13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
  14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
  15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
  16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
  17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
  18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
  19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
  20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."
  21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
  22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now



- 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
  24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
  25. On 12 June 2016, an Islamic terrorist perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando Florida. The terrorist pledged allegiance to ISIL, although there is *no* evidence that ISIL communicated with him. See my essay for [June 2016](#).
  26. On 16 June 2016, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, testified before a committee of the U.S. Senate that "Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#).
  27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
  28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) ("... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered diners in a restaurant."); [Reuters](#) ("... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State."). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).
  29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
  30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).

31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 85 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
32. On 18, 24, and 26 July 2016, there were ISIL terrorist attacks in Würzburg in Germany, Ansbach in Germany, and Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in France. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
33. On 2 August 2016, [NBC News](#) published an exclusive report of a classified National Counterterrorism Center briefing to the White House, that showed a "fully operational" ISIL had spread to 18 nations during Obama's presidency. ISIL is "aspiring" in six additional nations.
34. On 6 August 2016, an Islamic terrorist — and illegal immigrant from Algeria — used a machete to slash the faces of two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium. See my essay for [August 2016](#).
35. On 20 August 2016, 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. On 10 December 2016, ISIL recaptured Palmyra, Syria. Assad's army had liberated Palmyra from ISIL in March 2016.
37. On 11 December 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated inside St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo, the seat of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, killing 25 people. [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#).
- 38.

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

As of October 15, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$10 billion and the average daily cost is \$12.6 million for 800 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 17 Nov 2016.

These data from 15 October are still current at the Pentagon website on 28 December 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.](#)

In a little noticed request for supplemental funding, on 10 November 2016 the White House asked Congress to approve an additional US\$ 5,800,000,000 for the war in Afghanistan and the war against ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Obama also asked for an additional \$5.8 billion in funding for the State Department's anti-ISIL operations. [The Hill](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#)(AP).

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## **U.S.-led Coalition Airstrikes in Iraq & Syria**

### **Escalation of U.S. Military Engagement in Iraq**

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [list](#) of significant escalations of U.S. Military involvement in Iraq.

Since U.S. airstrikes began in Iraq on 9 August 2014, I have copied the CENTCOM or Pentagon daily press releases into my monthly essays, to chronicle these airstrikes.

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### **1 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Nov. 30, Coalition military forces conducted five strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack aircraft and rocket artillery 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 bomber aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed two oil pump jacks.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike engaged an ISIL headquarters building.

### **Iraq**

- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed four ISIL-held buildings, two vehicles, a VBIED, a mortar system, and a rocket propelled grenade; disabled a bridge; and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit, a mortar system, and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Rawah, two strikes engaged an ISIL VBIED staging area and destroyed a bunker.

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

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

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

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## **2 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 1, Coalition military forces conducted eight strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack aircraft, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted four strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike engaged an ISIL chemical weapon and ammunition storage facility.
- Near Day az Zawr, two strikes destroyed four oil well heads, two oil tanker trucks, an oil tanker trailer, and an oil work-over rig.

### **Iraq**

- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and a weapons cache; destroyed four heavy machine guns, four fighting positions, two VBIEDs, and a rocket propelled grenade; suppressed a tactical unit; and damaged eight supply routes.

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

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

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

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### 3 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 2, Coalition military forces conducted four strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted two strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted two strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

#### Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike destroyed a communications tower.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an artillery system.

#### Iraq

- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed an ISIL-held building; damaged eight supply routes; and suppressed a tactical unit.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed a VBIED factory.

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

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

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

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### 4 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 3, Coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, bomber and fighter 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, rotary and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

## Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, three strikes destroyed three oil wellheads.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed an ISIL-held building and an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed an oil tanker truck, an oil wellhead, and an oil rig.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL artillery piece.

## Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, three strikes disabled a bridge and destroyed five ISIL-held buildings.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed a mortar, a weapons cache, four ISIL-held buildings, a command and control node, an explosives factory, and a heavy machine gun; damaged a land bridge, an ISIL-held building, and 16 supply routes; and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED factory.

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

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

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

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## 5 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 4, Coalition military forces conducted 21 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 10 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

## Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed two oil manifold valves.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike destroyed an ISIL command and control node.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a weapons production facility, a vehicle, and a bulldozer.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two fighting positions, a vehicle, and an oil wellhead.
- Near Manbij, two strikes destroyed an ISIL bulldozer and a VBIED.

## Iraq

- Near Al Asad, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Bashir, one strike destroyed an ISIL-held building and an anti-air artillery system.
- Near Bayji, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a bunker.
- Near Mosul, five strikes engaged four ISIL tactical units; destroyed seven mortar systems, four ISIL-held buildings, two vehicles, a VBIED factory, and a front-end loader; and damaged 31 supply routes.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle and a weapons system.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a building.

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

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

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

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## 6 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 5, Coalition military forces conducted 11 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted five strikes using 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 attack, bomber, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike damaged an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.

### Iraq

- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar system.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed nine ISIL-held buildings, four mortar systems, two VBIEDs, a vehicle, a heavy machine gun, two repeater tower power stations, and a land bridge; damaged a bridge, a front-end loader, 47 roads; and suppressed a tactical unit.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Rawah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an air defense artillery system.

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

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

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

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## **7 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 6, Coalition military forces conducted 18 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 five strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Abu Kamal, two strikes destroyed two oil wellheads and an oil pump jack.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two storage sheds, a vehicle, and a decoy tank.
- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an artillery system, and disabled an ISIL VBIED.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed four wellheads and two oil trucks.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL decoy artillery system.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed a vehicle.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL heavy machine gun fighting position.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a VBIED facility and an excavator, damaged three supply routes, and suppressed two tactical units.
- Near Ramadi, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED and a homemade explosives cache.

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

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

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

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## **8 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 7, Coalition military forces conducted 23 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 11 strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, six strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and a staging area; destroyed a mortar system, a fighting position, and a training camp; and damaged two supply routes.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL road block and damaged four supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed 17 oil tanker trucks and three oil wellheads.
- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Qaim, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL-held buildings.
- Near Baghdad, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL mortar cache.
- Near Mosul, five strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed 11 armored vehicles, five vehicles, four ISIL-held buildings, three VBIEDs, two fighting positions, two mortar systems, a VBIED facility, a front-end loader, and an artillery system; damaged three supply routes, three ISIL-held buildings, and an armored vehicle; and suppressed five tactical units.
- Near Ramadi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Rawah, two strikes destroyed an ISIL bunker and a mounted artillery system.

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

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

Not reported by the Pentagon.

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## **9 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 8, Coalition military forces conducted 12 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 five strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a vehicle,

- a fighting position, and a supply cache.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes damaged five ISIL supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an oil wellhead.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed 168 oil tanker trucks.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bashir, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL rocket system.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed six vehicles, two front-end loaders, two VBIEDs, an armored vehicle, an ISIL command and control facility, a heavy machine gun, and a fighting position; damaged an excavator, and two supply routes; and suppressed a tactical unit.

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

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

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

On 9 December, the [Inherent Resolve](#) Task Force reported that Coalition airstrikes on 8 Dec had destroyed a fleet of 168 trucks that transported ISIL oil in Syria. These airstrikes near Palmyra, Syria reduced ISIL's revenue by about US\$ 2 million/year. Also reported by the [Pentagon](#).

On 19 December, [CENTCOM](#) called the 8 Dec raid on Palmyra "one of its largest airstrikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant". More than 20 aircraft participated in the airstrikes on the oil tanker trucks in Palmyra.

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## **10 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 9, Coalition military forces conducted 20 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery 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, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a chemical storage area and destroyed a VBIED decoy, a command and control node, a communications node, a weapons storage facility, and a fighting position.
- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units and destroyed five fighting positions and two VBIEDs.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an ISIL oil well head.

- Near Manbij, one strike destroyed an ISIL headquarters building.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed 20 oil tanker trucks.

### **Iraq**

- Near Mosul, nine strikes engaged four ISIL tactical units; destroyed seven ISIL-held buildings, five vehicles, 10 fighting positions, eight front-end loaders, three mortar systems, two weapon caches, an excavator, an armored vehicle, and a heavy weapons system; damaged 11 supply routes and two ISIL compounds; and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a front-end loader, two dump trucks, and a tunnel entrance.

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

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

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

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## **11 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 10, Coalition military forces conducted 27 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 nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed two oil pump jacks.
- Near Al Shadaddi, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a communications tower and a vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Ayn Isa, 10 strikes engaged five ISIL tactical units; destroyed an IED, three fighting positions, and a weapons cache; and damaged eight ISIL supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, three strikes destroyed five oil well heads, an oil storage tank, and an oil tanker truck.
- Near Palmyra, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bashir, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a VBIED.
- Near Bayji, two strikes destroyed a cave entrance, four ISIL fighting positions, two weapons caches, and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed seven front-end loaders, three fighting positions, two ISIL-held buildings, two tractor trailer

trucks, a vehicle, a land bridge, and three tunnels; damaged six tunnels; and disabled two bridges.

- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL armored vehicle.

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

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

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

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## 12 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 11, Coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted nine strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted ten strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, rotary and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed seven oil tanker trucks and an oil well head.
- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL chemical weapon facility and an armored vehicle.
- Near Ayn Isa, four strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed eight oil tanker trucks.

### Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle.
- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.
- Near Mosul, five strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed five ISIL-held buildings, two VBIED facilities, three VBIEDs, six fighting positions, three mortar systems, a heavy machine gun, a weapons cache, two front-end loaders, two tactical vehicles, a tunnel, and two pieces of engineering equipment; damaged 15 supply routes; and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed an ISIL dump truck and damaged an artillery system.
- Near Tal Afar, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a tactical vehicle.

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

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

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

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## 13 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 12, Coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted eight strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, four strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units, destroyed a command and control node and damaged five supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, four strikes destroyed four oil well heads and three oil tanker trucks.

### Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed a homemade explosives factory and supply cache.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed two front-end loaders and a VBIED.
- Near Mosul, five strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; destroyed four ISIL vehicles, four mortar systems, four ISIL-held buildings, three rocket-propelled grenades, two VBIED facilities, two front-end loaders, a tunnel, a land bridge, and a supply cache; damaged 13 supply routes, a tunnel and bridge; and suppressed three ISIL tactical units.

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

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

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

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## 14 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 13, Coalition military forces conducted seven strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted two strikes using bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted five strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using attack and fighter aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and damaged six supply routes.

## Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed a bridge.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed three fighting positions, a supply cache, a bunker, a tunnel, a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, and a mortar system; suppressed two mortar systems and a bunker, and damaged six supply routes.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed an ISIL-held building.

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

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

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

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## 15 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 14, Coalition military forces conducted seven strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted five strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted two strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using bomber and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

## Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike damaged six canal bridges and a minor water control network.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes engaged a tactical unit, destroyed a fighting position, and damaged four supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed seven oil tanker trucks, two oil well heads, and an oil workover rig.

## Iraq

- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed a fighting position; suppressed 11 ISIL tactical units and 13 mortar teams.

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

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

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

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## 16 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 15, Coalition military forces conducted 18 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 three strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ayn Isa, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed an ISIL-held building, and damaged two supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes damaged a modular oil refinery and an excavator.
- Near Palmyra, 10 strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed 14 tanks, three artillery systems, two ISIL-held buildings, two tactical vehicles, and an air defense artillery system.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building and a vehicle.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed five ISIL-held buildings, two fighting positions, a heavy machine gun, a bulldozer, and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher; and suppressed three tactical units and a mortar.

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

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

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

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## **17 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 16, Coalition military forces conducted 13 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 three strikes coordinated with and in support of the Government of Iraq using fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft and rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, one strike damaged two bridges and a water control system.
- Near Ayn Isa, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed a fighting position, an ammunition storage facility; and damaged two supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an oil well head.

- Near Palmyra, four strikes destroyed seven aircraft shelters and four weapons storage bunkers.

### **Iraq**

- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed six ISIL-held buildings, two fighting positions, two heavy machine guns, and a front-end loader.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed two bunkers.

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

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

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

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## **18 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 17, Coalition military forces conducted 10 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted three strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an anti-air artillery system, an ammunition storage facility, and two buildings.
- Near Dawr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed two oil well heads.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed a VBIED facility.
- Near Bayji, one strike destroyed an ISIL fighting position, an ISIL-held building, and an ISIL supply boat.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed three tactical vehicles, a supply cache, two front-end loaders, a VBIED, five fighting positions, three ISIL-held buildings, a communications tower, an anti-air artillery system; damaged five ISIL supply routes; and suppressed three mortar teams, a bunker, and an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed an ISIL bunker.

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

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

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

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## 19 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 18, Coalition military forces conducted eight strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted four strikes using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted four strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed three fighting positions.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.

### Iraq

- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed six fighting positions, three ISIL-held buildings, two vehicles, an ISIL headquarters building, a media center, a land bridge, a tunnel, a bunker, a front-end loader, and a mortar system; damaged five supply routes and a tunnel; and suppressed four tactical units and a mortar system.

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

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

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

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## 20 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 19, Coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 11 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, bomber, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, three strikes destroyed one oil tanker truck and damaged an ISIL supply route.
- Near Ayn Isa, five strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two

VBIEDs and an ISIL-held building.

- Near Palmyra, three strikes destroyed an ISIL-held tank, a tactical vehicle, and an artillery piece.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL command control node.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed 11 fighting positions, three ISIL-held buildings, an anti-air artillery piece, and a tunnel; suppressed three ISIL tactical units and a mortar team; and damaged four ISIL supply routes.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed an ISIL-held building.

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

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

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

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## **21 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 20, Coalition military forces conducted 25 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 20 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 and fighter aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, 11 strikes engaged four ISIL tactical units; destroyed three oil storage tanks, two oil well heads, two oil tanker trucks, two fighting positions, two tactical vehicles, a financial storage facility, an artillery system, and a VBIED; and damaged a supply route.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, four strikes destroyed seven oil well heads and an oil pump jack.
- Near Palmyra, five strikes destroyed four ISIL-held tanks, three hardened aircraft shelters, an excavator, and an air defense artillery system.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed two ISIL-held buildings, a tunnel, and a supply cache.
- Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed eight fighting positions, five ISIL-held buildings, two land bridges, a VBIED factory, an artillery system, an anti-air artillery piece, and a weapons storage facility; damaged 11 supply routes; and

- suppressed a mortar team and two ISIL tactical units.
- Near Tal Afar, one strike destroyed a weapons storage facility.

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

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

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

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## 22 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 21, Coalition military forces conducted 16 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 eight strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an oil well head.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike destroyed a decoy tactical vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes destroyed an ISIL mortar system and suppressed a tactical unit.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, two strikes destroyed three oil well heads, three oil tanker trucks, an excavator, and a crane.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed two bunkers and an ISIL artillery system.

### Iraq

- Near Al Qaim, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle.
- Near Bashir, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and a tunnel.
- Near Bayji, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building and a generator.
- Near Haditha, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Kisik, one strike destroyed an ISIL held building.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed six fighting positions, three mortar systems, an ISIL headquarters, a tactical vehicle, a command and control node, a munitions production factory, and an IED factory; damaged seven ISIL supply routes; and suppressed five tactical units and three mortar teams.

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

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

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

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## 23 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 22, Coalition military forces conducted 19 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 nine strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Ar Raqqa, eight strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; destroyed six oil storage tanks, two VBIEDs, and destroyed a technical vehicle; and damaged a supply route, a fighting position, and a truck.
- Near Ayn Isa, one strike damaged three ISIL supply routes.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed an oil well head.

### Iraq

- Near Bashir, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a tactical vehicle.
- Near Haditha, one strike destroyed an ISIL VBIED, two vehicles, and a supply cache.
- Near Mosul, five strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed two vehicles, a building, two tunnels, an ISIL command and control headquarters; and damaged a supply route.
- Near Rawah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit, destroyed a building, and suppressed a VBIED.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL tank.

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

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

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

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## 24 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 23, Coalition military forces conducted 20 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 six strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

## Syria

- Near Raqqah, 13 strikes engaged 10 ISIL tactical units; destroyed seven fighting positions, three vehicles, and a VBIED; and damaged a supply route.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed an ISIL vehicle and damaged an artillery system.

## Iraq

- Near Bayji, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and damaged a tunnel entrance.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed five ISIL-held buildings, four fighting positions, a vehicle, a mortar system, a weapons cache, and a VBIED factory; damaged five supply routes, three bridges, and a tunnel; and suppressed five tactical units and three mortar systems.
- Near Rawah, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a vehicle and a weapons cache.

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

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

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

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## 25 December 2016: airstrikes

On Sunday, 25 December 2016, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Dec. 24, 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 and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

## Syria

- Near Ar Raqqah, nine strikes engaged eight ISIL tactical units, destroyed seven fighting positions and a tunnel and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.

## Iraq

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed four buildings and two tunnels.
- Near Al Qaim, one strike engaged two ISIL VBIED factories and a weapons storage facility.
- Near Mosul, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed four buildings, four heavy machine guns, three tactical vehicles, and three VBIEDs; and suppressed nine mortar teams and two ISIL tactical units.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.  
[Central Command](#), 25 Dec 2016.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 25 Dec 2016.

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## 26 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 25, Coalition military forces conducted 18 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 four strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Al Shadaddi, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two vehicles and a heavy machine gun.
- Near Ar Raqqa, 11 strikes engaged eight ISIL tactical units; destroyed 11 fighting positions, four tactical vehicles, a heavy machine gun, and a VBIED; and damaged a supply route.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.

### Iraq

- Near Mosul, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed six fighting positions, a land bridge, two tactical vehicles, two buildings, a heavy machine gun, and two mortars; suppressed an ISIL tactical unit and two mortar teams; and damaged a supply route.
- Near Rawah, one strike destroyed a front end-loader.
- Near Sinjar, one strike destroyed an ISIL warehouse.

Strike assessments are based on initial reports. All aircraft returned to base safely.  
[Central Command](#), 26 Dec 2016.  
Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 26 Dec 2016.

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## 27 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 26, Coalition military forces conducted 16 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 12 strikes using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq,

Coalition military forces conducted four strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an oil well head.
- Near Ar Raqqa, nine strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; destroyed six VBIEDs, three tactical vehicles, a bridge, a fighting position, and a supply cache.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units and destroyed two fighting positions.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bashir, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed three ISIL-held buildings, an observation post, and a weapons cache.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed four VBIEDS, two VBIED factories, a mortar, an ISIL-held building, a tactical vehicle, and a front-end loader; damaged an ISIL-held building, a tunnel, and eight ISIL supply routes; disabled a bridge; and suppressed a mortar and ISIL tactical unit.

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

[Central Command](#), 27 Dec 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 27 Dec 2016.

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## **28 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 27, Coalition military forces conducted 19 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 15 strikes using attack and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted four strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a tactical vehicle.
- Near Ar Raqqa, 13 strikes engaged seven ISIL tactical units; destroyed 11 fighting positions, a surface-to-air missile truck and a radar truck, a heavy machine gun, and a mortar system; damaged two supply routes; and suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Dayr Az Zawr, one strike destroyed two supply caches.

### **Iraq**

- Near Kirkuk, one strike engaged an ISL tactical unit and destroyed a tractor.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed four mortar systems, two VBIED factories, an unmanned aerial vehicle facility, two front-end loaders, an ISIL tactical vehicle, and an ISIL-held building; damaged a front-end loader and a VBIED; disabled two bridges; and suppressed two ISIL tactical units and a mortar system.

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

[Central Command](#), 28 Dec 2016.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 28 Dec 2016.

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## 29 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 28, Coalition military forces conducted 11 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 three strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, fighter, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### Syria

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an oil well head.
- Near Ar Raqqa, six strikes engaged five ISIL tactical units; destroyed a fighting position, a heavy machine gun, a mortar system, and a vehicle; and disabled a bridge.
- Near Palmyra, one strike destroyed an ISIL-held tank.

### Iraq

- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed seven front-end loaders, four command and control nodes, two land bridges, a VBIED factory, a vehicle, and a steam roller; and damaged 24 supply routes.

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

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

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

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## 30 December 2016: airstrikes

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

On Dec. 29, Coalition military forces conducted 18 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 eight strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Abu Kamal, three strikes destroyed three oil well heads and a oil tanker truck.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike suppressed an ISIL tactical unit.
- Near Ar Raqqa, two strikes engaged two ISIL tactical units; destroyed a command and control node, a weapons cache, and a fighting position.
- Near Manbij, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position.
- Near Palmyra, three strikes destroyed three ISIL-held artillery systems, a crane, a heavy machine gun, and a tank.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Al Qaim, three strikes destroyed a VBIED facility, an IED factory, and an ISIL-held building.
- Near Mosul four strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit; destroyed 11 ISIL-held buildings, five supply caches, three tactical vehicles, two mortar systems, two fighting positions, two VBIEDs, a tunnel, an observation post, a research lab, a command and control node, an up-armored VBIED, two barges, and two artillery pieces; suppressed five mortar teams; and damaged 20 supply routes and two repeater towers.

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

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

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

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## **31 December 2016: airstrikes**

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

On Dec. 30, Coalition military forces conducted 28 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 21 strikes using attack, bomber, and fighter aircraft against ISIL targets. Additionally in Iraq, Coalition military forces conducted seven strikes coordinated with and in support of the government of Iraq using attack, bomber, fighter, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft as well as rocket artillery against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Ar Raqqa, 17 strikes engaged 14 ISIL tactical units; destroyed 12 fighting positions, three oil storage tanks, a VBIED, and an oil well head; damaged two supply routes; and suppressed a tactical unit.
- Near At Tanf, four strikes destroyed two VBIEDs.

### **Iraq**

- Near Al Huwayjah, one strike destroyed an ISIL-held building.
- Near Haditha, one strike damaged a fighting position.
- Near Mosul, four strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; destroyed five fighting positions, three mortar systems, three ISIL-held buildings, a vehicle, a crane, a weapons factory, a VBIED, and a mortar position; damaged 12 supply routes; and suppressed four mortar positions.
- Near Qayyarah, one strike destroyed an ISIL weapons storage facility.

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

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

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 31 Dec 2016.

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## **1 January 2017: airstrikes**

On Sunday, 1 January 2017, the U.S. Central Command reported more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria:

On Dec. 31, Coalition military forces conducted 28 strikes against ISIL terrorists in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, Coalition military forces conducted 19 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, rotary, and remotely piloted aircraft against ISIL targets.

### **Syria**

- Near Abu Kamal, one strike destroyed an oil tanker truck.
- Near Al Shadaddi, one strike destroyed a VBIED.
- Near Ar Raqqa, 15 strikes engaged nine ISIL tactical units; destroyed four VBIEDs, eight fighting positions, two heavy machine guns, and a supply route; and damaged an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Ayn Isa, two strikes engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position and an anti-air artillery piece.

### **Iraq**

- Near Bayji, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and destroyed a rocket rail.
- Near Haditha, two strikes damaged four ISIL defensive berms.
- Near Kisik, one strike engaged an ISIL tactical unit and an ISIL tactical vehicle.
- Near Mosul, three strikes engaged three ISIL tactical units; destroyed three front-end loaders, a bulldozer, five mortars, two supply caches, a truck, inoperable

coalition equipment, two VBIEDs, and a barge; suppressed three ISIL mortar teams; and damaged 19 ISIL supply routes and a defensive berm.

- Near Tal Afar, two strikes destroyed an ISIL highway checkpoint and a VBIED factory.

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

[Central Command](#), 1 Jan 2017.

Also posted at the [Pentagon](#), 1 Jan 2017.

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Because I can no longer justify the time that I spend to copy these press releases about airstrikes and format them, this is the end of my chronicling U.S.-coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria.

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## **Terrorism & Migration in Europe**

### **Islamic Terrorism in Europe**

History in my previous essays:

- My [first essay](#) tersely — and incompletely — recounts a history of Islamic terrorism from 1972 to 2013.
- My essay for [June 2014](#) mentions the Islamic terrorist attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels on 24 May 2014, and an attack in France on March 2012.
- My essay for [Jan 2015](#) describes the Islamic terrorist attacks in France on 7-9 January.
- My essay for [Feb 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Copenhagen on 14 Feb.
- My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions a 15 y old girl in Denmark who stabbed her mother to death after repeatedly watching on the Internet (YouTube) videos of ISIL executions with her 29 y old boyfriend who was a so-called "refugee" from Iraq. That essay also mentions an Iraqi terrorist in Berlin who was killed by police in an attack on 17 Sep 2015.
- My essay for [November 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Paris that killed 130 people on 13 Nov 2015.
- My essay for [December 2015](#) describes an Islamic terror attack in San Bernardino, California on 2 Dec 2015.
- My essay for [January 2016](#) describes Muslim immigrants running amok in Cologne, Hamburg, and at least five other European cities on the night of 31 Dec 2015.

My essay for [March 2016](#) describes ISIL terror attacks on the airport and subway in Brussels that killed 32 people on 22 March 2016.

- 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.
- My essay for [September 2016](#) describes how (1) French police arrested a group of women before they could detonate a bomb, (2) series of bombings in New Jersey and New York City, and (3) an attack in St. Cloud, Minnesota.
- My essay for [October 2016](#) describes the arrest in Germany of an immigrant from Syria, before he could detonate a bomb at an airport in Berlin. The suspect committed suicide in jail.
- My essay for [November 2016](#) describes an Islamic immigrant from Somalia who wounded 11 people at Ohio State University, before a policeman killed the immigrant.

Some of these previous essays also mention concerns by governments in Europe and Russia that Islamic terrorists will return from Syria and engage in terrorism in Europe and Russia.

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## **Islamic Migration into Europe numbers**

One of the major news stories during September 2015 was the flood of approximately 100,000 migrants into Europe, mostly from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

During the migration crisis in September 2015, accurate numbers were sparse. Instead, politicians and journalists spoke of "thousands" per day, "tens of thousands" per week, and at least a hundred thousand per month. On 7 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "An Austrian Interior Ministry official says nearly 200,000 migrants transited Austria" during September 2015. The actual number was higher, because some migrants boarded trains outside of Austria and then traveled through Austria. Also the [Associated Press](#) reported: "German authorities say 164,000" migrants arrived in Germany during September 2015.

On 7 December 2015, the German government announced that a total of 965,000 migrants had registered in Germany during the first 11 months of 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 6 January 2016, the German government announced that a total of 1,091,894 migrants had registered in Germany during the 2015 year. Of these, 428,468 (39%) were from Syria.

[Associated Press](#).

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

### **disenchantment & failure of assimilation**

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

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

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

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

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

On 14 April 2016, Germany demanded that immigrants learn the German language *and* seek employment, or the immigrants would lose welfare benefits. [Reuters](#). Learning the German

language is difficult for native speakers of English, and must be harder for native speakers of Arabic that has a different alphabet.

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](#).

On 24 October 2016, the French government began demolishing the shanty-town migrant camp in Calais. The approximately 6500 immigrants will be moved to other locations in France. Reuters reported that some immigrants threw rocks at police. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 26 October, the last of the immigrants were bussed out of Calais. Some of the immigrants set fire to part of the shanty town. The Associated Press reports that four immigrants from Afghanistan were arrested for arson. [Reuters](#)(fire); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

### 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](#).) 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. The new election was held on 4 Dec 2016, and the anti-immigrant candidate lost again, with 46.2% of

the vote. [ÖRF](#).

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](#).

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### 19 Dec 2016: Islamic Attack in Berlin

Details are sketchy, and the two most knowledgeable people are dead. But here is a terse summary of what happened.

A Polish truck driver picked up a 20-ton load of steel in Italy and drove to Berlin, where the steel was to be delivered. (While journalists called it only a "truck", photographs showed it was what Americans would call a "semi-trailer truck" — it was a *large* truck.) In Berlin, sometime around 15:45 German time on 19 December, an Islamic terrorist hijacked the truck and stabbed the Polish driver, who fought the terrorist. The terrorist also shot the Polish driver with a pistol. The terrorist then drove the heavy truck 80 meters into a crowd of pedestrians at a Christmas market in downtown Berlin at 20:00 German time on 19 December. To be clear, the Polish driver was *not* in control of the truck during the attack, although his mortally wounded body was inside the cab of the truck. The terrorist jumped out of the cab of the truck and fled on foot. A total of 12 people died (including the Polish driver) and 48 people were injured in the attack (later raised to 56 wounded).

At least one witness to the attack followed the terrorist, but the witness lost sight of the terrorist, as the terrorist fled into the crowd. Police initially arrested an innocent Pakistani migrant, who was confused with the terrorist. Because the pistol used to shoot the Polish driver was not been found on 19-20 December, police assume the terrorist is armed and dangerous.

On the afternoon (in Germany) on 21 December, police announced that they were seeking Anis Amri for the terror attack. He is a 24 year old citizen of Tunisia. He committed armed robbery in Tunisia, and in April 2011 Amri unlawfully fled to Italy to avoid prison in Tunisia. While he was an illegal immigrant in Italy, he committed more crimes, for which he spent 3½ years in an Italian prison. Since July 2015, Amri has been in Germany. Amri is known to have six different aliases. Both Italy and Germany attempted to return Amri to Tunisia, but he did not have a passport or identity papers, and the Tunisian government denied Amri is a citizen of Tunisia. Ironically, Amri's Tunisian passport finally arrived in Germany on

21 December, the day the Germans issued an arrest warrant for him.

Amri died in a gun battle with police at a railroad station in a suburb of Milan, Italy at 03:00 on 23 December.

### Chronological Reports

On the evening of 19 December 2016, Deutsche Press Agentur posted a terse initial report:  
A truck has rammed into several people on a pavement in Berlin, leaving at least one person dead and several injured, in what police tell dpa they are treating as an attack.

Numerous destroyed Christmas market stands could be seen near the Kaiser-Wilhelm Memorial Church in western Berlin, according to footage on the Facebook page of German daily *Berliner Morgenpost*.

Multiple police cars were at the scene.

"Truck rams crowds at Berlin Christmas market in suspected attack," [dpa](#), 19:53 GMT, 19 Dec 2016.

At 21:25 GMT, the Associated Press reported that at least 9 people died in the attack on the Christmas market. The driver of the truck "was arrested nearby". [Associated Press](#).

At 22:30 GMT on 19 December, I looked at the websites of several German-language newspapers in Berlin. While they mentioned the federal police (which investigates terrorism cases) had taken command of the investigation, none of the newspapers mentioned *Islamic* terrorism.

At 05:19 GMT on 20 December, the [Associated Press](#) reported there were 12 dead and 48 wounded in what Berlin police are calling an "intentional" act. The identity of the driver has *not* been publicly released.

At 07:10 GMT on 20 December, Reuters reported:

German media cited local security sources as saying that there was evidence suggesting the arrested suspect was from Afghanistan or Pakistan and had entered Germany in February as a refugee.

Local broadcaster rbb cited security sources as saying the arrested truck driver came to Germany via Passau, a city on the Austrian border, on Dec. 31, 2015. It cited the sources as saying the man was born on Jan. 1, 1993 in Pakistan and was already known to police for minor offences.

....

The incident evoked memories of an attack in Nice, France in July [2016] when a Tunisian-born man drove a 19-tonne truck along the beach front, mowing down people who had gathered to watch the fireworks on Bastille Day, killing 86 people. That attack was claimed by Islamic State.

Michelle Martin, "Berlin police assume truck was deliberately driven into Christmas market," [Reuters](#), 07:10 GMT, 20 Dec 2016.

At 13:00 GMT on 20 December, police were uncertain whether the arrested man was actually the driver of the truck. The arrested man denies any involvement. [dpa](#); [Deutsche Welle](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

At 14:00 GMT on 20 December, [Reuters](#) reported the truck was apparently hijacked sometime around 15:45 German time yesterday, and the attack happened at 20:00 German time yesterday. The truck belonged to a Polish company and was scheduled to make a delivery in Berlin. The attacker apparently shot the Polish driver, who died at the scene of the attack.

At night of 20 December, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Berlin. The Associated Press reported:

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility Tuesday [20 Dec] for a truck attack on a crowded Berlin Christmas market that left 12 people dead and nearly 50 injured, as German security forces hunted for the perpetrator after releasing a man from custody for lack of evidence.

IS said in a statement from its Amaq news agency that the attacker "in Berlin is a soldier of the Islamic State and carried out the attack in response to calls for targeting citizens of the Crusader coalition."

....

Witnesses saw only one man flee from the truck after it rammed into the crowd at the Christmas market, smashing wooden stalls and traveling 60 to 80 meters (200 to 260 feet) before coming to a halt.

Six of those killed have been identified as Germans, and a man found shot and killed in the truck's passenger seat was Polish. The other five people killed have not yet been identified. Twenty-five people remained hospitalized, 14 with serious injuries.

Kirsten Grieshaber & Frank Jordans, "Islamic State Claims Responsibility For Berlin Market Attack," [Associated Press](#), 20:05 GMT, 20 Dec 2016.

Reuters also reported that ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack in Berlin:

Islamic State claimed responsibility the attack, saying the perpetrator was a "soldier" of the militant group. "He executed the operation in response to calls to target nationals of the coalition countries," its AMAQ news agency said.

Michelle Martin & Sabine Siebold, "Germany frees suspect in market attack, says perpetrator maybe still at large," [Reuters](#), 20:13 GMT, 20 Dec 2016.

Also see [Reuters](#) at 19:56 GMT on 20 December.

On the afternoon (in Germany) of 21 December 2016, journalists reported that German police had launched a Europe-wide manhunt for Anis Amri, an Islamic terrorist who was born in Tunisia and denied asylum in Germany in July 2016. His wallet was found under the driver's seat, in the cab of the truck that was used to attack the Christmas market. The Tunisian man

has used at least 6 names. [Deutsche Welle](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(blog); [Associated Press](#).

At 23:30 GMT on 21 December, [dpa](#) reported: "Fourteen of those [48] injured in the carnage remain in life-threatening condition."

Around noon GMT on 22 December, journalists reported that police had found Amri's fingerprints on the driver's door and steering wheel of the truck, which is strong evidence that Amri was the terrorist driver. [Deutsche Welle](#)(early); [Deutsche Welle](#)(evening); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 22 December, the Associated Press reported on the wounded in hospitals:  
Berlin's state government says 12 people are still being treated for severe injuries after Monday night's truck attack on a Christmas market, and that an unspecified number of them are still in critical condition.

Another 14 people with less serious injuries were also still hospitalized, while 30 others have been discharged.

Twelve people were killed in the attack.

Berlin's state health ministry on Thursday [22 Dec] raised the number of market attack victims treated in Berlin hospitals to 56, up from 48. It said some victims had reached hospitals on their own after the attack.

"The Latest ...," [Associated Press](#), 16:25 GMT, 22 Dec 2016.

On Friday, 23 December, the Associated Press reported that Amri died in a gunfight with police at a suburban Milan railroad station.

The Tunisian man suspected in a deadly attack on a Christmas market in Berlin was killed early Friday [23 Dec] in a shootout with police in Milan during a routine patrol outside a train station, ending a Europe-wide manhunt.

Italian police said Anis Amri traveled from Germany through France and into Italy after Monday [19 Dec] night's truck attack in Berlin, at least some of it by train. French officials refused to comment on his passage through France, which has increased surveillance on trains after both recent French attacks and the one in Germany.

....

Milan, Rome and other cities have been on heightened alert, with increased surveillance and police patrols. Italian officials stressed that the young officers who stopped Amri didn't suspect he was the Berlin attacker, but rather grew suspicious because he was a North African man, alone outside a deserted train station at 3 a.m.

Amri, 24, who had spent time in prison in Italy, was stopped by two officers during a routine patrol in the Sesto San Giovanni neighborhood of Milan early Friday. He pulled a gun from his backpack after being asked to show his identification and was killed in an ensuing shootout.

One of the officers, Christian Movio, 35, was shot in the right shoulder and had surgery for what doctors said was a superficial wound. Movio's 29-year-old partner, Luca Scata, fatally shot Amri in the chest.

[Amri] had no ID, no phone and only a pocket knife on him, as well as the loaded .22-caliber pistol he used to shoot Movio, police said.

Colleen Barry & Nicole Winfield, "Berlin Truck Attack Suspect Killed In Milan Police Shootout," [Associated Press](#), 17:17 GMT, 23 Dec 2016.

The final version of this news article is posted at [AP](#).

### Citations to More News Articles

- "Berlin on high alert as search for Christmas market attacker resumes," [Washington Post](#), 20:19 GMT, 20 Dec 2016.
- "Berlin Christmas market attack: What we know so far," [The Telegraph](#), 08:17 GMT, 21 Dec 2016.
- "Berlin Christmas market attack killer still on the loose, say police," [The Guardian](#), 16:12 GMT, 21 Dec 2016.
- "Tunisian suspect in Berlin Christmas market attack faced past German terror probe, official says," [Washington Post](#), 18:49 GMT, 21 Dec 2016.
- "Suspect in deadly Berlin attack is latest Tunisian jihadi," [Associated Press](#), 22:16 GMT, 21 Dec 2016.
- "Attack Sets Off Hunt for Tunisian Who Had Slipped Germany's Grasp," [New York Times](#), 21 Dec 2016.
- "How Berlin attack suspect Anis Amri made his way through Europe," [dpa](#), 16:00 GMT, 22 Dec 2016.
- "Anis Amri, Suspect in the Berlin Truck Attack: What We Know," [New York Times](#), 22 Dec 2016.
- "Berlin Christmas market attack suspect: Who was Anis Amri?," [CNN](#), 12:05 GMT, 23 Dec 2016.
- "Berlin attack suspect 'pledged allegiance to Isil', as questions raised over how he travelled 1,000 miles across Europe before he was shot dead by police in Milan," [The Telegraph](#), 15:06 GMT, 23 Dec 2016.
- "ISIS-linked news agency releases video of Berlin attacker swearing allegiance to the radical group," [Washington Post](#), 19:50 GMT, 23 Dec 2016. (In the video that was apparently filmed in Berlin, Amri says: "God willing, we will slaughter you like pigs.

To my brothers everywhere, fight for the sake of Allah. Protect our religion.")

- "Killed Berlin suspect vowed revenge in Islamic State video," [dpa](#), 20:00 GMT, 23 Dec 2016.
- "Anis Amri: a well-trodden trail of jihad," [Deutsche Welle](#), 23 Dec 2016.
- "Investigators seek supply network for slain Berlin attacker," [Associated Press](#), 19:40 GMT, 24 Dec 2016.
- "Polish truck driver shot long before Berlin attack - report," [Reuters](#), 16:32 GMT, 27 Dec 2016. ("A Polish truck driver whose hijacked vehicle was used to crash into a Berlin Christmas market was shot in the head several hours before the attack and could not have attempted to foil it as previously thought, Bild newspaper reported....")
- "Islamic State supporters call for more holiday attacks in Europe," [Reuters](#), 22:12 GMT, 28 Dec 2016.
- "Tunisian man released in Berlin Christmas attack case," [Deutsche Welle](#), 29 Dec 2016. (German prosecutor Frauke Köhler "also confirmed that a video in which Amri is seen pledging allegiance to Islamic State was authentic.")
- "Berlin police detain Anis Amri contact on fraud charges," [Deutsche Welle](#), 4 Jan 2017. ("Italian police confirmed on Wednesday [4 Jan] that a gun used to kill the Polish driver of the truck used in the Christmas market attacked was the same as one used in a shoot-out with police in Milan.")
- "Berlin truck attacker used at least 14 names — German police," [Reuters](#), 18:30 GMT, 5 Jan 2017. (Anis Amri "... had lived under at least 14 different names in Germany, [Dieter Schuermann] a regional police chief said on Thursday [5 Jan] ....")

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## 23 Dec 2016: Arrests in Australia

On 23 December 2016, seven Muslims were arrested in Melbourne, Australia on suspicion of plotting attacks in Australia on Christmas day. They allegedly intended to attack several landmarks in Melbourne, including Federation Square, St Paul's Cathedral, and Flinders Street Station. The planned attacks involved explosives, knives, and firearms. Four of the seven suspects were born in Australia, three are immigrants. Two of the seven were released without being charged in criminal court. [SMH](#) (12:38, 23 Dec).

[SMH](#) (17:03, 23 Dec)

[ABC](#) (23 Dec)

[Herald-Sun](#)(24 Dec).

Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton said those arrested were "self-radicalised, but certainly inspired by ISIS propaganda". [Herald-Sun](#) (23 Dec)

Andrew Bolt's 22 December commentary in Melbourne's [Herald-Sun](#) newspaper said about the arrested terror suspects: "To the surprise of nobody, they were Muslim."

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## Conclusions

During September 2013, I began chronicling the history of chemical weapons in Syria and the futile peace negotiations. I now see three distinct intervals:

1. Before 10 June 2014, when removal of Assad was the simplistic solution to the Syrian civil war.
2. The capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL on 10 June 2014 — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — changed the Western view of the insurgency in Syria. Suddenly, the USA and Western Europe focused on defeating ISIL.
3. In March 2016 a "cessation of hostilities" had greatly reduced deaths in Syria, but the opposition delegation to peace negotiations in Geneva was making numerous demands that scuttled the negotiations. Nonetheless, there was finally a glimmer of hope for an end to the Syrian civil war. 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 attempted 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.

On 18 October 2016 Russia unilaterally suspended airstrikes on Aleppo, and Russia/Syria had a unilateral ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-21-22 October 2016, to allow Nusra to depart from

Aleppo, and to evacuate wounded from eastern Aleppo. This wonderful opportunity was another glimmer of hope, but was quickly rejected by insurgents in eastern Aleppo. Nusra refused to depart from Aleppo, which frustrated Russia's main reason for offering the ceasefire. The insurgents refused to allow wounded to leave eastern Aleppo, and the insurgents refused to allow civilians to leave eastern Aleppo. And finally, the insurgents repeatedly violated the three-day ceasefire. History shows the insurgents *again* prevented peace in Syria.

Finally, on 13 Dec 2016, the insurgents in Aleppo agreed to depart. After many violations of the agreement in Aleppo, the evacuation was completed on the night of 22 December 2016.

### **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](http://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.

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## Conclusion for Syria

Obama needs to end his obsession with deposing Assad, and begin coordinating with Assad a

strategy to defeat ISIL in both Syria and Iraq.

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 312,600 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than four million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

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

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## Conclusion for Iraq

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

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

1. The Iraqi government is corrupt. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [January 2016](#))
2. The Iraqi government is dysfunctional. During July-October 2014, the Iraqi Parliament *slowly* formed a new government — during an existential crisis. My essays for July 2014 through February 2015 summarized the infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. (See the summary for July through October 2014 in my [webpage](#).)
3. The Iraqi army was unable to stop the ISIL invasion during the first six months of 2014. In June 2014, the Iraqi army was exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout in Ramadi.
4. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable or unwilling to prosecute:
  - A. corrupt politicians or corrupt government officials,
  - B. army officers who hired ghost soldiers,
  - C. desertion at Mosul on 10 June 2014,
  - D. fleeing from Ramadi on 17 May 2015, and
  - E. terrorists who kill innocent civilians in frequent bombings in or near Baghdad.(See my essay for [September 2016](#).)
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.

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## Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism

Beginning in August 2014, my essays on Syria and Iraq have had a section titled "[Islamic Public Relations Problem](#)", in which I have chronicled reaction by Muslim clerics and the need for these clerics to *continually* condemn Islamic terrorism.

Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

These facts clearly show that an interpretation of Islam is central to the ideology of the terrorists who have infested Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, .... The problem is "Islamic terrorism" — the *use of terrorism* to further goals that are justified by an interpretation of the Islamic religion.

To defeat the *idea* of Islamic terrorism, and to stop young Muslims from joining terrorist organizations, it is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism in the name of Islam, and especially condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government. Instead, Muslim clerics have only sporadically condemned Islamic terrorism, typically after some atrocity committed by Islamic terrorists.

Instead of writing only in the Arabic language, websites of major Islamic organizations (e.g., Al-Azhar University in Egypt) should also post webpages in French and English languages to discourage Europeans and non-Arabs from joining Islamic terrorist organizations.

Just to be clear, Western Civilization is *not* at war with *all* Muslims. I suggest that Western Civilization — *and* also mainstream Muslims everywhere — *should* be at war with Islamic terrorists. Indeed, mainstream Muslims are most affected by Islamic terrorism, as death tolls in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq show.

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## 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.

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This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria40.pdf>  
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to historical documents.

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