

Syria & Iraq: January 2017

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 38 essays on Syria. That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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 webpage for the [Spokesman](#) of the United Nations Secretary General,
- and *The Washington Post*

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

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

Terse Summary of Syria Fighters

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

1. The so-called "rebels" are moderates, many of whom are part of the Free Syrian Army. In 2011, these moderates wanted to continue a secular government in Syria, but without Assad.
2. The "jihadists" want to impose an Islamic government (i.e., Sharia law) on Syria. The Islamic Front is a large group of jihadists, formed on 22 November 2013. Ahrar al-Sham is one of the major organizations in the Islamic Front.
3. And two Al-Qaeda affiliated groups fighting in Syria:
 - a. the Nusra Front, which wants to establish an Islamic emirate in Syria. On 28 July 2016, Nusra voluntarily ended its affiliation with Al-Qaeda, but Nusra remains Al-Qaeda inspired. After July 2016, Nusra calls itself "Jabhat Fatah al-Sham".
 - b. the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) — also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). On 3 Feb 2014, Al-Qaeda repudiated ISIL, but ISIL remains Al-Qaeda inspired. ISIL's goal since June 2014 is to establish a caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

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

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

On 28 July 2016, Nusra voluntarily ended its affiliation with Al-Qaeda. [Reuters](#) reported Nusra's leader said the change was made: "to remove the excuse used by the international community — spearheaded by America and Russia — to bombard and displace Muslims in the Levant: that they are targeting the Nusra Front which is associated with al Qaeda". Henceforth, Nusra Front calls itself "Jabhat Fatah al-Sham". See also [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 28 July. Despite the change of name and loss of the Al-Qaeda franchise, Nusra is the same group of terrorists with the same ideology and same goals as before the change. The U.S. State Department spokesman, John Kirby, [said](#) "... we judge any organization, including [Nusra], much more by its actions, its ideology, its goals. Affiliations may be a factor, but

ultimately it's their actions, ideology, and goals that matter the most. we certainly see no reason to believe that their actions or their objectives are any different, and they are still considered a foreign terrorist organization."

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

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

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

Government

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

Chemical Weapons

Beginning in October 2013, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued monthly reports on chemical weapons on Syria. OPCW has also issued occasional fact-finding reports that report their conclusion whether or not chemical weapons were used in Syria at a specific place and time, but do *not* conclude *who* released the chemical weapons. My [webpage](#) has links to each of these reports at the United Nations Security Council.

For a history of recent releases of chlorine gas in Syria, see my essay for [December 2016](#).

Effort to Punish Someone in Syria

The final report from the United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) first year was submitted to the U.N. Security Council on 21 Oct 2016. But the Security Council was unable to punish anyone in Assad's military for releasing chlorine, because of the threat of a Russian veto in the Security Council.

Syria

Futile Peace Negotiations in Syria

Disorganization of the Syrian National Coalition

& Politics of the Peace Process

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

Diversions

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

1. Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the **Ukraine**, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. By 30 May 2014, the crisis in the Ukraine appeared to be winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border. But on 28 June 2014, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil war. On 17 July 2014, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug 2014, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels. On 5 Sep 2014, another ceasefire began. On 24 Jan 2015, Russian rebels violated agreements and began an offensive against Mariupol. From the end of April 2014 to 2 Feb 2015, the United Nations says 5358 people died in the war in the Ukraine. During the first two weeks of Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was negotiated.
2. a continuing civil war in the **Central African Republic**
3. more violence in **South Sudan**, as ceasefires are violated
4. On 14 April 2014, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists in **Nigeria**, kidnapped more than 230 girls from a boarding school. On 20 May 2014, an Islamic bomb in Jos, Nigeria

killed at least 130 people. Approximately ninety people were kidnapped by Islamic terrorists on 21 June in Nigeria. On 10 Nov 2014, a suicide bomber killed at least 48 pupils at a high school in Nigeria. On 28 Nov 2014, Boko Haram attacked a mosque in Kano, killing more than 102 people. On 3-7 Jan 2015, Boko Haram attacked 17 towns and slaughtered approximately 2000 people, "too many to count". [Guardian](#).

5. On 18 May 2014, a former Libyan general led an assault against the Libyan Parliament building, causing another crisis in **Libya**. Various parts of the government and military supported the general's anti-Islamist campaign. On 16 July, Islamic rebels attacked the airport at Tripoli, destroying airplanes and damaging the terminal building. On 31 July, Islamic extremist rebels seized control of Benghazi. On 23 Aug 2014, Islamic extremists captured the airport at Tripoli.
6. On 10 June 2014, ISIL — an Al-Qaeda inspired group that operates in both Iraq and Syria — captured Mosul, the second-largest city in **Iraq**. On 11 June, ISIL captured Tikrit. (See my essays for [June](#), [July](#), and [August](#) 2014.) The crisis in Iraq pushed Syria out of the news in Western newsmedia. Moreover, the capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — [changed](#) the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.
7. On 12 June 2014, palestinians kidnapped three boys in **Israel** and killed them. Their dead bodies were found in a field on 30 June. After terrorists in Gaza fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells into Israel, the Israeli military began a military campaign in Gaza on 8 July. Despite the blatant provocations by the palestinians, the Arab newsmedia pushed Syria and Iraq out of the news in order to hysterically report the so-called "Israeli aggression" in Gaza. On 14 July 2014, Egypt proposed a ceasefire in Gaza, which Israel accepted but Hamas in Gaza rejected. After more than 1300 rockets and mortar shells were fired from Gaza into Israel since 8 July 2014, the Israeli Army invaded Gaza on the evening of 17 July. On 26 August 2014, a ceasefire of indefinite duration was arranged in Gaza.
8. Ebola hemorrhagic fever in western Africa (e.g., Liberia and Sierra Leone), which had killed approximately 2800 people by 23 Sep 2014. On 23 Sep 2014, the U.S. Government forecasts between 0.5 and 1.4 million people infected by 20 Jan 2015, killing perhaps half of those infected. After massive intervention by the USA and other nations, the death toll on 14 Jan 2016 was only 11,300.
9. For many years, **Yemen** has been an impoverished, failed nation, infested by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2012, longtime president Saleh was deposed. On 19 Jan 2015, Houthi (Shiite) rebels surrounded the home of the president (a Sunni) who is supported by the U.S.-government. On 22 Jan 2015, the president and cabinet resigned, plunging Yemen deeper into anarchy. On 10 Feb 2015, the U.S. [State Department](#) closed the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, because of rapidly deteriorating security. On 20 March, ISIL attacked two Shiite mosques in Yemen during Friday prayers, killing at least 137 people. [AP](#). On 26 March 2015, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

10. On 6 January 2016, **North Korea** detonated a fourth nuclear weapon, in another blatant violation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. On 7 February 2016, North Korea apparently launched a nonfunctioning satellite into orbit in a forbidden test of ballistic missile technology. On 5 September 2016, North Korea launched three missiles that landed in the ocean near Japan. And on 9 Sep 2016, North Korea detonated a fifth nuclear weapon, which was more energetic than any of their previous weapon tests. Each time, the United Nations Security Council condemns the violations by the North Korean government, but these condemnations are clearly *not* effective in stopping the belligerent behavior of the North Koreans.
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Deaths in Syria

On 1 February 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a death toll for the month of January 2017.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2001 persons during the month of January of 2017, they were distributed as following:

- Civilian casualties: 645 including 138 children under the age of eighteen, and 91 citizen women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
 - 180 including 53 children and 33 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria
 - and 81 including 16 children and 12 citizen women were killed in shelling by the regime forces using rocket and artillery shells, missiles believed to be ground-to-ground, targeting and sniper bullets,
 - and 6 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons,
 - and 12 including a child and 4 citizen women were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions and the "Islamic State" organization,
 - and 115 citizens including 24 children and 15 citizen women were killed in bombing of the Turkish warplanes,
 - and 9, including a citizen woman were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards,
 - and 26 including a citizen woman were executed by the "Islamic State" organization,
 - and 43 including 11 children and 6 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells launched by the "Islamic State" organization and by the fire of its machineguns,
 - and 2 citizens were martyred at the hands of Islamic factions and in their detention,
 - and 5 including 3 children and 2 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells and by the bullets of the rebel factions in Idlib and Aleppo,
 - and 42, including 6 children and 5 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the international coalition,

- and 61 including 9 children and 4 citizen women were killed in the detonating of cars and vehicles,
- and 6 including 4 children and 2 citizen women died as a result of poor sanitary conditions and the lack of treatment and as a result of fires in the camps of displaced people,
- and 2 citizens were killed at the hands of Syria Democratic Forces,
- and 55 including 11 children and 6 citizens were killed in different circumstances like bullets by unknown gunmen, explosions, mines, sniper fires and unknown circumstances.
- Syrian fighters of the rebel and Islamic Factions and the Syria Democratic Forces and other movements and organizations: 369
- The regime forces: 180
- Members of popular the committees, NDF and gunmen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 199
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 6
- Fighters loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities, most of them are of the Shiite sect: 7
- Unidentified: 9
- Fighters of the rebel and Islamic factions, the “Islamic State” organization, Jabhat Al-Nusra (Al-Qaeda organization in the Levant), Jaysh al-Mohajereen Wa al-Ansar and the Islamic Turkestan Party of non-Syrian nationalities: 586

"In the lowest monthly death toll in 4 years, less than 2000 persons killed and about third of them are civilians, during the first month of 2017," [SOHR](#), 1 Feb 2017. [Formatting as indented list by Standler.]

January 2017 had the fewest deaths/month in the Syrian civil war during the past four years. During the five months from 1 June 2016 to 31 Oct 2016, there was an average of 4460 deaths/month in Syria, so the January death rate is approximately 45% of this previous average. Obviously, the new ceasefire that began on 30 Dec 2016 is effective in reducing deaths.

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* 314,600.

Back in early 2014, both Reuters and the Associated Press published news articles that reported monthly death tolls from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. But those news reports stopped more than one year ago, perhaps as a result of fatigue about the increasing death toll with *no* end in sight.

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.

Jan 2017: Turkish invasion of Syria

On 6 January 2017, the Turkish government dismissed at least an additional 6000 employees, in a continuing purge of people who allegedly were sympathetic to the attempted coup on 15 July 2016, bringing the total of fired government employees to more than 100,000. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 24 August 2016, President Erdogan of Turkey began an invasion of northwest Syria, with the intent of clearing Kurds from west of the Euphrates River, and incidentally also clearing ISIL from the region of Syria near the Turkish border. On 11 January 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reports that Turkey is "bogged down" in Syria, as its Syrian allies proved inadequate to defeat ISIL at al-Bab in Syria. As a consequence, Turkey has had to send 4000 soldiers to fight in Syria.

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 to 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 2016, 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](#).

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, U.K. prime minister David Cameron, 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.

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](#).

On 26 January 2017, there was a significant change in the United Kingdom's foreign policy, when the U.K. foreign minister said Assad could be a candidate in Syrian elections. [The Guardian](#); [The Times](#); [BBC](#).

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.

My essay for [December 2016](#) chronicled the end of the Kerry-Lavrov negotiations on Syria (14 Dec), two U.N. General Assembly Resolutions on Syria (9, 21 Dec), two U.N. Security Council Resolutions on Syria (19, 31 Dec), and de Mistura's plan to resume negotiations in Geneva on 8 Feb 2017. Also during December 2016, the U.S. Government and the United Nations suddenly became unimportant in Syria, while Russia and Turkey took the lead in negotiations with Assad and the insurgents.

Negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan.

On 16 December 2016, Russia announced there would be a Syrian peace conference in Astana, Kazakhstan at some unspecified date in January 2017.

On 2 January 2017, several insurgent groups in Syria issued a statement that they would *not* attend the negotiations in Astana, because Assad was violating the ceasefire in Syria. [BBC](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

My comment is that on 22 Dec 2016 the insurgents polluted the drinking water supply for Damascus, then the insurgents maliciously destroyed pumping equipment that supplied water to the city of Damascus. When Assad's military fought to recapture the source of water for Damascus, the insurgents sanctimoniously and hysterically screamed about ceasefire violations by Assad. War crimes like these by the insurgents are one reason why the Syrian civil war is continuing.

As chronicled in my previous essays, the immature Syrian opposition groups have a history of refusing to negotiate, or walking out of negotiations, whenever they are unhappy.

1. Back on 7 May 2013, Russia and the USA proposed negotiations in Geneva, but the opposition did not agree to meet until 24 Jan 2014, a delay of 8 months. A second round of futile negotiations ended on 15 Feb 2014.
2. There were no negotiations from 16 Feb 2014 to 28 Jan 2016, an interval of almost two years.
3. There were more negotiations scheduled beginning 29 Jan 2016, but the opposition refused to negotiate until its demands were met, then the opposition walked out on 18 April 2016 and never returned.

This kind of immature conduct by the Syrian opposition shows that they are *not* competent to control Syria, and that Assad is a better ruler than the opposition. When there is a problem, mature people have *more* discussions. In contrast, the Syrian opposition refuses to have discussions when there is a problem. Negotiations are a way to solve problems, *not* an opportunity to make demands.

On 3 January 2017, [CNN](#) published a news article with the headline: "Syria: What it will mean if rebels snub peace talks". My comment is that the insurgents have been snubbing peace negotiations since 2013, so snubbing negotiations in Astana is expected. This is *not* news.

On 4 January, Turkey announced a 23 January 2017 start date for negotiations in Astana. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Anadolu Agency](#); [Associated Press](#). The 23 Jan start date is also mentioned in S/2016/1133 at Annex V, §2.

On 11 January 2017, Russia was still intending to begin the peace conference in Astana on 23 January. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Daily Star](#) in Lebanon.

On 11 January 2017, the insurgents presented a list of demands that must be satisfied before they attend negotiations in Astana later this month. [Asharq Al-Awsat](#).

On 13 January 2017, a group of insurgents met in Ankara, Turkey and issued a demand that there be ten consecutive days of no fighting in southern Syria — including Damascus and east Ghouta — *before* the insurgents will choose a delegation for the Astana meeting. [RIA-Novosti](#). That demand will at least delay the Astana meeting.

On 13 January 2017, [Al-Arabiya](#) had a headline: "Astana: Mysterious negotiations as participants remain anonymous". Al-Arabiya concludes: "The only sure thing about the Astana conference is that it is going to take place in the 23 of this month, the rest is still a mystery." My comment is that the 23 Jan conference is *not* a "sure thing". The insurgents who agreed to the ceasefire on 29 December announced on 2 Jan that they would *not* participate in Astana because of violations of the ceasefire. Just 10 days before the scheduled 23 Jan start date, formal invitations have not been sent.

On 16 January, after arm-twisting by Turkey, some insurgents agreed to attend the peace conference in Astana. Reuters reported:

Syrian rebel groups have decided to attend peace talks backed by Russia and Turkey in Kazakhstan to press for full implementation of a ceasefire they say has been widely violated by the government and its Iranian-backed allies.

....

The rebels took the decision at meetings underway in Ankara, and are now working to form a delegation that will be headed by Mohammad Alloush, the head of the political office of Jaish al-Islam rebel group, Alloush told Reuters. He said the rebels were going to Astana to "neutralise the criminal role" of Iran.

Analysts believe the rebels have been under pressure from Turkey, one of their main sponsors, to attend. Earlier this month, they called off any talks on their participation in the Astana meeting over what they said were government violations of a ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey.

....

The delegation will be different to one sent to peace talks in Geneva last year by the main opposition council, the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee. The HNC, which includes political and armed opposition groups, represented the opposition in peace talks last year.

....

[Zakaria Malahifji of the Fastaqim rebel group] said the new delegation would be formed in coordination with the HNC, but it would differ from it because "the Russians are focusing very much on the military factions".

Tom Perry & Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Syrian rebels to attend Kazakhstan peace talks," [Reuters](#), 16:47 GMT, 16 Jan 2017.

The Associated Press gave a hint of what would be negotiated in Astana:

Representatives of some Syrian rebel groups said Monday [16 Jan] they will attend talks sponsored by Russia and Turkey scheduled later this month [23 Jan], despite mounting violations of a cease-fire across the war-ravaged country.

A rebel adviser said the talks between representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition, to be held in the Kazakhstan capital of Astana, will initially focus on ways to strengthen and monitor the cease-fire that went into effect Dec. 30.

....

Osama Abo Zayd, a legal adviser to the Free Syrian Army rebel groups, said the first round of talks will last for four days and focus solely on ways to monitor cease-fire violations.

Abo Zayd said Moscow has promised to rein in violations of the cease-fire by government and allied troops. If a mechanism is worked out, there will be a phase two of the talks, he told the opposition-linked Revolutionary Forces of Syria online. "If Russia doesn't live up to its promises after phase one, Russia, Iran and the regime will be the main cause of fighting in Syria," he said.

....

Abo Zayed and [Molhem Akidi, a leading member of the Fastaqim group] said Ahrar al-Sham, one of Syria's largest rebel groups, was not participating in the talks but support the delegation going. The other powerful group, Fatah al-Sham Front, is not included in the cease-fire, according to the government, and is considered linked to al-Qaida.

Sarah El Deeb, "Syria rebel factions to attend Russia, Turkey-backed talks," [Associated Press](#), 21:21 GMT, 16 Jan 2017.

On 21 Jan 2017 the U.S. State Department decided to send the U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan, George Krol, as an "observer" to the negotiations in Astana that begin on 23 January. [Reuters](#).

At noon GMT on the first day of the meeting in Astana, 23 January, [Reuters](#) had a news article with the headline: "Expectations low as Syria's warring sides meet". Reuters reported: "Kazakhstan's foreign ministry said it expected the meetings to be over by midday on Tuesday [24 Jan]." My comment is that this is the first time that the opposition has met in the same room as Assad's government since a few days in February 2014 in Geneva, approximately three years ago. I wonder why the meeting in Astana was scheduled for only 1.5 days, when the parties' positions are far apart and long negotiations (e.g., at least 5 days) are needed.

The United Nations posted a transcript of de Mistura's opening remarks in Astana, of which I quote only a few paragraphs of his remarks to the ~~war criminals~~ participants:

The violence has dropped in Syria. But it has not ended yet. For instance we have seen cases more recently of strong tensions in many places, but in particular in Wadi Barada, jeopardising access to water for residents of Damascus and neighbouring areas. The violence has dropped, but we must do better.

Protection of civilians — men and women — must be a crucial priority. All parties should protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, water and electricity networks, and areas such as markets.

Sieges are totally unacceptable methods of warfare that cause civilians to be deprived from food, medicines and other essential items. Safe and sustained and unimpeded access to people in need, in particular to besieged areas, and unhindered access for medical teams to enter these areas to treat civilians and evacuate urgent cases, is an extremely important element and should be a consequence of a ceasefire.

Every ceasefire attempted in Syria in the past has broken down, that's why we put so much hope in what you have been able to achieve so far. The objective is human lives, and many lives, we want to believe, have already been saved by the ceasefire that was announced by President Putin and President Erdogan with the support of Iran recently, and was agreed upon by the Government of Syria and many participants of the opposition.

All stakeholders should support the commitment of the sides that are party to the ceasefire that entered into force in December 2016. All other armed opposition groups not affiliated to terror organisations designated as such by the Security Council, in addition to groups allied with the Government, should also listen to the call to abide by the ceasefire.

The chances of success will be greater if the parties here are able to agree on a mechanism to oversee and implement nationwide ceasefire. A mechanism to oversee

and implement a nationwide ceasefire — we didn't have it in the past, that's the reason why often we failed. We are encouraging the guarantors of the ceasefire to create a mechanism to implement the consolidation and de-confliction ceasefire measures, and to see what else can be done to build confidence.

"Note to Correspondents: UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura — Opening Remarks to Astana meeting [as delivered]," [U.N.](#), 23 Jan 2017.

So how do the insurgents behave at this historic opportunity to end the Syrian civil war? After a mere hour in the same room as Assad's government, the insurgents walked out. Later in the day, negotiations resumed with the delegations in separate rooms.

An early report by the Associated Press said:

Their seats remained empty for a few tense minutes after the Russia-Turkey-sponsored talks were officially inaugurated. Then, the Syrian rebel delegation finally walked into the room, marking what was supposed to be an ice-breaking first encounter.

But cold glances and sharp exchanges marred the first face-to-face meeting between the Syrian government and its armed opposition, which lasted about an hour in the freezing cold Kazakh capital, Astana.

....

Arab TV stations said the rebels registered their displeasure at being seated at the same oval-shaped table as the Iranian delegation. Tehran has sent thousands to Syria to fight alongside the government.

Rebel delegates said they had no "talks" with government officials. Only barbs were exchanged.

Lead rebel negotiator Mohammed Alloush equated between the Syrian government with the militants extremists of the Islamic State group.

....

The two delegations later headed to separate rooms, and proximity talks with the U.N. as mediators began.

anonymous, "Icy, Brief Face-To-Face Meeting of Syria Government, Rebels," [Associated Press](#), 14:56 GMT, 23 Jan 2017.

At night on 23 January, Reuters reported:

After facing each other to make opening remarks on Monday [23 Jan], the rival delegations spent the rest of the day negotiating indirectly through intermediaries and at times trading barbs. But the rebel side expressed optimism about Moscow's position. "We noticed a real understanding on the part of the Russians," Yahya al-Aridi, an opposition spokesman, told reporters. "We understand that militarily they have achieved what they wanted in Syria. Now they want to translate this military achievement into some sort of political deal. That has to be a ceasefire."

Diplomats said Russia, Turkey and Iran were working on a final communique that could be completed as early as Tuesday [24 Jan]. It would reaffirm a Dec. 30 ceasefire that each side accuses the other of violating.

....

Mohammed Alloush, a leader of the powerful Jaysh al-Islam group who heads the rebel delegation, insisted he wanted to stop "the horrific flow of blood" in the six-year-old war. To achieve that, the Syrian army and its Iran-backed allies had to abide by the truce and Shi'ite militias [from Iran and also Hezbollah from Lebanon] had to leave the country.

Denis Dyomkin & John Irish, "Russia and Turkey push Syria's warring sides to seal truce," [Reuters](#), 19:30 GMT, 23 Jan 2017.

Turkey refused to invite the Syrian Kurds to the negotiations in Astana, because President Erdogan regards all Kurds as terrorists. [Reuters](#) reported: "The Syrian Kurdish YPG militia said on Monday [23 Jan] it would not be bound by any decision that comes out of peace talks under way in Kazakhstan as it was not involved in the meetings."

On 24 January, in a bizarre conclusion to the so-called negotiations in Astana, the three convenors (i.e., Russia, Turkey, Iran) issued a statement in which the three convenors agreed to do something about ceasefire violations in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Middle East Eye](#). Notice that the event in Astana was supposed to be negotiations between Assad's government and insurgent groups. But when these delegations from Syria accomplished nothing, the convenors issued a statement and then pretended that the Astana meeting was a success. In retrospect, the presence of a delegation of insurgents at the conference in Astana was a distraction from the work by the convenors. Reuters reported: "A Western diplomat said the three powers [Russia, Turkey, Iran] agreed to meet again in Astana on Feb. 6 to discuss the mechanism [to monitor its compliance with the ceasefire]." Note that the three powers will be unencumbered by Syrians at the 6 February meeting, but any results from that meeting will be imposed by foreign meddlers on Syria.

I posted a copy of the 24 January Astana final statement at [rbs0.com](#)

A transcript of de Mistura's 24 January closing remarks at Astana is posted at [U.N.](#).

The inability of Syrian insurgents to sit in the same room as a delegation from Assad's government, and the inability of the insurgents to engage in productive negotiations, means that de Mistura will have a tough time during future negotiations in Geneva.

HNC faltering?

On 31 May 2016, [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 2016 and continuing up to 14 July 2016, the HNC failed to meet, despite their announcement on 31 May 2016. The obvious explanation for why the HNC failed to select a new negotiating team is that the HNC does *not* expect to return to negotiations soon.

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

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

On 12 January 2017, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that the Syrian opposition would meet in Moscow on 26-27 January to select a delegation to attend the negotiations in Geneva.

Neither the Syrian National Coalition (which represented the opposition in the Jan/Feb 2014 negotiations in Geneva) nor the HNC (which represented the opposition in the Jan/April 2016 negotiations in Geneva) attended the Moscow meeting. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

Resumption of Intra-Syrian Negotiations on 8 Feb ?

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.

My essay for [December 2016](#) summarizes the events that led de Mistura on 19 December 2016 to propose a resumption of Intra-Syrian negotiations 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 in the negotiations during February-April 2016, and there have been *no* negotiations in the nine months from 20 April 2016 to 20 January 2017. 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 in Astana that were 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.

Press briefings by de Mistura are quoted [below](#).

On 27 January 2017, the Russian foreign minister, Lavrov, announced that the 8 February negotiations in Geneva would be postponed to "late February". Lavrov did *not* give a reason for the postponement. [TASS](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). It seems strange that Lavrov would announce the scheduling of negotiations that are organized by the United Nations and convened by de Mistura.

On 31 January 2017, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council and then he told journalists that the negotiations in Geneva had been postponed until 20 February. The U.N. posted a [transcript](#) of de Mistura's press briefing. [U.N. Council Statement](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). There were three reasons for the postponement:

1. The insurgents failed to improve the ceasefire during the 23-24 January meeting in Astana, so the improvements need to be accomplished *before* the Geneva negotiations begin.
2. The opposition continues to be disorganized. The opposition has *no* agreement on who should attend the Geneva negotiations. De Mistura gave the opposition an 8 February deadline to choose their delegation. If the opposition misses that deadline, then de Mistura will select a delegation.
3. De Mistura diplomatically added that the delay would also give Assad an opportunity "to become seriously engaged in concessions".

On 1 February, the HNC strongly objected to de Mistura's selecting an opposition delegation. [Reuters](#) and [Al-Arabiya](#) quoted Riad Hijab, head of the HNC: "Selecting the Syrian opposition delegation is not de Mistura's business." On 2 February, the U.N. Secretary General supported de Mistura's plan to select an opposition delegation if the opposition fails to select an inclusive delegation before 8 Feb. [U.N.](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

my comments

This postponement does *not* surprise me. The previous negotiations in Geneva were originally intended to begin on 1 January 2016, but were postponed until 29 January 2016. The HNC delegation arrived late, then refused to negotiate until there was a ceasefire in Syria. De Mistura declared a "pause" in the negotiations on 3 Feb 2016, and the negotiations resumed on 14 March 2016, 74 days after the original target date of 1 Jan. The opposition has been reluctant to negotiate since mid-2013, partly because of their demand that Assad must resign.

My comment is that the opposition has known since 19 Dec 2016 about the Geneva negotiations that were originally scheduled to begin on 8 Feb 2017. *If* the opposition wanted

to attend, then they should have promptly selected a delegation for the Geneva negotiations. The fact that they still have *no* delegation 43 days later tells me that the opposition does *not* want to negotiate.

In his 31 Jan press briefing, de Mistura referred to the "prerogative that [U.N. Security Council Resolution] 2254 gave to the Special Envoy to actually finalise the delegation in order to make sure that it can be as inclusive as possible". De Mistura also said he would include "both armed groups and the political opposition". But the armed groups in Syria often disagree with the expatriates in the so-called "political opposition". De Mistura said he wanted "a unified group" of opposition, but unity will be lacking if both insurgents (i.e., "armed groups") and the expatriates (e.g., Syrian National Coalition) are together. Also, de Mistura quite properly wants women present in the opposition, but both the Syrian National Coalition in Turkey and the HNC have excluded women from past delegations. Including women will likely reduce unity that de Mistura desires.

If de Mistura includes Kurds in order to be truly representative of Syria, then it is easily foreseeable that Turkey — one of the guarantors of the ceasefire — will be apoplectic.

If members of the Syrian National Coalition or the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) attend the Geneva meeting, they will likely again refuse to negotiate, just as they scuttled the negotiations in Feb 2014 and Feb-April 2016. But if these expatriates are excluded from the Geneva meeting, Saudi Arabia and Turkey will surely object.

If members of insurgent groups attend the Geneva meeting, their rigid demand that Assad resign will prevent any progress. Furthermore, the insurgent groups are disorganized and lack unity, which will frustrate building a consensus. But if members of insurgent groups are excluded from the Geneva meeting, then it will be more difficult to implement in Syria any agreement from Geneva.

In short, de Mistura faces impossible choices in choosing an opposition delegation for the Geneva negotiations. These impossible choices strongly indicate that the negotiations in Geneva will fail again, because of the unwillingness of the opposition to compromise. Disorganization and lack of unity in the opposition will continue to cause problems in negotiations.

If de Mistura is willing to use his authority to select an opposition delegation on 8 Feb, why did de Mistura decline to use that authority to replace the HNC, who walked out of negotiations in April 2016? There have been *no* negotiations in Geneva for 9 consecutive months, because of the HNC's refusal to negotiate and because de Mistura did not select a new opposition delegation.

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. The ISSG also failed to meet in January 2017. 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.

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".

My essay for [December 2016](#) chronicles a 13 December Russian-Turkish agreement to evacuate insurgents from eastern Aleppo city. Owing to numerous violations of the agreement, the evacuation was not completed until the night of 22 December. On 30 December, a nationwide ceasefire in Syria began. Also during December 2016, the U.S. Government and the United Nations suddenly became unimportant in Syria, while

Russia and Turkey began negotiations with Assad and the insurgents.

Nationwide Ceasefire in Syria

On 20 January 2017, the new U.N. Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, issued his first monthly report on Syria, which covered events in December 2016. In a paragraph overlooked by journalists, the Secretary General reported on the continuing attacks on hospitals and health clinics in Syria.

In blatant disregard for the protected status of medical facilities under international humanitarian law, further articulated by the Security Council in its resolution 2286 (2016), such facilities continued to be damaged or destroyed as a result of fighting. The United Nations and health partners received credible reports of 12 attacks against medical facilities in December, comprising 4 on hospitals (2 in Aleppo, 1 in Dar'a and 1 in Idlib), 2 on primary health-care centres (1 each in Aleppo and Rif Dimashq), 1 on a mobile field hospital (Aleppo) and 5 on ambulances (4 in Rif Dimashq and 1 in Aleppo). Primary, secondary and tertiary health-care services continued to experience severe gaps in performance and service delivery, owing to the extensive damage caused to health facilities, the rapid turnover of health staff and the lack of qualified professionals in different specialized medical fields. Paediatric and maternal health services, including routine vaccinations, remained negatively affected.

Antonio Guterres, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016)," S/2017/58, at ¶27, 20 January 2017.

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.

Before the nationwide ceasefire began, on 22 December insurgents ended the water supply to the city of Damascus. Assad *needs* to retake the Barada Valley area, which supplies water to Damascus.

On 1 January 2017, Reuters reported on the "fragile" ceasefire in Syria.

Syrian government warplanes resumed their bombardment of a rebel-held valley near Damascus on Sunday after nearly 24 hours with no air raids, a rebel official and monitors said, during the third day of a fragile ceasefire.

The truce deal, brokered by Russia and Turkey which back opposing sides in the conflict and welcomed unanimously by the United Nations Security Council, has been repeatedly violated since it began, with warring sides trading the blame.

Rebels on Saturday [31 Dec] warned they would abandon the truce if the government side continued to violate it, asking the Russians, who support President Bashar al-Assad, to rein in army and militia attacks in the valley by 8:00 p.m.

Bombardments ceased before that time — although some clashes continued — but began again late on Sunday [1 Jan] [in Wadi Barada].

It was not immediately clear if the rebels would abandon the truce as a result. Like previous Syria ceasefire deals it has been shaky from the start with repeated outbreaks of violence in some areas, but has largely held elsewhere.

John Davison, "Syrian warplanes strike near Damascus during fragile truce," [Reuters](#), 18:24 GMT, 1 Jan 2017.

On Tuesday, 3 January 2017, *The Washington Post* reported:

A Syrian cease-fire backed by Russia and Turkey is crumbling five days after it began, with government forces pushing offensives around Damascus and rebels threatening to suspend participation in new peace talks.

The truce was to have been followed by a meeting between government representatives and mainstream rebel factions in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

But while fighting has largely ebbed in Syria's north, where Turkey wields influence over most rebel groups, troops loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad have continued strategic offensives in the Damascus suburbs.

In a statement published Monday [2 Jan], 10 rebel factions said they were suspending discussions regarding the Astana conference or the cease-fire "until it is fully implemented." The groups cited "major and frequent violations" in the rebel-held areas of Wadi Barada and Eastern Ghouta outside the Syrian capital.

....

The [ceasefire] deal's shaky progress also underscored the fact that no single player can fully deliver the government or the rebel side. While Russia has burnished its reputation as a mediator during talks with Turkey, it now appears unable to bring the Syrian government in line with the cease-fire.

Louisa Loveluck & Heba Habib, "Syrian cease-fire crumbles as government forces advance around Damascus," [Washington Post](#), 18:53 GMT, 3 Jan 2017.

The *Post* speaks of Assad's "strategic offensives" in Wadi Barada, without mentioning that on 22 December the insurgents interrupted the flow of water to residents of Damascus.

On 3 January 2017, the Associated Press reported:

Residents of Damascus are scrambling for clean water after the government attacked rebels holding the city's main source in a nearby valley, leading to an accidental outage that has stretched on for nearly two weeks.

....

"I have stopped cleaning the house, washing dishes or clothes. We no longer take showers," said Mona Maqssoud, a 50-year-old resident of Damascus. She said residents

have relied on water tankers that come by occasionally and give 20 liters (5 gallons) of water to each house, but that hasn't been enough. "We begged the drivers (to return) to our neighborhood, but they refused."

The cut-off, since Dec. 22, is the longest Damascus has seen, say residents, who are accustomed to intermittent outages.

The opposition has long controlled Wadi Barada, the valley northwest of Damascus through which the river of the same name flows to the capital. The Barada River and its source, the Ain al-Fijeh spring, supply 70 percent of the water for Damascus and its environs.

Philip Issa, "Water crisis in Syrian capital as government attacks valley," [Associated Press](#), 19:12 GMT, 3 Jan 2017.

On 5 January 2017, Turkey's foreign minister — Mevlut Cavusoglu — was at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, where he publicly complained about violations by Assad of the ceasefire in Syria. The [Associated Press](#) quoted him as saying: "When I look at the list [of violations of the ceasefire] today there is no single violation by the opposition. All the violations, including the bombardments, are by the regime or its supporters or other groups. This is not acceptable. So this is the main obstacle [to peace negotiations in Astana]."

Assad's defense seems to be that his military is attacking terrorist groups who are excluded from the ceasefire agreement. [Washington Post](#); [The Guardian](#). The commingling of Nusra with moderate rebels has bedeviled previous cessation of hostility agreements, so it is surprising that the Russian-Turkish agreements of December 2016 contain the same known problem. Although journalists do not mention this, many of the insurgent groups have *not* signed the ceasefire agreement, so the nonsigners are not eligible for protection under the agreement.

On the night of 5 January 2017, Reuters reported:

The Syrian army and its allies pressed ahead on Friday [6 Jan] with a two-week-long offensive to seize a strategic valley where a key spring provides supplies to four million people in the capital, Damascus, residents and rebels said.

Aerial bombing and shelling from the army as well as Hezbollah fighters stationed in the mountains that overlook the valley on the northwestern edge of the capital had intensified in the last forty-eight hours, they said.

Scores of jets pounded the area around the Ain al-Fija springs and the villages of Baseimah, Kafr Zayt and al Husseineh, which form part of a cluster of ten villages controlled by rebels in the valley that lies at the northwestern edge of the capital.

The Syrian army, aided by Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese Shi'ite group, has so far been unsuccessful in making any significant advance in the valley since they launched the drive to capture the strategic area and accused rebels of polluting the springs with diesel.

....

The rupture of water supplies from the springs has caused severe shortages after the pumping station of Ain al Fija that supplied around 70 percent of the capital's water needs was damaged.

Prices of bottled water and trucked water supplied by private traders to residential homes has tripled, residents of the sprawling capital say, with a black market now thriving.

Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Syrian army, allies press assault to secure capital's water supply," [Reuters](#), 00:51 GMT, 6 Jan 2017.

On 5 January, Egeland explained why interrupting the water supply to Damascus is a war crime, see [below](#).

On 6 January 2017, Russia triumphantly announced that it was reducing its military presence in Syria. In particular, Russia's aircraft carrier (named "Admiral Kuznetsov") and associated ships would return to Russia from the eastern Mediterranean. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). The Russian aircraft carrier arrived in the eastern Mediterranean in early November 2016. My comment is that, back on 14 March 2016, Russia announced a major military withdrawal in Syria, but *after* that alleged withdrawal they still had enough aircraft and combat helicopters to attack Aleppo and Idlib provinces. There were especially brutal airstrikes in Syria from September to December 2016. So I think the 6 Jan announcement is mostly propaganda about peace-loving Russians.

On 13 January 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's army was advancing toward the source of water for Damascus. By agreement with the insurgents, "engineers had entered Ain al-Fija to fix the damage to the pumping station." The [Associated Press](#) reported that the maintenance of the water pumps at Ain al-Fija may have ended the fighting in the valley near Damascus.

On 15 January 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that continued fighting in the Wadi Barada area had "derailed" plans to restore water supplies to Damascus. Reuters reported: "But the plan was derailed on Saturday [14 Jan] evening, after armed men killed the head of a negotiation team who was overseeing the agreement and repairs, the [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights] said. The warring sides accused each other of assassinating the official, who had only assumed his role a day before."

On 17 January 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported on frustrations by residents of Damascus about lack of water.

On 20 January 2017, the Pentagon announced that a U.S. airstrike targeted an Al-Qaeda training camp in Idlib province of Syria. The Pentagon alleges that "more than 100" Islamic terrorists were killed in this one strike. [Pentagon](#); [CENTCOM](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). This strike is significant because U.S. airstrikes in Syria nearly always target ISIL.

On 24 January 2017, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Nusra Front) attacked Free Syrian Army groups in northwest Syria. The attacks were allegedly motivated by the FSA's participation in ceasefire negotiations in Astana. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 25 January 2017, journalists reported that Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly Nusra Front)

had defeated some groups of the Free Syrian Army, thereby further weakening the moderate rebels and strengthening the Islamic terrorists in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). In my opinion, these victories by Nusra are partly a consequence of Obama's policy to focus on ISIL and ignore Nusra Front. When Nusra and moderate rebels were commingled during 2016, Obama and Kerry did nothing to separate the moderate rebels from Nusra, so that U.S. airstrikes could hit Nusra.

On 26 January 2017, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, told the U.N. Security Council that Assad's government had "blocked" delivery of humanitarian aid inside Syria. In December 2016, one convoy delivered aid to 6000 people. So far in January 2017, one convoy has delivered aid to 40,000 people. [Associated Press](#); [U.N.](#). The USA was *not* represented at this Security Council meeting, owing to the resignation of Obama's diplomats and the nonarrival of Trump's diplomats.

Incidentally, on 20 January 2017, the new U.N. Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, issued his first monthly report on Syria, S/2017/58. At paragraph 30, during December 2016 the United Nations delivered humanitarian aid to less than 1% of the people in Syria who need food and medicine. Figure 11 shows that December was the worst month in 2016 for the delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. The delivery of humanitarian aid was unacceptably bad during 2016, and is getting worse.

On 27 January 2017, [Reuters](#) reported Nusra and moderate rebel groups continued to have "heavy clashes" in Idlib province in northwest Syria.

On 28 January 2017, [Reuters](#) and the [Associated Press](#) reported that Assad's army took control of Wadi Barada valley, including the water supply for the city of Damascus. On 29 January, some insurgents were transported by bus to Idlib province. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

5 Jan 2017 briefing by de Mistura & Egeland

On 5 January 2017, there was the regular meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva. Afterwards, de Mistura and Egeland held a press conference.

de Mistura: ... today is the third working day of the new Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and therefore we are in a middle of brainstorming, all together, with the Secretary-General, who is actively interested, involved and engaged in the issue of Syria as he has publicly said even before taking up this assignment. And therefore we are in the middle of very intense brainstorming so I will avoid for the moment to get too many comments until we get through that. What I can tell you is that Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, and you will see it, will be, and we are delighted frankly because that makes our job much easier, heavily and actively involved in the issue of Syria and its conflict.

Second point, we have had two Security Council resolutions recently both unanimous, the one on Aleppo [Resolution 2328] and one on let's say, Astana plus [Resolution 2336], and that has certainly given us a feeling of hope that the Security

Council may continue showing unanimous approaches to what has been an attempt again to try to solve the Syrian crisis.

Resolution 2336 in particular is very much welcomed by everyone in the Security Council and certainly by us, because any cessation of hostilities, which we have already had two attempts, and this is the third major attempt, is indeed welcomed, not only by us and the Security Council but clearly by the Syrian people.

The two guarantors are the Russian Federation and Turkey. Our stand is that any initiative such as this one, needs to be supported, and we hope it will succeed and is definitely welcomed. We will continue contributing, at the request of Turkey and the Russian Federation and the US co-chair, with some type of statistical information until they set up their own monitoring system. That means, however, anyway that guarantors of the cessation of hostilities are going to be, and remain to be, and we want them to succeed of course, the Russian Federation and Turkey, who have been announcing the ceasefire.

There are incidents, we know about them, we are informed, and we are trying and hoping that the two guarantors, and we trust they will, succeed in overcoming them so that they reach the point in which the cessation of hostilities will be recognized and working this time.

That leads me to Astana. Preparations as you know for the Astana meeting are underway, and they are being led in particular by Turkey and the Russian Federation, with support I understand by Iran as well and certainly by Kazakhstan. We, the UN, welcome such effort, because we believe that any effort, again, that consolidates and that's the expectation, the cessation of hostilities, and helps in preparing for a discussion that will take place here in Geneva in February, is certainly welcome. And we are in particular looking forward to that, particularly in the context of our own meeting that will be taking place early in February here.

We plan to attend, as indicated, and we will contribute to it, in order to hopefully make it a success and producing deliverables that we can then use at the Geneva Talks. We are preparing ourselves, our February meeting, regardless of the Astana meeting, but will certainly we will take into account and make good use of hopefully any positive outcome that we hope will be coming from the Astana meeting and other initiatives in January that can take place in various contexts that we hear and that we will be working on.

I will not go more in details on how January in particular will be quite an active month in terms of preparation for the February meeting, because as I told you the Secretary-General is himself now very much engaged in our own internal brainstorming, we had one yesterday, and I look forward to that to help us to even be more proactive between January and February.

I will take now two questions and then I will leave you. Thank you.

.....

Egeland: We had today a meeting of the humanitarian task force where we also did stock taking of 2016.

We did reach close to 1.3 million people in cross-front-line assistance in 2016. We reached 420,000 in besieged areas in 2016, we reached them with 131 land convoys.

We did 170 airdrops to Deir-ez-Zor. The airdrops programme organized by the WFP is unique in the history of humanitarian work. I cannot recall this kind of high altitude airdrop being done for such a sustained period of time.

For besieged areas, there was progress, compared to 2015, but of course that came from a very low point. In 2015, we only covered 1% of the needs in besieged areas. In average, in 2016, we reached 21% of the needs. So, in other words, 79% of the needs each and every month were on average not reached. Some people got repeated assistance, some got none in 2016.

We are proving as was December, two things: that men with power and guns are willing to go to any extreme to deny to women children, wounded and others basic lifesaving relief even. But also, it was proving that humanitarian diplomacy and local agreements and national agreements with parties and their sponsors can change things. In December, we had only one convoy going to one place one place only, Khan Elshih, and it became our worst month in that respect since the task force was created. But we also had the largest humanitarian evacuation. Some 35,000-36,000 people were evacuated from east Aleppo and that had not happened if there had not been the humanitarian diplomacy that involved the co- chairs of this task force, the other members of the task force and us in the United Nations.

This evacuation was so close to fail many times through this difficult operation. So, this all proves that it has to change in 2017 and it can change in 2017. After five ruthless war years, we can have a year of diplomacy, of conflict resolution, and of protection of civilians, it can happen, and we were heartened to hear that Russia and Turkey both said in the task force that indeed they will facilitate humanitarian access to all civilians as part of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement that they function as guarantors for, and we will actively hold them accountable for their promise to help us.

We also had a report from Aleppo, the team in Aleppo were live through the meeting, and their report basically said the following: the devastation is beyond belief in this ancient city of Aleppo. There is devastation that it will take enormous effort to rebuild. People want to return, many are returning already, it is dangerous to return because there are unexploded bombs and munitions, and buildings are unsafe. There is however now a big humanitarian operation. 1.1 million people have gotten their water restored or repaired, 400,000 people get relief by UN and partners continuously, these are more or less exactly corresponding with the 400,000 displaced in a city of 1.5 million. 400,000 people are displaced within a city of 1.5 million. What is not happening is the reconstruction yet, that will be a very big future effort.

Finally, beyond Aleppo, enormous dramas are unfolding as we speak. One of them is

in Damascus itself where 5.5 million people have had their water supplies cut or minimized because of the springs of Wadi Barada, which is just outside of Damascus and accounts for 70% of the water supplies, have been broken. Because of fighting, or because of sabotage, or because of both. We have asked to get there, to go there to explore how to restore water supply to Damascus, already it is dramatic the consequences, there are now emergency efforts to ensure that schools, and hospitals, and bakeries, and other essential functions get water.

Finally, our January [inter-agency convoy] plan has come back from the Government, and 5 out of the locations were denied in terms of access, 5 out of 21 locations were denied, and this is in rural Damascus mostly, where there is a lot of fighting, but also in Homs and in Hama. So it is not over, even though the cessation of hostilities is largely holding in large parts of the country, there are tremendous dramas for the civilian population still, and we are denied access still in too many places.

QUESTION: On the water issue in Damascus, do you have more specifics on who specifically is to blame for the lack of water? There are a lot of allegations from both sides on that. Also, the cessation of hostilities, what kind of humanitarian aid have you been able to bring in during the cease in fighting? What promises do you have? Thanks.

Egeland: Well, it is very much a politicized and disputed issue. How much was caused by fighting or by bombardment, or by sabotage by armed opposition groups. There are a lot of allegations on that. We do not really know, because we have not been able to go there. We want to go there, we want to investigate what happened, but first and foremost restore water. To sabotage and deny water is of course a war crime because it is civilians who drink it, and civilians who will be affected by waterborne and other diseases, if it is not restored. I am disappointed that so far the cessation of hostilities that is holding in so many places is not increasing our access. Why isn't there access? Well, there is a whole web of obstacles really; not only do we need approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Damascus, we need it from the Governor's office, from the Security Committee of the region, from the security forces involved, and from the armed groups inside. All of them have to allow us access, and it only takes one of them to deny us access. We are routinely still denied access, and we hope that the cessation of hostilities and the guarantors can change that. It has not so far.

....

[there are now 15 besieged places in Syria]

QUESTION: Can you go back to Damascus, what are the consequences at this point? Are there hospitals that cannot function because they do not have water? And do you have a time table? What do you expect? When will water be restored? How many people are affected by a lack of water at this point?

Egeland: We reckon it to be 5.5 million civilians now being affected by the water shortages, meaning that they would not have any tap water anymore, most of them. There is however some 30% of the supplies that have been restored by the various

emergency efforts, and that water has been directed to vital functions like public sector hospitals, etc. This has been the reality now for two weeks, it cannot continue like this, we need immediately to restore water supplies, since it is so enormous the number of people affected. But there are also a number of emergency efforts, so I do not know of any disease spreading at the moment, but that is certainly the fear, and certainly many people are now at subsistence level of having minimum of drinking water and nothing else.

"Transcript of joint stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, M. Staffan de Mistura, and Senior Advisor M. Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 5 Jan 2017.

Copy at [U.N.](#)

12 Jan 2017 briefing by de Mistura & Egeland

On 12 January 2017, there was the regular meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva. Afterwards, de Mistura held a press conference. Here is the entire transcript:

de Mistura: Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. As you know there are other very urgently important meetings taking place in Geneva today, and yesterday. We do have the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres with us here, so I am sure that your focus would be on other issues, and I will be trying to be short, but let me address two points, in absence of Jan Egeland.

The focus on the humanitarian discussion we had today on the HTF in Syria was about: one, that the CoH is largely, largely holding, with some exceptions, but in theory that should be giving an opportunity for accelerating humanitarian access to besieged areas. Unfortunately that is not the case and therefore there has been a pressure by everyone in this HTF to insist on the fact that the procedures to get humanitarian access to the very areas which are besieged, now that there is not a lot of military activities, thanks to the CoH [30 Dec Cessation of Hostilities], should be an element of priority.

Then, the main area, as you know, of concern, is Wadi Barada. The water issue, which is affecting five million people in Damascus. The information we have is that five villages in the Wadi area have reached an agreement, an arrangement with the government. That is good news. But two villages, in particular, one which is the one holding the actual source of water, al-Fijah, until the moment, has not yet reached an agreement. And therefore there is a danger, substantial danger, imminent danger, that this may develop into a further military escalation, and the consequence of it, unavoidably, no water solution for the people in Damascus.

We consider the water, as you know, a vital priority for the civilians in Damascus, or anywhere else, and there are water engineers ready to intervene, but they need to have minimum security arrangements in order to be able to work on the source in particular.

Two meetings are taking place, both in Ankara and now probably in Moscow too, which will be discussing this aspect because of two reasons: the first one, water in Damascus is vital because it is affecting five million people, and B, because it does have potentially, if it escalates, an impact on the Astana talks and meeting, which is

based, as you know, on the concept of a well-established, potentially even better established cessation of hostilities. So there is a sense of urgency linked both to water and to Astana and we are definitely in that direction too.

Now, concerns about two other areas, four actually, in particular Kefraya and Foah. You remember those two villages which have been constantly a reason of concern, because they are besieged by the armed opposition. These are the only two locations which have been actually, besieged so far by the armed opposition. In Kefraya and Foah there is an issue which is quite unusual: 23 drivers and buses are being held inside because they are unable to get out from there, by the armed opposition. These where the buses and drivers who actually moved, you remember, during the Aleppo evacuation and mutual evacuation, who went there and couldn't leave anymore. That is not good and needs to be addressed and we are working on it together with, and we have asked those who have an influence on the armed groups to allow the 23 drivers to leave Kefraya and Foah.

Same concerns apply to Madaya and Zabadani. You remember one year ago we had terrible images in at least one of the two locations, the fact that the cessation of hostilities has not produced easy access to these two locations, is becoming an area of serious concern, because we have seen pictures both in Kefraya and Foah, and Madaya and Zabadani which are giving a feeling that the issue of food and essential items is a serious one.

Now on the political track or the political process. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is in town and of course naturally his focus will be/is on the Cyprus issue, but we will be having with the Secretary-General some consultations in order to be able to look ahead on what are the next steps of the UN contribution to the political process in Syria.

Astana. Astana is something that we have said and will repeat it, the UN is supportive of. Particularly when we see that the discussions between the sponsors, Turkey and Russia in particular, with Iran added to it and the Kazakh authorities hosting it, are continuing and progressing, with ups and downs, but progressing in the right direction. The UN is being kept informed and as we have said, and as the Secretary-General said, ready to contribute and support so that we have a successful Astana meeting on which the UN then can be using as a stepping stone, in order to be able to go in the direction of the Geneva meetings.

So far the focus, as you heard, will be most likely on stabilizing, on increasing, on deepening, thickening the positive effects of the cessation of hostilities with some type of political broad lines which we feel could be a good opportunity of linking them with and bringing them to Geneva for the meetings that we are planning on the target date which is still on 9th February, sorry, 8th February.

Thank you, that is all on my side.

QUESTION: You mentioned that you have got concerns about Wadi Barada and that it may develop into a military confrontation, what evidence do you have that that

actually may be happening, is there signs of military buildup that make you believe such a complication?

de Mistura: Well, first of all the concern is confirmed by the fact that Wadi Barada is a strategically and from a humanitarian point of view, a crucial place, because water is fundamental and there are already substantial problems since 22nd December. Actually in Damascus the population is over five million. Secondly, there is, as I said, a discussion which has produced at least five of the villages having found an arrangement with the government, but two of them, no, and they are the ones where there are various armed groups, who seem to be at the moment, not inclined to want to do what the other five villages have done. And there are rumors about deadlines, in other words, deadlines that are being put by the government in order to get some type of clarity otherwise there will be military activities. We have not seen military preparations, but we have heard about these deadlines. That's why I think the meeting which we understand is taking place in Moscow, which will be addressing, including also the Iranians, who have an influence on Hezbollah, who are very much involved in the area, and hopefully, on other groups that are internally inside these villages, will be hopefully deflecting or defusing the danger of that taking place. Military activities in that area mean also the potential of further damaging what has been water pumps and water supplies.

QUESTION: On the subject of Wadi Barada, I just want to clarify, as far as you are concerned, are there any fighters there from ex al-Nusra, or Daesh, because that would be a justification to attack the area, and if there are no fighters from those groups, bad groups, then what would be the justification for carrying on those attacks on those areas?

de Mistura: You are touching a crucial point, and I don't have sufficient information to be able to confirm or not. What I do hear is what you have heard too, that there might be presence of al-Nusra in exactly one of the two missing non-villages yet, but I cannot confirm it.

QUESTION: Have you been invited to Astana?

de Mistura: You see I do not know whether you are following up the current preparation for Astana, but they are in the middle of it, actually, and I think this is what we have been facing ourselves every time we are organizing a meeting on the Syrian issues, a lot of discussion on how to have a substantive meeting. Therefore even the date which is so far I understand is the 23 January, is the date indicated. What I know is that we have been told that the UN is definitely invited. And in fact invited to be able to be proactively supportive. But if you ask me if I have a written invitation with a date and an hour, not yet, but I doubt anyone has.

QUESTION: Could you go over the issue of the buses one more time, specifically whether UN personnel are somehow involved.

de Mistura: Well, perhaps you will remember that during this very delicate, painful, to a certain degree, effective period when in fact it was avoided the final battle on Aleppo

with the possibility of a major number of people being victims and the city being completely destroyed, there was an arrangement, and the arrangement was an evacuation and the evacuation which was discussed between Turkish and Russian officials and supported by us frankly, because it was avoiding a major tragedy, was at the last moment also linked to some conditions or requests coming from Iran, and one of them was actually evacuating people from Kefraya and Foah. Sick people, wounded people and there were numbers linked to that. And the evacuation took place to a large degree. But then some buses ended up going there for a second tour, and they were not allowed to leave. These are not UN officials, these are Syrian buses with Syrian drivers, and that is not to happen because this complicates then the tit-for-tat approach.

QUESTION: Coming back to Wadi Barada, you mentioned that water engineers are ready to intervene, who are these people? Are they part of the UN supported elements that might intervene there or others related to the government institutions, and secondly, we had an indication that 30% of the water supplies could be restored, is it still the figure you have been aware of, or is it more right now?

de Mistura: Regarding the technical aspect of it, the technicians we are talking about are Syrian people, who belong to the Syrian institutions and have always been doing this type of job, supported by technical advice and perhaps even more than that from the UN. They have tried twice to actually do so and they have been stopped by the armed groups actually.

Regarding the 30%, yes the figure is still that one, but it is concerning, because 30% in a city of more than five million people especially at a time when the water has been now since 22 December and the possibility of diseases is a serious issue.

QUESTION: Foah and Kefraya, the opposition groups holding the bus drivers hostage, are they elements of ex al-Nusra?

de Mistura: You see again, you are making it simple, but it is not simple to be able to say how many al-Nusra persons are in a certain place, vis-a-vis the majority which may be other groups. My understanding is that around Kefraya and Foah there are various groups.

Thank you very much.

"Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, M. Staffan de Mistura,"

[U.N. Geneva](#), 12 Jan 2017.

Copy at [U.N.](#)

19 Jan 2017 briefing by Egeland

On 19 January 2017, Jan Egeland delivered grim news about delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, and the continuing interruption of water supply to Damascus.

Thank you very much. This fifth cruel war winter is the worst so far for the civilian population of Syria. An exhausted civilian population is still trapped, with no escape,

we are still unable to reach hundreds and hundreds of thousands. It is positive that this current cessation of hostilities is saving lives in many areas, however, fighting has been tremendous in other areas and thousands of new families have been displaced, including in the Wadi Barada valley, close to Damascus.

And in terms of humanitarian access, the cessation of hostilities period has been a disappointment, frankly. This humanitarian taskforce started in February of last year, we saw immediate progress, we reached areas that hadn't been reached for years.

December [2016] and January [2017] so far have been our worst months since we started. In January, only half of the populations that we asked to reach, we were approved for access in full. Five locations were denied completely, they were in the rural Damascus region, including Wadi Barada. But then after our monthly plan is approved, we now end up in this complete, hopeless, bureaucratic quagmire of having to seek facilitation letters, permits, security permits, having the governor's office to agree on access, the security forces, the security committees, the armed actors, including the armed opposition groups, they all need to give us access and they are routinely doing what they can, all of them it seems, to avoid us helping women, children, wounded on the other side.

That has to change, it can change, we hope it will change. First opportunity would be the Astana meeting and I am glad that Russia, Iran and Turkey in the meeting today said that they will indeed push as guarantors for Astana, for the parties, including the government, to stop this present practice of denying courageous humanitarians who are able and willing to go to places with relief, to stop the present denials of access.

There are two areas I would flag in particular where we are extremely concerned. The first is Deir ez-Zor. Deir ez-Zor is a desert town, with some 93,000 civilians now by our best count. It is in the east of Syria. The Islamic State fighters, terrorists, have launched a major offensive, have cut the besieged area now in two and have captured, among other things, the drop zone for humanitarian supplies. So it has not been possible since Sunday [15 Jan] to drop new humanitarian relief to the Deir ez-Zor people who really do not have any other life-line than relief by air.

The other, of course, dramatic situation is the Wadi Barada area, it is very close to Damascus. Thousands of families had been displaced from Wadi Barada, there is fierce fighting, many civilians killed, and it also holds the water supply to Damascus. So now for nearly a month, 27 days today, five and a half million people have been without their normal water supply in Damascus. Repair men are able and willing to go, went at one point, a few days back, when one of the negotiators was killed by a sniper, the whole repair mission was called off and the repair engineers have not been able to return. So this situation is screaming for a cessation of hostilities that can hold and that can enable the repair of the water supply.

Also in Aleppo now more than a million people are without water because one of these pumping stations is held in Islamic State territory and it is not possible at the moment to repair it. To deny populations water, to deny repair of water supplies, is a criminal offense under international law.

Finally, in Aleppo a major relief operation is unfolding. We have been helping some five hundred thousand people now in recent weeks, we will be able to reach now all populations, all over Aleppo, and that's a first for many months. However, those who have been there, including our Humanitarian Coordinator, Ali Al-Za'tari, coming from Aleppo to brief us on video today, says that of course, the devastation is absolutely shocking and all of the unexploded ordinances make life very difficult in the city and still the Aleppo citizens are now wanting to go back increasingly and they need our help to rebuild it.

QUESTION: ... with respect to the water repairs if I understood correctly after the repair man [actually, the head of a negotiating team] was hit by a sniper there has been no further work to restore the water supply in Damascus[,] so effectively the situation remains as it had remained from the beginning of this crisis [on 22 Dec] ?

Egeland: Correct, the repair engineers were able to access the facility and see that it can be repaired but when the General was killed by a sniper [on 14 Jan] the whole operation was aborted and they haven't been able to return since.

....

"Transcript of stakeout by UN Senior Adviser, Mr. Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 19 Jan 2017. Copy at [U.N.](#).

There was *no* briefing on Thursday, 26 January 2017.

U.N. Reports

On 22 Feb 2014, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2139, which required parties in Syria to allow humanitarian aid and to stop targeting civilians. Although this Resolution was effective immediately, *all* of the parties in Syria ignored it. The U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, issued monthly Reports on the situation in Syria, beginning March 2014.

A list of all of the Secretary General's reports on Syria can be found at my [webpage](#), which has links to the original reports.

Prosecution for War Crimes ?

My essay for [March 2016](#) collected quotations from four monthly reports (Oct 2015 to Jan 2016) by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in which he called for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC). All of his calls were ignored by the United Nations Security Council. The last time the Security Council attempted to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court was in May 2014 — two years ago — when Russia and China both vetoed the referral.

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

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, whoever 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 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 20 January 2017, the new U.N. Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, issued his first monthly report on Syria, S/2017/58. At paragraph 45, he said: "... I also reiterate the call that my predecessor made many times, namely, for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court."

U.N. General Assembly Resolution 71/248

On 21 December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 71/248 that directs the Secretary General to create a team to investigate war crimes in Syria. (See my essay for [December 2016](#).)

This important resolution was *not* publicly posted at the U.N. website until 20 Jan 2017, 30 days after it was passed.

Resolution 71/248 contains two deadlines.

1. §5 of 71/248 says: "Requests the Secretary-General, in this regard, to develop, within 20 working days of the adoption of the present resolution, the terms of reference of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and also requests that the Secretary-General undertake, without delay, the steps, measures and arrangements necessary for the speedy establishment and full functioning of the Mechanism,"
2. §8 of 71/248 says: "Requests the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the present resolution within 45 days of its adoption,...." (i.e., 4 Feb 2017)

On 26 January 2017, the U.N. Secretary General met both deadlines in Resolution 71/248. The Secretary General promised to appoint a head of the Mechanism by the end of February 2017. [U.N.](#)

However, there is still *no* forum in which to try suspected war criminals.

Debacle in Iraq

Death Toll in Iraq

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of monthly death tolls announced by United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) during 2013-2015.

I am no longer listing the Iraqi death toll on my HTML webpage, because the statistics from the Iraqi government are seriously incomplete and *not* credible. But, for what it is worth, the United Nations reported 403 Iraqi civilians killed by "terrorism, violence, and armed conflict" during January 2017. [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, making it difficult to compare monthly numbers before and after the month of November 2016.

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.

January 2017: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

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](#).

On 1 January 2017, an ISIL suicide car bomber and four ISIL gunmen attacked a police checkpoint in Najaf, killing 7 policemen. [Reuters](#).

On 2 January 2017, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated his pickup truck in a Baghdad market, killing at least 36 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On the night of 2 January 2017, three suicide bombers attacked a police station in Samarra, Iraq. The attackers killed 7 policemen. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

Journalists explain that the increase in terror attacks in Iraqi cities is a result of a guerrilla-war by ISIL in response to the Iraqi army slowly liberating Mosul from ISIL.

On 5 January 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported at least 27 people were killed in a series of six bombings "in and around Baghdad". See also [Reuters](#).

On 8 January 2017, there were ISIL suicide bomb attacks on two marketplaces in Baghdad, which killed between 20 and 25 people. The Associated Press reports three other bombings in Baghdad killed 7 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 11 January 2017, the [Associated Press](#) incidentally mentions: "Also on Wednesday [11 Jan], bombings in Baghdad largely targeting commercial areas of the capital killed 11 people and wounded 40." Terror attacks in Baghdad are so routine that killing 11 people no longer rates a separate news article. Instead, a one-sentence remark on the terrorist attacks is tossed at the end of a news article on a different topic.

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.

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.

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).

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. On 11 January 2017, the top Iraqi commander in Mosul said "the operation to retake the city of Mosul from the Islamic State group could be complete in three months or less." [Associated Press](#). That would mean complete liberation of the entire city before 15 April 2017.
- 12.

January 2017: Mosul

My essays for [October 2016](#), [November 2016](#), and [December 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.

On 6 January 2017, Iraqi forces entered eastern Mosul from the north for the first time since the liberation of Mosul began in October 2016. [Reuters](#).

On 8 January 2017, Iraqi special forces reached one spot on the eastern bank of the Tigris river in Mosul, for the first time in the liberation of Mosul. The Iraqi special forces need to liberate the remainder of the eastern half of Mosul, before advancing into the western half of Mosul. [Reuters](#).

On 11 January 2017, the Iraqi special forces claim to have liberated between 80% to 85% of eastern Mosul. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). The [Pentagon](#) said the Iraqi army had liberated between 70% and 80% of eastern Mosul.

On 14 January 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported the "swift territorial gains" by the Iraqi security forces in eastern Mosul. But one way the Iraqi army is making rapid progress is to destroy buildings that contain ISIL fighters, but no civilians. The cited AP article mentions destroying a building on the campus of the former University in Mosul. An 11 January Associated Press [article](#) reports "After weeks of airstrikes and artillery fire, Mosul's al-Salam

hospital is little more than a burnt-out shell."

On 15 January 2017, both the [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) reported that Mosul University is now fully liberated from ISIL. On 13 January, the Iraqi forces entered the campus of Mosul University. [Reuters](#) tersely reported that Iraqi special forces "discovered chemicals used to try to make weapons".

On 18 January, the Iraqi army announced it was in "full control" of *all* of eastern Mosul, except part of northeast Mosul. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 23 January, politicians in the Iraqi government announced the government had "complete control" of *all* of eastern Mosul. [Reuters](#). On 24 January, the Iraqi prime minister declared that eastern Mosul was "fully liberated" from ISIL. [Associated Press](#).

On 28 January, Iraqi forces found an ISIL stockpile of sulfur mustard together with more than a dozen Russian-made rockets that were apparently intended to deliver the chemical weapon. [Associated Press](#).

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

Beginning in August 2014, I have included this section in my essays. In the USA and Western Europe, many Christians do *not* personally know any Muslim person, so the only time these Christians encounter Muslims is in reading about atrocities of Islamic terrorists. That is a public relations problem for mainstream Muslims, as the reputation of the Islamic religion is besmirched by Islamic terrorists, who act in the name of their interpretation of Islamic theology.

Then some military leaders and politicians developed the notion that Muslim clerics needed to explain *why* so-called "Islamic terrorism" was unIslamic, to stop the flow of foreigners into Syria to fight for ISIL and Nusra Front, and to stop the financial support of terrorists. This exposure of the erroneous ideology of Islamic terrorism is a different kind of public relations problem from defending mainstream Islam.

The same broad public relations campaign could satisfy the three goals of (1) protecting the reputation of mainstream Islam, (2) stopping the flow of foreign fighters into Syria, *and* (3) reducing financial support of Islamic terrorism.

Back in August 2014 there was a burst of condemnation of terrorism by Islamic clerics. (See my [tenth essay](#) on Syria.) But beginning in September 2014, Muslim clerics stopped publicly denouncing terrorism. There needs to be a consistent and continuing condemnation of terrorism by Muslim clerics, in part to discourage young Muslims from joining Al-Qaeda and ISIL.

This continuing condemnation by Muslim clerics is *not* something that is nice to have. It is an

essential element in fighting against Islamic terrorism. On 3 Dec 2014, sixty nations agreed that "ideological delegitimization" was one of five "lines of effort" that would be used to defeat ISIL, see my essay for [Dec 2014](#). However, this program was quickly ignored by nearly everyone.

In the context of the Islamic terrorist attack in Paris on 7-9 Jan 2015, my [essay](#) explains two different reactions by Christian politicians to Islamic terrorism:

1. Some Christian politicians have condemned Islamic terrorism as unIslamic, but I think it is inappropriate — and *not* credible — for Christians to say what is, or is not, proper Islam. Instead, such distinctions should come from Islamic clerics.
2. Other Christian politicians carefully refuse to make a connection between Islam and terrorism. This may be "politically correct", but it is factually wrong. The facts are obvious, but I will tersely review them anyway. Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

It is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics — and Islamic opinion leaders — consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government.

My Proposal

There are genuine cultural differences between mainstream Islam and Christianity. For example, Saudi Arabia does *not* issue driver's licenses to women. Women in Afghanistan wear a burqa. The effort here should *not* be to impose orthodoxy and make mainstream Islam more like Christianity. Instead, the effort here should be for Muslim clerics and other Muslim opinion leaders to cite their holy book and other theological documents to show that it is forbidden for Muslims to:

- invade nations in an attempt to spread an interpretation of Islam on other Muslims
- invade nations in an attempt to spread Islam on non-Muslims
- kill civilians (i.e., noncombatants)
- kill unarmed military prisoners
- deny water, food, and/or medical supplies to besieged cities
- impose a tax (i.e., Jizya) on non-Muslims
- sell captured women as sex slaves

In other words, the focus should be on defeating Islamic terrorism (e.g., Al-Qaeda and ISIL), and *not* on attacking mainstream Islam.

On 8 May 2015, I suggested creating hundreds of small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia,

and elsewhere to hire Arabs to counter propaganda from ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

I suggest that the U.S. government fund a hundred small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab nations to hire native speakers of Arabic-language to counter ISIL propaganda. Some of these employees could monitor social media and post counter-propaganda. Other employees could design websites that explain why ISIL is violating teachings of Islam, violating Fatwas, and list atrocities committed by ISIL. Using small companies (e.g., 30 employees per company) ensures that they are quickly adaptable to changing conditions. Using native speakers of Arabic adds authenticity. A few thousand Arabs might be able to swamp ISIL's propaganda operation.

There are millions of Arabs who have fled from their homes in Syria and Iraq, because of Islamic terrorists. Many of these refugees are either unemployed or have minimal income. Putting them to work countering propaganda on the Internet from Al-Qaeda or ISIL would not only help defeat Islamic terrorism, but also provide much needed income to refugees.

Standler, [Syria & Iraq: May 2015](#), 1 June 2015. See end of the section on the Terror Attack in Garland, Texas.

A manager would recognize that there are economies of scale, by having *one* central office to handle payroll, benefits, etc. And I have no problem with consolidating payroll in one central office that serves all of the small companies.

A manager would also recognize cost savings by purchasing equipment and Internet access in large quantities in *one* central office, to provide *all* of the small companies. Whoa! I want managers in each small company to be able to use a credit card to *quickly* purchase whatever they need, without going through a central bureaucracy. There are security advantages when different companies use different computer operating systems, different webbrowsers, different antivirus and firewall software, and different Internet service providers. That way one computer virus, or one denial of service attack, will not affect all of the different companies.

I want the small companies to maximize creativity in attacking ISIL's message, and to maximize productivity. To do that, equipment costs would not be minimized.

I envision these small companies attacking ISIL and Al-Qaeda in four ways:

1. Collect and display truth about Islamic terrorism:

Create and operate websites that

- A. explain why ISIL and Al-Qaeda are violating teachings of Islam,
- B. collect and display Fatwas against ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- C. list atrocities committed by ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
- D. hire Muslim clerics to write blogs or essays about how terrorism is evil.

Each website to have versions for Arabic, French, and English languages.

2. Social media: Monitor social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and refute propaganda. Cite URLs of websites that display truth about Islamic terrorism.

3. Produce press releases that can be published by newspapers or reported by

radio/television stations.

4. Use ridicule and parody to humiliate ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

I have seen calls for Internet Service Providers to shut down websites that espouse Islamic terrorism. (See, e.g., plan for Europol to shut down ISIL's social media accounts. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); 22 June 2015.) I am opposed to shutting down websites for three reasons:

1. First, if we shut down a website, the terrorists will move their webpages to a new location, making the shut-down efforts futile. The goal here is *not* to inconvenience Islamic terrorists, but to defeat Islamic terrorists. Shutting down websites only inconveniences the terrorists.
2. Second, shutting down websites that we do not approve is censorship. The terrorists will respond by saying Western Civilization can not win the debate in the marketplace of ideas, so Western Civilization simply censors unapproved messages.
3. Third, as Justice Brandeis famously said: "... the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence." *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357, 377 (1927) (concurring opinion).

In summary, Western Civilization *can* refute the arguments of Islamic terrorism. Winning the debate is the right way to defeat Islamic terrorism.

Need to Kill *Ideology* of Islamic Terrorism

The U.S. has killed several influential Islamic terrorists:

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).
- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.
- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).

- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.
- On 15 October 2015, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December 2015, U.S. airstrikes killed al-Qaida leaders in Libya and Somalia. [Pentagon](#).
- In "late November" 2015, a U.S. airstrike in Iraq killed Abu Salah, the financial minister of ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 29 December 2015, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes had killed 10 senior ISIL leaders during 7-27 December. Some of the dead leaders were involved in the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 Nov. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 29 Dec; [Reuters](#) on 30 Dec.
- On 25 March 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military had killed Haji Imam, "who was an ISIL senior leader, serving as a finance minister and who is also responsible for some external affairs and plots." Imam is also known as Abdul-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) spells the dead man's name as "Haji Iman — an alias for Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli".
- On 4 May 2016, Australia announced that a Cambodian immigrant who had joined ISIL had been killed by a U.S. airstrike in Mosul on 29 April. His name was Neil Prakash, also known as Abu Khaled al-Cambodi. Neil had been featured in ISIL recruiting videos. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [ABC](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#).
- On 9 May 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that an airstrike on 6 May had killed "Abu Wahib, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's military emir for Iraq's Anbar province". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 21 May 2016, the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, was killed by an airstrike from a U.S. drone in Pakistan. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). [Reuters](#) reported: "The death of Mullah Akhtar

Mansour ... could further fracture the Taliban — an outcome that experts cautioned might make the insurgents even less likely to participate in long-stalled peace efforts." And [Reuters](#) reported the Pakistani government is wailing about the U.S. violation of Pakistani sovereignty. [Obama](#) was pleased that Mansour — also spelled Mansur — was killed by the U.S. military. Four days after Mansour was killed, the Taliban elected a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

- 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](#).
- On 12 January 2017, a U.S. airstrike splatted Abd al-Jalil al-Muslimi, a Tunesian citizen who was a member of Al-Qaeda in Syria. [Pentagon](#).

- On 17 January 2017, a U.S. airstrike splatted Mohammad Habib Boussadoun al-Tunisi, a Tunesian citizen who was a member of Al-Qaeda in Syria. [Pentagon](#).

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The deaths of bin Laden and al-Awlaki had little effect on Al-Qaeda, and it is expected that the deaths of the leaders since June 2015 will also have little effect on Islamic terrorism.

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](#).)

On 31 January 2017, the [Associated Press](#) exposed flaws in a U.S. Central Command program on the Internet to counter recruiting by Islamic terrorist organizations. An early version of the Associated Press article said the military program was "botched" because the operatives "have little experience in counter-propaganda, cannot speak Arabic fluently and have so little understanding of Islam they are no match for the Islamic State online recruiters." Moreover, the management is "beset with incompetence, cronyism and flawed data". My comment is that the CENTCOM program of hiring immigrants from Morocco is not as good as my 2015 proposal above to use refugees from Syria and Iraq who remain in the Middle East (e.g., Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.).

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. On 1 January 2017 at 01:15, a man dressed as Santa Claus walked into a nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey carrying a rifle. He shot 108 people, of whom 39 died. He shouted "Allahu Akbar" as he shot unarmed civilians. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#)(1Jan); [Anadolu Agency](#); [Reuters](#)(2Jan). ISIL claimed responsibility. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#). On 16 January 2017, police in Turkey arrested the gunman, who was a citizen of Uzbekistan who had trained in Afghanistan. [Anadolu](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

39.

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 January 2017, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of December 15, 2016, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$10.7 billion and the average daily cost is \$12.5 million for 861 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 19 Jan 2017.

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).

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.
- My essay for [December 2016](#) describes an Islamic terrorist who used a large truck to attack a Christmas market in Berlin on 19 December, killing 12 people. On 23 December, police in Melbourne, Australia arrested a group of Islamic terrorists who were planning attacks.

Some of these previous essays also mention concerns by governments in Europe and Russia that Islamic terrorists will return from Syria and engage in terrorism in Europe and Russia.

Islamic Migration into Europe numbers

One of the major news stories during September 2015 was the flood of approximately 100,000 migrants into Europe, mostly from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

During the migration crisis in September 2015, accurate numbers were sparse. Instead, politicians and journalists spoke of "thousands" per day, "tens of thousands" per week, and at least a hundred thousand per month. On 7 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "An

Austrian Interior Ministry official says nearly 200,000 migrants transited Austria" during September 2015. The actual number was higher, because some migrants boarded trains outside of Austria and then traveled through Austria. Also the Associated Press reported: "German authorities say 164,000" migrants arrived in Germany during September 2015.

On 7 December 2015, the German government announced that a total of 965,000 migrants had registered in Germany during the first 11 months of 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 6 January 2016, the German government announced that a total of 1,091,894 migrants had registered in Germany during the 2015 year. Of these, 428,468 (39%) were from Syria. [Associated Press](#).

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

disenchantment & failure of assimilation

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

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

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

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

2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iraqis were "disappointed" in Europe and were returning to Iraq.

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

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

On 13 September 2016, [Reuters](#) reported that only 63 refugees have been employed by the top 30 companies in Germany, because of refugees' weak knowledge of the German-language and because of refugees' lack of job skills.

some immigrants are criminals

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

See:

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

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

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

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

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

On 20 January 2016, [Israel National News](#) reported that the German government had been

concealing crimes committed by Muslim immigrants since June 2014.

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

[Washington Post](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

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

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](#).

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, 4 Jan 2016.

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

By 1 October 2016, the Geneva negotiations about Syria were dead, with the last meeting in April 2016. There was a brief cessation of hostilities in March and April, but then the situation in Syria became worse and worse, with *no* reasonable hope of ending the Syrian

civil war. *Why* so little progress? I see five reasons:

1. Since the HNC was created in December 2015, the HNC has consistently demanded its pre-conditions be satisfied *before* they would negotiate. In March 2016, Assad proposed a so-called "national unity government", but the HNC refused to consider the proposal. The HNC walked out of negotiations on 18 April 2016. It is clear that the HNC *never* wanted to negotiate.
2. On 18 April 2016, the jihadist group Ahrar al-Sham began a military offensive in Latakia province. In June 2016, Jaysh al-Islam, another jihadist group, conducted a military offensive in Damascus province. My previous essays chronicle other violations of the cessation of hostilities by rebels and jihadist groups.
3. Assad is now clearly pursuing a military solution, as he declared in his 7 June 2016 speech, and again on 12 Sep 2016. On the night of 21 Sep 2016, Assad — with the assistance of Russian warplanes — began a ferocious assault on the city of Aleppo.
4. The foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, USA) continue to pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military victory. Convincing these foreign meddlers to stop supporting the Syrian civil war currently appears impossible. My essay for [May 2016](#) cites repeated calls during 2013 and 2014 by the United Nations Secretary General for nations to stop the flow of weapons to Syria, but those calls were ignored by *all* of foreign meddlers.
5. The USA and Russia, as co-chairs of the ISSG Ceasefire Task Force, failed to recommend frequent violators of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for punishment. In particular, on 11 May 2016, the USA blocked Russia's attempt at the United Nations to declare Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam as terrorist organizations, which would exclude them the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. And Russian airstrikes are supporting Assad's military campaign against rebels and jihadists. Neither Assad nor Russia are being punished for violating the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Note that there is *no* single villain who is responsible for the continuing Syrian civil war. Assad is blameworthy. The rebels/jihadists who refuse to negotiate are blameworthy. Russia is blameworthy, especially for airstrikes in Syria beginning 30 Sep 2015. Other foreign meddlers have also enabled the civil war to continue.

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

Why don't the foreign meddlers — who are members of the ISSG — force their proxy armies in Syria to negotiate? Well, the foreign meddlers — like the protagonists in the Geneva negotiations — are obsessed with the issue of whether Assad remains or resigns. Russia needs Assad to remain in power, so Russia can continue to use the naval base at Tartus. Iran needs Assad (a Shiite) to remain in power, so the Shiite government in Iran can have influence in Syria, where the majority of the Syrians are Sunnis. Obama is under the delusion that if Assad resigns, then the terrorists (i.e., ISIL and Nusra) and the jihadists will all magically disappear. My essay for [March 2016](#) (see section titled "Why wait for Assad to leave before fighting terrorist groups?") explains why ISIL and Nusra will persist after Assad is removed.

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

Conclusion for Syria

Obama needs to end his obsession with deposing Assad, and begin coordinating with Assad a strategy to defeat ISIL in both Syria and Iraq.

Beginning in 2013, Obama and Kerry, along with the United Nations Secretary General, have repeatedly uttered the slogan that there is "*no* military solution" in Syria. But what the foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, USA, etc.) have actually done is pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military solution. The situation dramatically worsened on 30 Sep 2015, with the beginning of massive Russian airstrikes on the Free Syrian Army and Nusra Front in western Syria. There is an incredible amount of hypocrisy by the foreign meddlers in *talking* about a political solution according to the Geneva Communiqué of 2012, while actively engaging in continuing — and escalating — warfare.

Since October 2013, I have been advocating in my essays that Europe and the USA actively support Assad in his fight against terrorists. But it is increasingly clear that neither Europe nor the USA will support Assad. And, beginning in December 2014, it is becoming clear that Assad's resources are stretched too thin for him to win militarily against a formidable array of terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front). We have been here before. When the USA deposed Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, the result in Iraq was anarchy, followed by civil war. And when NATO airstrikes helped depose Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, the result was again anarchy and civil war. And so, when Assad leaves power, the Syrian government will collapse, anarchy will prevail, and each terrorist organization — already present in Syria since 2012-2013 — will rule a small part of former Syria and continue fighting with each other. In retrospect, some nations should be ruled by a strong tyrant (e.g., Hussein, Gaddafi, Assad), because a transition to democracy quickly degenerates into fragmentation, anarchy, and civil war.

Back in June 2014, Lakhdar Brahimi — the second U.N. negotiator for Syria — predicted Syria will become "a failed state, with warlords all over the place." (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria, at section titled: "Brahimi Interview".)

It should be an immense scandal that Obama's idealistic obsession with "supporting democracy" (i.e., opposing Assad) in Syria led to:

- the deaths of *more* than 315,000 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than four million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

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

Conclusion for Iraq

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

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

1. The Iraqi government is corrupt. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [January 2016](#))
2. The Iraqi government is dysfunctional. During July-October 2014, the Iraqi Parliament *slowly* formed a new government — during an existential crisis. My essays for July 2014 through February 2015 summarized the infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. (See the summary for July through October 2014 in my [webpage](#).)
3. The Iraqi army was unable to stop the ISIL invasion during the first six months of 2014. In June 2014, the Iraqi army was exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout in Ramadi.
4. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable or unwilling to prosecute:
 - A. corrupt politicians or corrupt government officials,

- B. army officers who hired ghost soldiers,
 - 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.

Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism

Beginning in August 2014, my essays on Syria and Iraq have had a section titled "[Islamic Public Relations Problem](#)", in which I have chronicled reaction by Muslim clerics and the need for these clerics to *continually* condemn Islamic terrorism.

Leaders of Al-Qaeda and ISIL clearly and repeatedly invoke their concept of Islam in justifying or explaining their actions. Individual Islamic terrorists shout Islamic slogans as they commit their terrorist acts, and the individual terrorists are endorsed by Islamic terrorist organizations. Further, Al-Qaeda and other jihadists seek to establish Sharia law in Syria and/or Iraq — instead of a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

These facts clearly show that an interpretation of Islam is central to the ideology of the terrorists who have infested Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, The problem is "Islamic terrorism" — the *use of terrorism* to further goals that are justified by an interpretation of the Islamic religion.

To defeat the *idea* of Islamic terrorism, and to stop young Muslims from joining terrorist organizations, it is essential that mainstream Muslim clerics consistently and continually publicly condemn the use of terrorism in the name of Islam, and especially condemn the use of terrorism to impose any Islamic government. Instead, Muslim clerics have only sporadically condemned Islamic terrorism, typically after some atrocity committed by Islamic

terrorists.

Instead of writing only in the Arabic language, websites of major Islamic organizations (e.g., Al-Azhar University in Egypt) should also post webpages in French and English languages to discourage Europeans and non-Arabs from joining Islamic terrorist organizations.

Just to be clear, Western Civilization is *not* at war with *all* Muslims. I suggest that Western Civilization — *and* also mainstream Muslims everywhere — *should* be at war with Islamic terrorists. Indeed, mainstream Muslims are most affected by Islamic terrorism, as death tolls in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq show.

U.S. War on Terror

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

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

On 7 October 2001, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations notified the U.N. Secretary General that the U.S. would attack Islamic terrorists in Afghanistan, invoking the legal right of "self-defense" after the terror attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 11 Sep 2001. Note that most of the hijackers on 11 Sep 2001 came from Saudi Arabia and *none* came from Afghanistan. Further, Osama bin Laden, who ordered the attacks on the USA, was in Pakistan, *not* Afghanistan.

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

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

The U.S. war against terrorism began in Afghanistan in 2001. Fifteen years later, the U.S. Military is still fighting against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, with *no* end in sight. On 15 October 2015, Obama postponed the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan until sometime after the year 2016. The next U.S. president will inherit 5500 U.S. Military personnel in Afghanistan in January 2017. [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#) (commentary). On 6 July 2016, in response to an apparently worsening

situation in Afghanistan, Obama decided to leave 8400 U.S. Military personnel in Afghanistan in January 2017. [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the corrupt and weak governments are unable to defend their nations from Islamic terrorists. Substantial numbers of U.S. Military personnel and many tens of billions of US dollars in both Afghanistan and Iraq also have not defeated the Islamic terrorists. No one is asking the question *why* Islamic terrorists are so successful in their battle, while national armies and police are unable to defeat Islamic terrorists. I suggest the holy concept of jihad resonates with terrorists, while it is difficult for soldiers and policemen to be enthusiastic about working for a corrupt, dysfunctional government.

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

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

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

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

- "Are airstrikes successfully weakening ISIS?," [PBS](#), 1 May 2016. (Doug Ollivant interviewed by Soledad O'Brien. "We are hearing some reports, that actually now is what ISIL is telling people that they're talking to on social media: Don't come here [to Iraq or Syria]. Stay home. But that's obviously something we're just as concerned about, if not more so, are these radical jihadists in their home countries doing these lone wolf or very small group attacks. This is bad news particularly for Europe, where a much larger percentage of these foreign fighters come from....")
- Colin P. Clarke & Chad C. Serena, "Commentary: Islamic State may be down, but it's far from out," [Reuters](#), 25 May 2016. ("... Islamic State leaders could instruct would-be jihadists to remain home and launch attacks there.")
- "CIA chief: IS working to send operatives to the West," [Associated Press](#) 15 June 2016. ("CIA Director John Brennan will tell Congress on Thursday [16 June] that Islamic State militants are training and attempting to deploy operatives for further attacks on the West and will rely more on guerrilla-style tactics to compensate for their territorial losses." "Brennan also noted the group's call for followers to conduct so-called lone-wolf attacks in their home countries.")
- "White House says Baghdad attacks strengthen U.S. resolve in Iraq," [Reuters](#), 3 July 2016. (Brennan told Congress in June: "To compensate for territorial losses [in Iraq and Syria], ISIL (Islamic State) will probably rely more on guerrilla tactics, including high-

profile attacks outside territory it holds.")

- "US official says anti-Islamic State forces gaining momentum," [Associated Press](#), 28 June 2016. (Brett McGurk told the U.S. the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "more 'lone wolf' style attacks such as the one in Orlando are possible as the Islamic State loses territory,")
- "Islamic State's 'lone wolf' attacks to persist in West despite territorial losses in Middle East," [Washington Times](#), 28 June 2016. (Brett McGurk: "Islamic State officials are telling recruits in the West to stay put and conduct attacks at home rather than travel to the Salafist group's base in Syria, where its control is increasingly under threat.")
- "Germany girds for potential spike in Islamic State attacks in Europe," [Reuters](#), 28 June 2016. (German Interior Minister Thomas De Maiziere: "... we fear that Islamic State will externalise, transfer its activities to Europe, especially because of military losses in the region [Syria and Iraq].")
- "As ISIS Loses Land, It Gains Ground in Overseas Terror," [NY Times](#), 3 July 2016.
- "Islamic State's ambitions and allure grow as territory shrinks," [Washington Post](#), 3 July 2016. ("U.S. intelligence officials say battlefield setbacks in Iraq and Syria appear to have driven the Islamic State's leaders to speed up their timeline for attacks abroad.")
- "More than 140 killed in Islamic State's worst ever bomb attack in the Iraqi capital," [Washington Post](#), 4 July 2016. ("U.S. officials have warned that the [Islamic State] group is likely to intensify its attacks overseas as it loses ground in Iraq and Syria, but civilians in the Middle East continue to bear the brunt of the campaign of bombings.")
- "Inside ISIS: Quietly preparing for the loss of the 'caliphate'," [Associated Press](#), 13 July 2016. ("U.S. counterterrorism experts believe the mass-casualty attacks in Istanbul and Baghdad in the past month were largely a response to [ISIL's] military reversals in Iraq and Syria." "... [ISIL]'s highly decentralized nature ensures that it will remain dangerous for some time to come, according to current and former U.S. officials and terrorism experts.")
- "As 'caliphate' shrinks, Islamic State looks to global attacks," [Reuters](#), 13:08 GMT, 31 July 2016.
- President Obama at 4 Aug 2016 press conference at Pentagon: "In fact, the decline of ISIL in Syria and Iraq appears to be causing it to shift to tactics that we've seen before — an even greater emphasis on encouraging high-profile terrorist attacks, including in the United States." [Pentagon](#). See also [Associated Press](#).

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

This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria41.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to historical documents.

[my homepage](#)