

Syria & Iraq: February 2017

Copyright 2017 by Ronald B. Standler

No copyright claimed for quotations.

No copyright claimed for works of the U.S. Government.

Table of Contents

1. [Chemical Weapons](#)

2. [Syria](#)

United Nations [Diverted](#) from Syria

[death toll in Syria](#) now over 317,000 (28 Feb)

[Turkey](#) is an ally from Hell

[U.S. troops](#) in Syria

Recognition that Assad is [Winning](#) the Civil War

[Peace Negotiations](#) for Syria

Future of [Assad](#) must be decided by Syrians

[History](#) of Negotiations in Geneva during 2016

Failed Negotiations in [Astana](#) (15-16 Feb 2017)

[HNC](#) Faltering?

Planned Geneva [Negotiations](#) on ~~8 Feb, 20 Feb~~, 23 Feb ?

Negotiations in [Geneva](#) (23-28 Feb 2017)

occasional reports of continuing civil [war](#) in Syria

Nationwide [ceasefire](#) in Syria (began 30 Dec 2016)

Press Briefings by [de Mistura & Egeland](#)

[U.N. Reports](#)

war crimes [prosecution?](#)

3. [Iraq](#)

[Atrocities](#) in Iraq

Iraq is a [failed](#) nation

U.S. [combat troops](#) in Iraq

Liberation of [Mosul](#) (began 17 Oct 2016)

4. Islamic public relations [problem](#)

my [proposal](#)

Need to kill [ideology](#) of Islamic terrorism

5. [ISIL](#) is *not* defeated

[cost](#) of U.S. war against ISIL

6. Islamic terrorism and migration in [Europe](#)

Egyptian brings machete to [Louvre](#) (3 Feb 2017)

7. Conclusions

[Syria, Iraq, Muslim Clerics Need to Condemn Islamic Terrorism, U.S. War on Terror](#)

Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 39 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 That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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.

There is no copyright on works of the U.S. Government (17 U.S.C. §105), so an author is free to copy as much of a Government's work as the author wishes.

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

I use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) for events in Europe and Syria. Eastern Standard Time in Boston is -5 hours from GMT. 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](#).

Who used chemical weapons 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. That report surely ended any doubt about Assad's government releasing chlorine gas — a chemical weapon — in Syria. 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.

Finally, on 28 Feb 2017, there was a vote in the Security Council on a resolution drafted by France and the United Kingdom to sanction Syria for using chemical weapons. Both Russia and China vetoed the draft resolution. This was the seventh time Russia has used its veto in the Security Council to protect war criminals in Syria. [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Syria Futile Peace Negotiations in Syria Disorganization of the Syrian National Coalition & Politics of the Peace Process

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

Diversions

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

1. Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the **Ukraine**, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. By 30 May 2014, the crisis in the Ukraine appeared to be winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border. But on 28 June 2014, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil war. On 17 July 2014, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug 2014, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels. On 5 Sep 2014, another ceasefire began. On 24 Jan 2015, Russian rebels violated agreements and began an offensive against Mariupol. From the end of April 2014 to

2 Feb 2015, the United Nations says 5358 people died in the war in the Ukraine. During the first two weeks of Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was negotiated.

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

in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2012, longtime president Saleh was deposed. On 19 Jan 2015, Houthi (Shiite) rebels surrounded the home of the president (a Sunni) who is supported by the U.S.-government. On 22 Jan 2015, the president and cabinet resigned, plunging Yemen deeper into anarchy. On 10 Feb 2015, the U.S. [State Department](#) closed the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, because of rapidly deteriorating security. On 20 March, ISIL attacked two Shiite mosques in Yemen during Friday prayers, killing at least 137 people. [AP](#). On 26 March 2015, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

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

Deaths in Syria

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2854 persons during the month of February of 2017, they were distributed as following:

- Civilian casualties: 769 including 180 children under the age of eighteen, and 118 citizen women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
 - 229 including 59 children and 42 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria
 - 89 including 15 children and 13 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,
 - 10 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons,
 - 44 including 10 children and 9 citizen women were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions and the "Islamic State" organization,
 - 125 citizens including 38 children and 27 citizen women were killed in bombing of the Turkish warplanes,
 - 9, including a citizen woman were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards,
 - 9 including a citizen woman were executed by the "Islamic State"

- organization,
- 9 including 2 children and 2 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells launched by the “Islamic State” organization and by the fire of its machineguns,
- 1 martyred at the hands of Islamic factions and in their detention,
- 19 including 4 children and a woman were killed in the fall of shells and by the bullets of the rebel factions in Idlib and Aleppo,
- 59, including 18 children and 14 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the international coalition,
- 49 were killed in the detonating of cars and vehicles,
- 5 including 2 children and a woman 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,
- 6 citizens including 2 children and 3 women were killed at the hands of Syria Democratic Forces,
- and 106 including 29 children and 7 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

"About ... 2850 killed in February 2017," [SOHR](#), 1 Mar 2017. [Formatting as indented list by Standler. Some editing by Standler.]

When I add the numbers, I obtain a total of 2125, *not* 2854.

The number of deaths from the Syrian civil war increased from January to February, as the ceasefire unraveled.

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* 317,000.

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.

Feb 2017: Turkish invasion of Syria

On 23 February 2017, Turkish troops and elements of the Free Syrian Army liberated most of al-Bab, Syria from ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#); [Anadolu Agency](#).

On 24 Feb, Turkey announced they had "full control of all neighbourhoods of Syria's al-Bab". [Reuters](#).

Then on Friday, 24 Feb 2017, ISIL retaliated by detonating a car bomb at a checkpoint in the village of Sousian, 8 km northwest of al-Bab. More than 50 people were killed in the Islamic terrorist attack, including more than 30 civilians. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

U.S. troops in Syria

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

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

On 25 April 2016, Obama stood in Hannover, Germany and gave a speech "to the people of Europe". Obama said: "I've approved the deployment of up 250 additional U.S. personnel in Syria, including Special Forces," [White House](#).

On 28 April 2016, Syria claimed that 150 U.S. soldiers entered Syria on 27 April. The Syrian Foreign Ministry called the U.S. troops a "blatant act of aggression that constitutes a dangerous intervention and a gross violation of the Syrian sovereignty." [SANA](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). On 29 April, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov agreed that the U.S. troops violate the sovereignty of Syria. [TASS](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that Obama's deployment of U.S. troops is not only a violation of Syria's sovereignty, but also a violation of U.S. law, because the U.S. Congress has *not* passed an authorization of force that specifically allows Obama to fight ISIL.

On 24 November 2016, a U.S. Navy explosive disposal expert, Senior Chief Petty Officer Scott C. Dayton, was killed by an improvised explosive device in Ayn Issa in northern Syria. He was the first U.S. citizen killed in Obama's war in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Pentagon](#)(26Nov); [Washington Post](#).

On 10 December 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 liberated Aleppo city in December 2016, it is more clear than ever that Assad is slowly winning the Syrian civil war.

On 22 February 2017, [Agence France-Presse](#) reported: "The ground has shifted since the last round broke up in April 2016 and the rebels find themselves in a significantly weaker position." Also on 22 Feb 2017, [Reuters](#) reported: "And with Assad militarily stronger than he has been for years, [Assad] has the option of pressing home its advantage on the ground if it doesn't get its way at the negotiating table."

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](#).

History of Negotiations in Geneva during 2016

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.

My essay for [January 2017](#) described the total failure of negotiations in Astana, and de Mistura's postponement of the resumption of Geneva negotiations from 8 Feb to 20 Feb.

Failed Negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan

On 24 January 2017, a two-day negotiation between insurgents and Assad's government concluded in Astana, with absolutely *no* accomplishment. 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](#). 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.

On 6 February, military officials from Russia, Turkey, and Iran met for only one day in Astana to discuss the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. *No* document was issued at the 6 Feb meeting in Astana. The participants agreed to meet again, perhaps on 15-16 February. [Reuters](#). My comment is that, although no Syrians were present to frustrate progress, the diplomats apparently suffered from the Syrian disease of talking without achieving anything. Also, this failure in Astana could further delay de Mistura's negotiations in Geneva.

On 13 February 2017, the insurgents announced they would *not* attend the negotiations in Astana on 15-16 Feb, because Russia had failed to stop violations of the ceasefire by Assad. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 15 February 2017, the negotiations were scheduled to begin in Astana. Once again, the insurgents caused big problems. First, the delegation of insurgents arrived late, which delayed the start of the negotiations by one day. Second, the insurgents only sent "a group of technical experts", *not* a delegation who could make an agreement. [Reuters](#).

On 23-24 January, de Mistura was an active participant in the negotiations in Astana. But de Mistura will *not* attend the February negotiations in Astana. Instead, it was announced on 14 Feb that de Mistura will be in Moscow on 16 Feb for meetings with Russian diplomats and military officers. [TASS](#); [RIA-Novosti](#); [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#)(15Feb).

On 16 February 2017, [Al-Arabiya](#) published an Agence France Presse article that said the negotiation in Astana "is scheduled to begin at 1600 local time (0900 GMT)" on 16 Feb. There was *no* explanation of why the negotiations would begin so late in the afternoon.

On 16 February at 18:27 GMT, a [Reuters](#) news article reported that the head of Assad's delegation said there was *no* communiqué from the Astana meeting, because Turkey refused to sign. [RIA-Novosti](#) reports that a rejected document would have imposed sanctions on violators of the ceasefire in Syria.

At 01:17 GMT on 17 Feb, [Reuters](#) reported: "A round of Syria peace talks sponsored by Russia ended on Thursday [16 Feb] with no joint communique, usually the minimum outcome of any diplomatic negotiation, and saw opposing Syrian groups exchanging angry tirades at each other and the brokers." Reuters also said: there was "no concrete progress to report". Although the Astana meetings were supposed to focus only on the ceasefire, Russia submitted a draft of a new constitution for Syria, which was a distraction from discussing problems with the ceasefire. [RIA-Novosti](#) also reported there was *no* final document from the 16 Feb meeting in Astana.

Because the insurgents had not yet arrived, the scheduled 15 Feb meeting was cancelled. There is *no* explanation why the Astana negotiations were not extended to include negotiations on 17 Feb.

Honestly, one must conclude that the negotiations in Astana have been a complete and total **failure**. One wonders whether Russia is stupid enough to schedule a third round of negotiations with the insurgents, after the insurgents refused to negotiate during the previous rounds on 23-24 Jan and 16 Feb. [RIA-Novosti](#) quotes one of the insurgents as saying: "The perception that Astana gave absolutely nothing to the Syrian people is being reinforced. This is a waste of Syrians' time ... so I am saying I am very pessimistic and do not expect there to be another round of talks in Astana."

On 21 February 2017, the Syrian National Coalition complained that the Russians had broken a promise made in Astana:

Member of the Syrian Coalition's political committee Yasser Farhan accused Russia of failing to fulfill its promises in Syria, stressing that Russia bears responsibility for the ongoing crimes against the Syrian people.

Moscow pledged to halt its aerial campaign on the liberated areas during a meeting

with representatives of the FSA groups in Astana last week, Farhan said. However, Russia has not honored its pledges.

Local activists said that they have recorded dozens of air raids by the Russian forces on the provinces of Idlib, Dara'a, and Rural Damascus over the past week. The most violent airstrikes hit Dara'a province where the Syrian interim government announced that the Russian bombings put all hospitals in the liberated areas out of service.

Farhan, who was a member of the opposition's technical delegation during the latest meeting in Astana, said that Russia has so far failed to achieve any progress in the issue of detainees in the prisons of the Assad regime.

"We demanded the release of all detainees in Syria in accordance with international resolutions to achieve justice, not through prisoners swap deals with the Assad regime," Farhan said.

The opposition's delegation refused to discuss Russian suggestions for mechanisms to consolidate the cease-fire and demanded that discussions must focus on the paper submitted by the opposition, Farhan added.

"Syrian Coalition: Russia Breaking Its Promises in Syria," [SNC](#), 21 Feb 2017.

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 on 26-27 Jan. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On 3 February 2017, various groups of Syrian political opposition and insurgents met in Ankara. The Syrian National Coalition — a political group of Syrian expatriates who pretended in 2013-2014 to operate the opposition government — issued the following statement:

Member of the Syrian Coalition Nasr Hariri said that the Coalition, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) and the FSA groups will select the opposition's delegation to the upcoming Geneva talks.

Hariri, who attended a meeting of the Syrian political and military opposition in Turkey's capital Ankara on Friday, said the meeting brought together the real political and military opposition. He stressed the need for greater unity among the opposition.

The conferees in Ankara discussed the outcome of the Astana meeting held in the Kazakh capital on January 23, the solidification of the ceasefire, and the formation of the Syrian opposition delegation to the upcoming round of Geneva talks. The Assad regime forces and their allied foreign militias continue to violate the truce, Hariri said. He added that the Astana meeting has not yet produced any tangible progress in the issues of detainees, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the complete lifting of the sieges.

Hariri warned that the upcoming round of talks due to be held in Geneva on February 20 will be doomed to fail unless appropriate conditions are created; most notably a complete ceasefire; stopping the bombardment; the delivery of aid to those in need; and the release of detainees.

"Hariri: Only Syrian Coalition, HNC, & FSA Groups Have Right to Select Opposition's Delegation to Geneva Talks," [SNC](#), 4 Feb 2017.

Who declared that *only* the SNC, HNC, and FSA have the legal right to select a delegation to negotiations in Geneva? Those three groups appointed themselves to represent everyone in Syria who opposes Assad. The SNC and HNC are expatriates who do *not* live in Syria. The FSA exists in Syria, but is the weakest group of insurgents. In short, neither the SNC nor HNC represents people currently living in Syria, and the FSA does *not* represent the jihadists who are currently the bulk of the non-terrorist insurgent groups.

Instead of selecting a delegation, the participants in the Ankara meeting on 3 Feb reviewed the demands that they made in 2014 and 2016. Those demands scuttled the previous Geneva negotiations.

Hariri is right about one thing: the Geneva negotiations "will be doomed to fail", because the demands of the SNC and HNC have *not* been satisfied.

On 5 February, the HNC met in Riyadh to choose a delegation to the Geneva negotiations that are scheduled to begin on 20 February. [Al-Arabiya](#). Note that the HNC meeting began

just 3 days before de Mistura's deadline for the opposition to select its delegation.

On 6-7 February, I searched Google News, *Al-Arabiya*, and *Arab News* for reports of the HNC in Riyadh, but I found nothing. This is an important omission, because de Mistura's deadline for selecting a delegation is 8 February.

On 6 February, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that Mohammed Alloush — the head of the Syrian armed opposition delegation to the Astana meeting on 23-24 Jan — said the Syrian armed opposition would *not* participate in Geneva unless all of its demands (e.g., U.N. observers monitoring the ceasefire, punishment of ceasefire violators, the release of political prisoners, and the lifting of the siege of several towns by Assad's government,) were satisfied. See also the article in [Al-Jazeera](#) by a FSA political officer.

On 8 Feb 2017, the day de Mistura was scheduled to send out invitations to the Geneva meeting that begins on 20 Feb, the opposition still had *not* chosen a delegation, as explained [below](#).

On 9 Feb 2017, the Syrian National Coalition issued a press release that touted a "consensus" in the formation of a delegation to the Geneva meeting. However, that press release did *not* mention the members of the delegation.

Member of the Syrian Coalition's political committee Osama Taljo said there is consensus among the Syrian Coalition, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), and the FSA groups on the formation of the negotiating team for the upcoming round of Geneva talks. Taljo said that the three opposition entities are aiming to form a delegation able to help the Syrian people regain their rights from the dictatorial regime.

"The real forces of the Syrian opposition agreed that that the opposition negotiating delegation should include figures with experience in negotiations and able to achieve the demands of the Syrian people during the upcoming Geneva negotiations, which will be thorny," Taljo said.

....

The Assad regime and its Iranian allies pose the biggest obstacle to reaching a political solution in Syria as they insist on pursuing a military solution to the conflict, Taljo stressed.

"Taljo: Consensus among Opposition Forces on Formation of Negotiating Team," [SNC](#), 9 Feb 2017.

Taljo's claim that "the opposition negotiating delegation should include figures with experience in negotiations" was previously made on 31 May 2016. But does the Syrian opposition have anyone with such good experience?

Taljo's claim that Assad and Iran are the "biggest obstacle" is false. Assad is winning the Syrian civil war, with the help of Russia and Iran. The biggest obstacle is the refusal of the insurgents to stop fighting and surrender to Assad. The Syrian civil war began in March 2011, six years ago.

The insurgents continue to demand what they have been unable to win in their civil war. The HNC has been promising a new negotiating delegation since 31 May 2016, more than 8 months ago, but on 9 Feb 2017 the HNC has failed to form that new delegation. On 19 Dec 2016, de Mistura announced the resumption of Geneva negotiations on 8 Feb 2017, which *should* have inspired the opposition to select a delegation in late December or early January.

On 10 February 2017, [Arab News](#) reported: "A meeting of an expanded Syrian opposition, which includes the Astana delegation and the Syrian Higher Negotiations Committee (HNC) started on Friday [10 Feb] [in Riyadh], said Mohammad Alloush, head of the Syrian delegation to Astana talks." That is astounding. What happened to the 5 Feb meeting in Riyadh? Why is a two-day meeting beginning on 10 Feb, *after* de Mistura's 8 Feb deadline to choose a delegation? There are *no* answers to these questions.

On 11 February 2017 at 13:06 GMT, [Al-Arabiya](#) reported the HNC and the insurgent delegates to the Astana conference on 23-24 January 2017 agreed on a delegation to the Geneva negotiations that begin on 20 February. A total of 20 delegates, plus "20 consultants" were chosen. *Al-Arabiya* reported: "Nassir al Hariri has been named as the lead delegate" and "Mohammed Sabra as their lead negotiator". There was *no* explanation of the roles of "lead delegate" and "lead negotiator". But at 18:25 Beirut time (16:25 GMT) on 11 Feb, the [Associated Press](#) reported "Nasr al-Hariri of the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition would head the mixed delegation of rebel leaders and exiled opposition figures", but the "rebels and political groups are preparing to appoint a 20-member delegation". That means the delegates are *not* yet appointed.

On 11 February 2017, Reuters explained:

[HNC spokesman Salim al-Muslit] said the opposition delegation would bring together various groups, which, as well as the HNC would include rebel factions that took part in Astana negotiations. It will also include Kurdish, Turkmen and Christian representatives, he said, but did not elaborate.

"It is a military political delegation and it represents everyone," Muslit said. "Each component will nominate the person it finds suitable."

Twenty legal advisors will accompany the negotiators to Geneva, he added.

An opposition official on Saturday confirmed to Reuters a report by al-Arabiya news channel that Nasr al-Hariri, of the Syrian National Coalition group, will head the delegation.

"Syrian opposition to announce delegates for U.N. peace talks — HNC," [Reuters](#), 13:08 GMT, 11 Feb 2017.

PressTV in Iran issued the following news article. In reading it, be aware that Iran and Saudi Arabia are enemies.

Syria's armed opposition groups have announced their new delegation for an upcoming round of peace talks brokered by the United Nations and set to be held in the Swiss city of Geneva, scrapping Saudi-backed terrorist groups.

The so-called High Negotiations Committee (HNC), a coalition of foreign-backed

Syrian opposition groups, made the announcement in a statement on Sunday [12 Feb], saying that the final composition of the delegation included 10 representatives of militant groups and 11 opposition politicians, mostly affiliated with the armed groups within the coalition.

The Saudi-backed Ahrar al-Sham militant group and Jaysh al-Islam do not have any representatives in the delegation, which could be perceived as a sign that the armed opposition groups are trying to distance themselves from Riyadh's warmongering policies in Syria.

....

Mohamed Sabra was also selected as the chief negotiator of the delegation. He replaced Mohamad Alloush, a member of the Saudi-backed Jaysh al-Islam terrorist group. Alloush served as the chief negotiator for the so-called opposition groups during three previous rounds of peace talks in Geneva, the last of which was held on April 13-27 last year and ended with no result.

"Syria opposition forms new delegation, scraps Saudi-backed groups," [PressTV](#), 12 Feb 2017.

On the night of 14 February, there was nothing at the English-language website of the Syrian National Coalition about the delegation, after their press release on 9 Feb.

My comment is that the large opposition delegation will make consensus difficult, because of the many differing opinions from different groups. The result is likely to be a rigid position, with uncompromising adherence to the HNC's previous demands. Large groups of people are able to insist on conformity to the group's dogma. It is unbelievable that the HNC is going to have 20 lawyers present in Geneva. *No* one needs 20 lawyers "advising" them on *one* negotiation.

On 12 Feb, the HNC allowed one delegate from each of the Moscow Group and Cairo Group of opposition politicians to join with the HNC in Geneva. On 14 February, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that the Cairo Group of opposition politicians refused to join the HNC in Geneva. Instead, the Cairo Group wants to be part of a "joint opposition delegation".

On 15 February 2017, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that Qadri Jamil — a member of the Moscow Group of Syrian expatriate opposition — said: "... we see the 'Riyadh group' [HNC] is impeding the formation of a single opposition delegation to ruin the future negotiations in Geneva."

My comment is that just 8 days before the Geneva negotiations begin, the Syrian opposition is already publicly quarreling.

**Planned Resumption of Intra-Syrian Negotiations
on ~~8 Feb, 20 Feb, 23 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 worser, 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.

My essay for [January 2017](#) explained that, on 31 Jan 2017, de Mistura postponed the negotiations in Geneva until 20 February. 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](#).

On 8 February, the HNC had not yet decided on a delegation. De Mistura could have selected an opposition delegation and be rid of the HNC, which had refused to negotiate during 2016. Instead, de Mistura gave the HNC a few more days to make a decision about their delegation. De Mistura still intends to convene the Geneva negotiations on 20 Feb. [TASS](#); [U.N.](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). The opposition finally decided on delegates on 12 Feb.

On 13 February, de Mistura sent out invitations to the negotiations in Geneva that are scheduled to begin on 23 Feb, a second delay in start date. [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#). A press release from de Mistura's office at [U.N. Geneva](#) said: "It is expected that delegations would arrive in Geneva on or about 20 February to enable prior consultations with the Special Envoy and his team before the formal start of intra-Syrian negotiations planned for 23 February 2017."

On 16 February, after a meeting in Moscow with the Russian defense minister, de Mistura held a short press briefing, at which de Mistura explained the agenda for the negotiations in Geneva: "Regarding Geneva, the discussion was clearly about hoping and wishing that the Geneva negotiations will be focusing, with as inclusive as possible delegation, on three items:

one is governance, the other one very important Constitution, new Constitution, and three — very important — new elections." [U.N. Geneva](#). This is basically the approach in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254. On 21 Feb, the U.N. Office in Geneva reiterated that agenda. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 17 February, a Friday, de Mistura was "still in the process of finalising who will come to Syria peace talks in Geneva that start on Feb. 23". [Reuters](#).

On Sunday, 19 February, de Mistura told journalists he had low expectations for the Geneva negotiations: "I can't tell you (if it will succeed), but we have to push with the momentum. Even a ceasefire cannot hold too long if there is no political (solution)." [Reuters](#).

The low expectations was reiterated in a 22 Feb press conference by de Mistura. I have added boldface to some sentences that I believe are really important.

Thank you for all of you to be here, I'm convinced it will be worthwhile. We are going to give a serious try. This round is taking place again at the time when we want to give a chance to the Syrian people, to the Syria parties to try to have some type of dialogue leading more beyond than just a conflict.

Let me give you some few points and then of course we will take some questions. I have got with me some colleagues also, I've got here for instance our Representative in Damascus. She is my representative in a very difficult office which is the one managing our relations and our work inside Syria, Stephanie Koury. Then I've got my colleagues also related to women issues and to the issues of humanitarian access, so in case you have any questions, plus of course my Deputy [Mr Ramzy] who has been supporting me on all what I am trying to do.

Let me go now on few points, first of all the cease-fire, let's talk about that for a moment, why? Because I'm just coming out from a Task Force on the Ceasefire and it's not by a coincidence frankly we had it today, why? It's not a precondition, let's be frank, let us be very honest among ourselves. The fact that in Astana and before between Turkey and Russia in December, there was an agreement to actually include in their agreement a substantial attempt to bring a cease-fire on board in Syria, has been helping, and I hope is going to continue helping a political process. Even if frankly there is still some difficulties. It is still fragile, but it is holding by large. And we would not have been able to have these talks if there was a breakdown of the cease-fire.

There are spoilers, we know it, we've seen it all the time during the last talks and perhaps they are maybe even attempting or maybe tempted to do something before or just during the talks in order to provoke one side and the other to walk out or to not accept talking. But we will try to control it, and you must know, and I understand this is standard procedure in every event like this that the political momentum that helped the cease-fire to have raison d'être and the raison d'être also from the cease-fire to the political momentum.

Today, the Russian Federation at the Ceasefire Task Force did announce to everyone and every country present and to myself that they have formally requested the Government of Syria to silence their own skies in the areas touched by cease-fire

during the intra-Syrian negotiations. We have been requesting those who have an influence on the opposition to try themselves also to do the same. They don't have airplanes but they can do something similar in terms of reducing any type of provocation on any side to give a better chance to the intra-Syrian negotiations to not be affected by breakdowns produced that spoil the actual talks.

Intra-Syrian negotiations, what we are planning to have tomorrow? The Syrian parties have been arriving, are arriving, and are expected to be all here by tomorrow. Tonight most of them, tomorrow perhaps one more, depending on visas and travel.

What and who are they? The guiding principle is the resolution 2254, if you read it carefully, operative paragraph number two, I won't repeat it, is the guiding principle along which I have been inviting the Syrian parties to these talks. I was there when the resolution was discussed, negotiated and then adopted, so there were a very delicate touching in order to be able to give guidance, which I am going to follow, and I did follow.

Now, regarding the subjects, the agenda, again 2254. If you look on the operative paragraph number four, it speaks very clearly; one the establishment of a credible, I'm quoting 2254, I'm not making my own working here,

1. the establishment of a credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance;
2. two, schedule for the process of drafting a new constitution, new constitution; and
3. three, free and fair election pursuant to the new constitution administered under the UN supervision to the highest international standards.

Well, these are the three areas, we can call them baskets if you want, in which we intend to lead the discussions among the Syrian sides.

On the constitutional side, there has been often, referred to recently, let me be clear, I think because that was a request I have got from many Syrians. The drafting of a constitution the sole prerogative of the Syrian people, not us, not anybody else. It should be understood that we can all contribute with thoughts, ideas, suggestions, but it is up to the Syrian people. No other country in the world has actually had someone else writing a constitution and that one lasting for long or succeeding, and we have past examples.

The UN is there to help them, the Syrian people, with devising the best procedure and by providing necessary expertise in this regard and it is our hope that it would be possible to agree on the process to devise a new constitution, clearly such a process should be as inclusive as possible and include the various components of the Syrian society, so just to address the issue, and I know it's been coming up regularly, it is up to the Syrian people, we can help them, support them, we have expertise, we have knowledge, about elections and governance frankly[.]

Now that they are in town, I will be meeting with the participants in the negotiations to discuss how to proceed, so I hope you will not expect me, please at this stage, and not

ask questions which I will not be able to reply to how we are going to actually devise all this, because the first ones I should be discussing this is exactly the Syrian counterparts who are coming. After that, with great pleasure, we will be able to elaborate more.

Tomorrow morning we will be having bilateral meetings with those who are here, I did today, this afternoon, this evening or tomorrow morning. And in the afternoon, I plan to have the first opportunity to give and express my welcome to them and hopefully also in the presence of the international support group [ISSG representatives], in order to show that the international community is interested, supportive, united as much as we can hope, in order to tell to the Syrian sides, it's time to talk and fight on the table, but not in the field.

Am I expecting a breakthrough? No, I'm not expecting a breakthrough, but I'm expecting and determined to keep a very proactive momentum. And I think we can aim at that. So I'm not expecting any media breakthrough from this round of negotiations, but a beginning of a series of rounds that should enable to go much more in depth on the substantive issues that are required for a political solution in Syria.

We will be very reluctant to engage on the preconditions, and in fact I will be refusing them. Preconditions about, we need to do this or that, before actually addressing any type of subjects, the subjects are clear — [U.N. Security Council Resolution] 2254.

Inclusivity, we have a mandate to be as inclusive as possible. I have been trying by following carefully 2254, to do exactly that. But there is a category of people, important people to us, to the UN, who have not been so far included sufficiently, those who represent fifty one, if not fifty two percent of the Syrian people, the women, Syrian women. I have been asking the delegations to include a substantial number of women, I don't think that will be, unfortunately, the case. I see names of highly qualified women, among those who have been suggested to come, but not enough in numbers. I have, as you know, established the Syrian women advisory board in a platform in the palace for civil society representatives in order to be able to advise me and participate, in one way or the other, in the intra-Syrian talks in an advisory and consultative capacity. And that what I plan to do even this time, inclusivity means, not only numbers but influence, and influence that women advisory board will have, and can have, with their own very remarkable example of being able to actually agree among them, in spite of having very different positions, on what can be the future of Syria, is an important element for me.

Today by the way, and it was not a casual decision, the first meeting of today was with a group of seven women. Syrian women, all of them united by one fact, there have been either detainees, or tortured or abducted, or they have their mothers, daughters or wives of detained or abducted people. Detainees, are those by government, thousands, and abducted are those by the opposition.

I want to do so to respect their determination in making sure, in spite of the fact that we are talking about grand issues, we should never forget the suffering of so many Syrians on one side and the other too during this conflict.

Bottom line, its delicate moment, but since we do have, fragile but very substantive, when you compare it to the past and today, think about what we used to have about a year ago, when the cease-fire broke down and think about today. So we do have fragile incidents, which need to be controlled and need to be taken care of and not be allowed to go further, **that's why Astana for us is important and Astana needs to be focusing on delivering the cease-fire and those confidence building initiatives.** But just because we do have a cease-fire, we need to keep the momentum we are not having. Second, any excessive expectations, let us be frank, clearly we are determined to give the Syrians another chance for addressing the political process that they all claim they want to address.

Three, please, dear friends of the media don't be surprised if there will be rhetoric statements and even dismissive statements among them, aggressive ones, they are part of what we should expect. Wait, look for the substance, look for what would happen during the talks and at the end of the talks. So don't be, and I will not be, impressed if you will be having terrible interviews saying, these people are awful, the others are even more awful. It is part of the rhetoric, we have seen that, you will have it. I hope they will be controlling it, we will be aiming at substance. I would stop there and leave it up to you for some questions.

....

QUESTION: Mr De Mistura, until now the picture is not clear for us, how these talks would take place, will there be dialects, direct meetings, will there be more than one delegation in the same room, in the same discussion, or will it be like last year separate meetings with delegations. Yesterday, Mr Michael Contet also spoke of what you mentioned today that the political process aims at a political transition, can you please clarify the objective of this round, in addition to the three points you already mentioned.

SdM: I have already replied to your question, so I have to say, first by saying please don't ask me kindly, any of those details because I am bound before informing you to actually discuss them with the actual Syrian interlocutors on how to proceed, what type of form, what type of meetings, separate rooms or together, so allow me to elaborate more later on. Regarding the agenda, both Mr. Contet and me referred to 2254, so I would please ask you to read paragraph 4 and paragraph 2 of 2254 and learn it by heart because that is our guidance and I will abide in terms of agenda by 2254.

....

QUESTION: About besieged areas, how can both parties be engaged in a peace process if they don't show compassion to the people living in these areas? Syrian peace talks must unlock humanitarian access, how? I would like to have your answer on that please.

SdM: At the moment, we do have areas that are besieged, and they are besieged mostly by the government and two areas are besieged by the opposition and one area besieged

by Daesh or ISIL or whatever you want to call them. The only area that has been reached in the last period has been Deir Ezor area controlled by the government, besieged by Daesh, and by whom? By the UN. We have been doing, thanks to the contribution of generous countries airdrops every day even during this period. All the other areas including Al-Waer have not been able to be reached. We are complaining about it very strongly, why? **Because that's something that we would like to be raised in Astana.** In Syria, the problem of reaching humanitarian access is not caused by the wind or by the snow or by a flood, it is caused by war, by conflict, by fighting, by roadblocks and when there is a ceasefire in theory, there should be no war, there should be no roadblocks, or at least roadblocks should be open, and that has not been happening so far. So this issue has been raised today at the Humanitarian Task Force.

....

QUESTION: You have repeatedly talked about an inclusive process, so I would be interested to know if the opposition delegation is going to include any people other than the High Negotiations Committee.

SdM: At the Security Council last time [1 Feb 2017], when I was there, in New York, I made quite a firm [statement](#) if you probably remember, saying our aim is actually to come to the talks with as a unified or as inclusive delegation of the opposition as possible for two reasons.

(A) It is easier for a negotiator to handle a negotiation when you have got two groups and

(B) because often, and I hope this time will not be the case, because frankly it would be quite disappointing, the Government delegation spent two or three days telling me that where is the opposition rather to address the substance.

So my aim and hope was that it would be as inclusive as possible. Well I must say there has been a response because I will leave it to the Riyadh based opposition to explain to you but they have been, to my knowledge, expanding as I requested. The number of armed groups that are represented, I think they are more that 50 per cent of the delegation. My argument being: Everyone who is doing peace among those who fight, secondly the ones who fight and die are the right ones to negotiate if that is the case. Three, even President Assad the first time I met him told me "I want to negotiate with those who are fighting me". Well, here they are. Plus I understand there was an inclusion of other groups, so you should ask them how inclusive they are. We will see tomorrow but my impression is that they have been making an effort to follow particularly the request to include armed groups upfront.

"Transcript of press conference by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 22 Feb 2017. [Boldface and link added by Standler.]

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

19 Feb 2017: my opinion

I have three comments on the imminent Geneva negotiations. First, the opposition continues to be disorganized, except for a consensus that Assad must *not* be part of Syria's future. As

we saw in Geneva in February through April 2016, and again in Astana on 23-24 January and 15-16 February 2017, the opposition refused to negotiate. Instead, the opposition demanded what it failed to win during the six-year Syrian civil war. For the negotiations in Geneva to be successful, we need an opposition delegation who will surrender to Assad's government and who will compromise with Assad.

Second, the agenda in Resolution 2254 was foisted on the Syrian people by a bunch of foreign meddlers in the U.N. Security Council. Worse, the agenda for the negotiations in Resolution 2254 is wrong — Syria does *not* need a new government. By discussing the wrong issues, the Geneva negotiations avoid discussing the real problems in Syria. What Syria really needs is:

1. the insurgents stop fighting,
2. punishment of violators of the ceasefire,
3. unimpeded deliveries of humanitarian aid to all who need food or medicine, and
4. reconstruction of Syrian cities and towns, roads, electricity infrastructure, and water infrastructure.

But de Mistura has diverted consideration of ceasefires and humanitarian aid to the negotiations in Astana, instead of discussions in Geneva. (Astana has been a total failure. Astana is mostly propaganda by Russia.) Also de Mistura ignores ISIL and Nusra (neither invited to Geneva), but those Islamic terrorist organizations must be defeated somehow. It would also be good if the foreign meddlers (e.g., Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, etc.) who sponsored the insurgents would begin paying tens of billions of dollars for the reconstruction of Syria. But these things that Syria really needs are a fantasy that is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future.

The agenda for a new government, new constitution, and new elections is dogma that began with Kofi Annan's Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. In the year 2012, the consensus was that Assad's government would soon collapse and a transitional government was needed in Syria. For other reasons why the 2012 Geneva Communiqué is flawed, see my [review](#).

A third problem seems to be that Islamic jihadists *enjoy* fighting. The Taliban in Afghanistan have been fighting since the early 1980s. Al-Qaeda was created in 1988 and now has branches in many Islamic nations. The two major Islamic terrorist organizations in Syria (i.e., Nusra Front and ISIL) are both inspired by Al-Qaeda, although they are no longer formally affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The insurgents in Syria have been fighting since mid-2011, although in recent years their probability of victory has been low and decreasing. To be frank, this problem is essentially that the insurgents in Syria — and also Assad's military — are barbarians.

A related question is whether *all* of the insurgents in Syria will obey any agreement reached in Geneva. I suggest the answer is "no", for two reasons. First, Nusra, ISIL, and major jihadist groups are *not* represented in Geneva. Second, for those groups who are represented in Geneva, the loyalty of fighters tends to be to local commanders, not to some distant leadership.

For these reasons, the Geneva negotiations will surely fail to produce any significant results,

such as integration of the political opposition into Assad's government. Despite my belief that the Geneva negotiations will surely fail, it is important to attempt the negotiations. De Mistura's incredible optimism is an asset here.

Negotiations in Geneva

20-22 Feb 2017: Arrival of delegates in Geneva

On 13 February 2017, de Mistura's office said: "It is expected that delegations would arrive in Geneva on or about 20 February to enable prior consultations with the Special Envoy and his team before the formal start of intra-Syrian negotiations planned for 23 February 2017." [U.N. Geneva](#).

I searched Reuters and the Associated Press on 20 and 21 Feb, but found *no* news of arrivals in Geneva. What actually happened was most of the delegates arrived on 22 Feb, and the remainder of the delegates arrived on 23 Feb. [Arab News](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#).

Some journalists call the current negotiations "Geneva4". Geneva1 was Kofi Annan's one-day meeting of foreign meddlers on 30 June 2012. Geneva2 was Lakhdar Brahimi's two weeks of negotiations during Jan/Feb 2014. Geneva3 was de Mistura's negotiations during Feb/April 2016.

23 Feb 2017: Day Nr. 1 Welcoming Ceremony

On 23 February, de Mistura met with a group of Syrian women and they all held a moment of silence for those detained, abducted, or missing during the Syrian civil war. [U.N. Geneva](#); [Associated Press](#). My comment is that this was a waste of time: the barbarians in Syria will *not* change their behavior as a result of this moment of silence.

On 23 February, de Mistura gave a welcoming speech to the Syrian ~~war criminals~~ delegates in an auditorium at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Here is part of his tediously verbose speech:

The Syrian people desperately want an end to the conflict. And you all know it. And you know it very well: you are the first ones to tell me this. They are waiting for a relief from their own suffering and dream of a new road out of this nightmare to a real and normal future in dignity. The Syrian people have a lot of historic dignity and [they dream of] a future that addresses their legitimate aspirations, for themselves and for their own country.

They know, they have long known, that there is no military solution, only a political solution. This has been true for all these horrible 6 years of this conflict, and it remains true today, and will be true tomorrow.

I have here with me, as honored members of my team, two Syrian women from civil society, who are calling for peace. They, together with the women who are

representing the Syrian delegations — and I see them here, I would have liked to see more, but those who are here are very strong — they represent not only the civil society, the women, but also the fathers, the children, that they are representing in Syria. And in the coming weeks, I hope that we will hear more the voices in particular from the Syrian women. They are here to remind me, and you and the world that the Syrian people need a political solution.

And I will continue to do everything I can to promote the full and effective participation of Syrian women in the Syrian effort.

Let us all keep the interest of Syria and its own people in mind, work together — I know it's not easy but let's try to work together — to end the bloodletting and lay the foundation for a country at peace with itself, sovereign and unified.

....

As you all know, the Security Council has repeatedly called for a political process to resolve the conflict based on the Geneva Communiqué and endorsed by Security Council resolution 2118, Security Council resolutions 2254, 2268 and 2336. And we have also been supported by the relevant statements of the International Syria Support Group, which has been contributing to what we see today. The Security Council has urged all of us but in particular the Syrian parties to participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

Within that framework, resolution 2254 specifically mandates the United Nations to convene representatives of the Syrian government and the opposition to engage in formal negotiations on a political transition process through a UN facilitated but Syrian-led political process.

The Government is here. 2254 indicates who should be participating in those negotiations regarding the opposition. That has been guiding my own invitations. Serious progress was made in the last few weeks, perhaps even in the last few hours, in moving towards a more united and inclusive, connected to the main opposition delegation — one. We hope this will be proceeding further in this type of discussion among the opposition. It is plain however that there is still some work to be done in this regard. I hope that it will be still progress while we are here in order to actually finalize this if possible, or at least progress.

It is important, because there is a lot to discuss. 2254 lays out a clear agenda, including specific language on governance, constitutions, elections, and even for the way negotiations should be timed. That is what must now be discussed in details when we will be meeting after this initial welcoming speech from myself.

I said it from the beginning yesterday, I am not expecting miracles. We face an uphill task. It will not be easy. There is a lot of tensions. There is a lot of suffering that everyone has been bearing. But we must apply ourselves to this task. We do know what will happen if we fail once again. More death, more suffering, more atrocities, more terrorism, more refugees. That's why my urge to all of you [is]: let us get on with

the job of implementing 2254. It won't be easy but we need to start now and we can actually do a lot of good work, while we hope that the ceasefire holds.

Staffan de Mistura, "Welcoming statement of the Intra-Syrian talks by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 23 Feb 2017. [Brackets are in original.]
Copy at [U.N.](#)

My comment is that de Mistura *twice* mentioned the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). The Truth is that the ISSG held its last meeting in September 2016, five months ago, and accomplished nothing. My essay for [Aug 2016](#) says: "It appears that the ISSG is dead."

De Mistura proclaimed U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254 says these negotiations in Geneva are "a UN facilitated but Syrian-led political process." De Mistura is correct: Resolution 2254 mentions "Syrian-led" four times on the first two pages. But notice that Resolution 2254 was foisted on the Syrian people by a bunch of foreign meddlers in the U.N. Security Council. It is only an empty slogan that this is a "Syrian-led political process". As I said [above](#), the agenda for Geneva is set by Resolution 2254, *not* by Syrians. Worse, it is the wrong agenda.

De Mistura says the Syrian women in the delegation "represent not only the civil society, the women, but also the fathers, the children". If it is true that women can represent fathers (i.e., men), then why can't men represent women? De Mistura should have stopped talking after he called for more women to be included in the delegations. I think women who are currently living in Syria would be more likely to end the civil war than expatriate men and insurgent men who intransigently declare that Assad must resign, even when Assad is winning the civil war.

On 23 February 2017, the spokesman for the U.N. Secretary General issued a press release that said:

The Secretary-General is encouraged that the Syrians, who have accepted the United Nations invitation to be in Geneva in the context of the resumption of the intra-Syrian talks, sat together in the same room today. He commends the work of his Special Envoy in bringing this about and for resuming the talks. He appreciates the presence of the members of the Security Council and the International Syria Support Group at today's welcoming, and underlines the importance of international unity behind the UN-led political process in the weeks and months ahead.

After six years of bloodshed, the Secretary-General urges the Syrians who have accepted the invitation to be in Geneva to engage in good faith as the Special Envoy seeks to facilitate the process. While acknowledging that progress will not be easy, the Secretary-General believes strongly that only a political solution can bring peace to Syria and that all those Syrians who have committed themselves to this goal should redouble their efforts for peace.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Syria," [U.N.](#), 23 Feb 2017.

My comment is that it was premature to praise the delegates for sitting in the same room during the welcoming speech. During the next several days, de Mistura met separately with Assad's delegation and the opposition delegation.

Reuters reported on the frosty reception given to de Mistura's welcoming statement: Neither delegation clapped the speech by de Mistura, who went to shake hands with both sides after his opening remarks. Even as he warmly embraced the opposition delegates, the government group were walking out of the room and did not turn back.

....

The lead negotiator for the opposition — which is still fractured and does not have a completely unified delegation — said the Geneva talks should prioritise finding a political transition, something he said Assad's side did not want.

....

A Gulf Arab diplomat said of the talks: "I'm not optimistic."
Tom Miles & John Irish, "Syria's warring sides face off as U.N. tells them — end the nightmare," [Reuters](#), 12:55 GMT, 24 Feb 2017.

On 27 February, [Reuters](#) reported more about the frosty reception of de Mistura's welcoming speech, and also reported on a confidential procedural paper that de Mistura handed to all the delegates on 24 Feb.

24 Feb 2017: Day Nr. 2

On Friday, 24 February 2017, there was little news from the negotiations in Geneva. De Mistura held separate meetings with Assad's delegation and the opposition delegation. [Associated Press](#). De Mistura gave the delegates his procedural paper. [Reuters](#).

On the evening of 24 February 2017, de Mistura's chief of staff held a press briefing: Today the Special Envoy de Mistura has started discussing how the process and the efforts he started can now move forward on all aspects of these issues identified in SCR 2254. Following yesterday's welcoming speech that he delivered in the room behind me, we have now entered in depth meetings with the Syrian invitees.

This morning and this afternoon respectively, the SE had very structured meetings with the Ambassador Jaafari and delegation, and Mr. Hariri and delegation.

In these meetings, the Special Envoy exchanged views and assessments with his interlocutors on yesterday's opening ceremony. He also made detailed proposals on how the talks could proceed in order to facilitate substantive discussions with a view towards genuine negotiations.

The Special Envoy is continuing a wide range of consultations as the effort moves forward. He is reflecting on the outcomes today and expects to have further contacts tomorrow.

He continues to underscore that this will be a long and difficult process and that early

public breakthroughs should not be expected.

At the same time, he is so far satisfied that in a short space of time, the parties have shown their readiness to sit in one room, and he has had the opportunity for some initial in depth exchanges.

Now Special Envoy de Mistura is planning to hold more meetings with the representatives of the Moscow and Cairo platforms, to discuss how they can best contribute. These meetings will be taking place over the weekend. We are also planning further encounters with the delegations that the Special Envoy met today. We will endeavour to inform you about how this will be unfolding. I understand from my colleagues in UNIS that arrangements will be in place for the media. With this, I'm ready to take your questions.

QUESTION: The opposition delegation has just told us that their understanding of a transitional authority body to have executive powers replacing the President, resolution 2254 seems to be less clear on that subject. The transitional covering structure may not have executive authority replacing the President, in terms of the papers submitted to the HNC today, can you elaborate on where thing stand on that specific question?

CONTET: I'm sure that by now you are very familiar with the lines of the Special Envoy stating that the basis of the agenda for this exercise is resolution 2254. We are looking at 2254 in the context of a broader corpus of the Security Council resolutions, but this is the context that defines the agenda for an exercise such as the one the SE is conducting in Geneva these days. And I'm sure you are familiar with the three baskets of issues that are containing this resolution, governance, constitution and elections, this is the intention of the SE to progress on all these three trends of work.

Regarding the papers, the documents, that were handed over by the SE to the two heads of delegation that he met with today. These are documents that are of procedural nature, they are trying the procedure for the talks. At this stage we are looking forward to feedback from the two delegations.

QUESTION: You said that both parties have showed readiness to meet in one room, when is this possible you think, at what stage?

CONTET: The reference I made was to the speech that the SE gave yesterday, the welcoming speech, in general as a mediator, the SE, of course, he wishes to be able to have all the invitees present in Geneva in the same place to exchange directly, and have direct talks.

And as you know this is not easy because at present there are difficulties for some of them to engage in such a format, which is why this is a mediation process and this why the SE will be continuing his efforts so that things can evolve toward direct engagement. As you all know in this regard, he is ready to lead the process in a manner that makes sense, given the state of plane. He is very pragmatic and creative mediator. Michael Contet, "Transcript of Stakeout by Michael Contet, Acting Chief of Staff, Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 24 Feb 2017 (first posted

27 Feb).

On the evening of 24 February 2017, Reuters explained the uncertainties in the Geneva negotiations and the role of Russia.

The first U.N.-led Syria peace talks in almost a year are in danger of getting lost in procedure, as officials obsess about who will meet whom, but behind the scenes diplomats say it's largely up to Russia to call the tune.

....

With Astana handling the ceasefire, Geneva is left with the political conundrum and a U.N. mandate to discuss a new constitution, U.N.-supervised elections and transparent and accountable governance.

There is leeway for different interpretations, and it is unclear to what extent Russia is willing to put pressure on the Syrian government to reach a political deal with the opposition.

Russia supports the creation of a government of national unity, which a senior European diplomat disparagingly said meant bringing in a few dissidents to run the ministry of sports and leaving Assad's power unchecked.

....

Despite Russia's call for the government to "silence the skies" ahead of the talks, the fighting has continued, with Syrian jets bombing rebel-held areas of Aleppo, Deraa and Hama provinces and insurgents firing rockets at government targets.

"We have no choice but to play Russia's games and try to resist attempts for a full-out military victory and try to bring them back to Geneva and hope something can be achieved here," said a senior Western diplomat.

"It is still an open question if and what an agreement would look like that Russia could accept."

Questions also remain over whether Russia has any influence with Assad's other ally, Iran, and the militias it backs, or whether it is merely turning a blind eye as they look to cement recent gains on the ground.

"The (Syrian) regime and Hezbollah want to clear areas around Damascus which are still a threat to the capital," said the same diplomat. "After that either they go towards Idlib or Deraa in the south."

So far, there is little evidence of Moscow pressuring the government delegation. The Russian-drafted proposed constitution alludes to Assad continuing for several seven-year terms.

John Irish, Stephanie Nebehay, & Tom Miles, "One question at U.N. Syria talks: What does Russia want?" [Reuters](#), 18:13 GMT, 24 Feb 2017.

25 Feb 2017: Day Nr. 3

On 25 February, Nusra Front perpetrated two terrorist attacks in the city of Homs, as described [below](#). The attacks in Homs disturbed the meetings in Geneva that continued on 25 Feb. De Mistura called the attackers "spoilers", who attempted to derail the Geneva negotiations. [Reuters](#). Assad's government demanded that the opposition delegates denounce the attacks in Homs as terrorism. The head of Assad's delegation said any delegate who refuses to denounce the attacks "will be considered a partner in terrorism." [SANA](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#). I find this demand by the Syrian government to be bizarre and emotional — there is *no* evidence that any of the opposition delegates are affiliated with the terrorists who perpetrated the Homs attack.

[Reuters](#) reported: “De Mistura handed a working paper on procedural issues to delegations at the talks on Friday [24 Feb.] but there appears little prospect of things moving to the key political issues that he had hoped to be able to begin addressing. ‘In reality, nothing is happening,’ said a senior Western diplomat.”

26 Feb 2017: Day Nr. 4

On Sunday, 26 Feb 2017, de Mistura met with delegates from the Cairo and Moscow groups. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [RIA-Novosti](#)(Moscow group).

As stated above, de Mistura has assigned all issues about the ceasefire to the Astana negotiations. But [Reuters](#) reported one opposition delegate demanded that de Mistura address the ceasefire in Geneva: “Under Security Council resolution 2254, de Mistura is meant to develop a plan to monitor the ceasefire and sanction those who violate it, [Mutaseem Alysoufi of 'The Day after Syria' campaign] said. ‘So this is a duty of the U.N.’ ” Alysoufi is clearly correct, see Resolution 2254 at §§ 6-7. But monitoring the ceasefire and punishing violators is a monumental task that will require full attention in negotiations and push all other issues to the side, which is probably why de Mistura wants to avoid talking about the ceasefire. On the fourth day, de Mistura's agenda is already unraveling.

In my opinion, the military operations should end and a nationwide ceasefire occur *before* there is a new government in Syria. The leaders of the new government may want to try former leaders of Assad's military for war crimes and reconstitute the leadership of the Syrian military, which will probably make the Syrian military more disillusioned and less effective.

To the opposition, the phrase "political transition" means the removal of Assad, while Assad insists on remaining in power, an issue that appears to be impossible for compromise. Remember, Assad was re-elected to a 7-year term in June 2014. Discussing a political transition is going to be very difficult, with the parties intransigent on the issue of Assad.

27 Feb 2017: Day Nr. 5

On Monday, 27 Feb 2017, de Mistura met with the opposition delegation. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

It is becoming apparent that both delegations dispute de Mistura's agenda (i.e., "credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance", new constitution, elections). The opposition wants to discuss a political transition, while Assad's delegation wants to discuss "fighting terrorism".

28 Feb 2017: Day Nr. 6

On Tuesday, 28 Feb 2017, de Mistura met with Assad's delegation. [Reuters](#) tersely said: "The Geneva peace process has barely reached first gear, with five days of discussion solely on how to arrange the talks." The [Associated Press](#) reported: "Syrian talks in Geneva are moving at a glacial pace with a series of bilateral meetings between the United Nations envoy and the conflicting sides in a bid to get them to sign off on a process of dialogue focused on governance, elections and re-drafting the constitution." And the [Washington Post](#) reported: "Five days into a round of discussions intended to take place between delegations representing the Syrian government and the opposition, government and opposition negotiators still have not met. Instead, the talks, due to end Friday [3 March], have become snarled in debates about procedures and process without yet addressing the major issues surrounding the remote possibility of finding a political solution to the nearly six-year-old war."

My comment is that, like previous so-called negotiations in Geneva in 2014 and 2016, it is clear that neither side *wants* to negotiate.

[Al-Arabiya](#) tells us that the opposition in Geneva refuses to draft a new constitution, because drafting a constitution should be done by "an elected constituent assembly".

My predicting on 19 Feb ([above](#)) that the negotiations in Geneva would fail was easier than predicting yesterday's weather. De Mistura has an impossible job trying to make progress with either one of the Syrian delegations.

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 22 December 2016 insurgents ended the water supply to the city of Damascus. On 30 December 2016, 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.

My essay for [January 2017](#) explained that on 28 January Assad captured the water supply for Damascus, and more insurgents were transported to Idlib province.

Nationwide Ceasefire in Syria

On 9 February 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported on continuing fighting in Syria, despite the ceasefire that began on 30 Dec 2016. Assad's government escalated airstrikes in in both the al-Waer suburb of Homs and also in Idlib province, as well as assaulted the eastern Ghouta region outside Damascus. The insurgents have attacked Assad's army in Hama province. And Nusra Front is continuing to fight other groups of insurgents in Idlib province.

On 11 February 2017, [Reuters](#) reported: "A prominent Syrian dissident [Louay Hussein] said on Friday [10 Feb] he believed the country's war was effectively over, as foreign governments have cut support to rebels fighting to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad."

On 15 February 2017, the [Washington Post](#) reported that insurgents violated the ceasefire with a new offensive in Daraa, Syria.

On 16 February, the U.N. Secretary General released his monthly report on Syria, U.N. Security Council document S/2017/144. ¶17 and Table 1 mention 41 attacks on civilians in Syria during January 2017. ¶25 and Table 2 of that report say in January 2017 "643,780 people are living in 13 areas under siege." The reduction in besieged towns is a slight improvement from early December 2016. ¶26; admits that only one delivery of humanitarian aid was made during January 2017, and that one delivery was to a town that was approved in November 2016. ¶30 and Table 3 states that "surgical kits, midwifery kits, basic X-ray machines, injectable analgesics, bottles of analgesics/antipyretics[,] and items to treat 200 trauma cases" were removed from that one convoy of humanitarian aid in January.

On 21 February, [Reuters](#) reported that the CIA had temporarily suspended deliveries of "assistance, which has included salaries, training, ammunition and in some cases guided anti-tank missiles" to rebel groups. The suspension is to prevent the assets from being acquired by Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) who began fighting against rebels in January 2017.

On 22 February 2017, it was reported that on 19 Feb insurgents shot at a humanitarian aid convoy of trucks that was attempting to enter Al-Waer, a suburb of Homs. On 20 Feb, another convoy to Al-Waer was hijacked by pro-Assad forces, and then the contents of the 22 trucks were looted. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#); [U.N. Geneva](#). My comment is that these two incidents are more evidence that those who fight in Syria are barbarians. Most news sources ignored this event near Al-Waer.

On 25 February 2017, six Islamic suicide bombers walked into the offices of two security centers in the city of Homs. The detonation of their explosive belts killed 32 people, including Major-General Hassan Daaboul, Head of Military Security Department. Fatah al-Sham Front (formerly called Nusra Front) claimed responsibility for the attacks. [SANA](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(27Feb).

16 Feb 2017 briefing by Egeland

There has been a tradition of weekly briefings by de Mistura and/or Egeland on each Thursday, after the weekly meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva. But — during the first half of February 2017 — the last briefing was on 19 Jan 2017, at which a dismal and worsening situation for delivery of humanitarian aid was described. The failure of the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid is *not* a good reason to cancel press conferences. In fact, press conferences that describe illegal conduct *might* embarrass the Syrian government or insurgents into obeying international law.

On 16 February 2017, there was the regular meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva. Afterwards, Egeland held a press conference.

... the two first months of this year have, so far, been an enormous disappointment. We have, so far, this year, not reached a single besieged area with land convoys, in spite of infinite number of attempts to reach the remaining 13 besieged areas with more than 600,000 civilians.

The one place that we do reach continuously is Deir Ez-Zor in the desert in the east, besieged by the Islamic state. It is a unique operation, never done before in the history of humanitarian work, this kind of high altitude airdrops, and it is an achievement of the humanitarian task force through the good people of the World Food Program. It is a pity that it is the only of these areas that can be reached with that kind of airdrops.

We also saw in the course of 2016, that we, for the first time, had real responses from the government on all of the requests to go to places where civilians are in great need. 2014 and 2015, much of the requests were never answered. 70 percent of our requests were approved in the course of the year, however, only 27 percent of the people were, on average, reached each month, and of course, the real test is, delivery of relief, it is not that you get approval on paper.

Why were they not reached? Because of a whole set of reasons, but the most important one is lack of administrative green lights on the Government of Syria side, either on local level, governorate level, on ministerial level, or by security forces there, but when they could, armed opposition groups were also denying access to Foua and Kefraya, besieged by armed opposition groups. We were still hindered to go and our drivers, courageous drivers, who were to evacuate people in December are still held by the armed opposition groups in Foua and Kefraya[.]

However, all in all, there are assessments that the HTF could provide access through, especially the initiatives of Russia and the United States when they were active and working together, but also other member states helped us real time in a number of convoys that were stopped and in the end were helped through check points because of diplomatic initiatives.

So the lesson is, it can be done, it can be done even in Syria and it is too bad that it hasn't been done in the first part of this year. If we look at protection, well protection

is, as much bigger of a crisis than access to assistance. Let me give an example, the medical relief and medical facilities, hospitals and clinics were attacked 338 times [in 2016], according to reports received. Nurses, medical workers were killed or wounded 67 of the 99 interagency convoys had medical relief off loaded, 67, more than two thirds, and it is beyond belief that men with guns and power can really want to spend their time off-loading diarrhea kits for children, midwifery kits for pregnant woman or family hygiene kits and all of the other things that were offloaded as late as in recent days in the convoy to the hard to reach place al-Rastan. Finally also it was a terrible year in terms of safety for humanitarian workers, hundreds of humanitarian workers have, do far, been killed, wounded or kidnapped and detained since the start of the war, and we had, on our watch in September, the direst attack on one of our convoys to Big Urem, close to Aleppo, when on 19 September 10 people died, many more injured and a convoy was attacked.

Now, this must change and can change. We have had intense of diplomatic activities by the UN or UN Envoys and with the help of the members of the Task Force, with the government of Syria, that say that a new and a better system will now come whereby we are extracted from the administrative quagmire, where we have too many green lights from so many instances that in the end no convoy moves to any besieged area.

So we have lined up convoys to al-Waer, could go tomorrow, besieged location, and to a number of other besieged and hard to reach areas in the coming days which would be very important as a sign of goodwill, as political negotiations are scheduled in Geneva.

We hope and we believe that it will change now, it must change now because, if we are not reaching the Four Towns, Foua, Kefraya, Madaya and Zabadani very soon, we will see again the scenes that we saw when the whole thing started a year ago, people starving.

Five people have died, just in recent days in Madaya and Kefraya, on each of the two sides that are holding these towns because they were not medically evacuated in time. Another 80 cases need to be urgently evacuated if their lives are to be saved. I know that there is, as we heard from members of the Task Force, intensive work at the moment to unlock this horrific grid lock on the four towns and it's a question of life and death for so many, as it is of course in the places where there is great fear for the future, including the besieged areas of eastern Ghouta who fear for their lives if we are not having protection and assistance coming to those remaining besieged areas.

....

The sieges are not compatible with cessation of hostilities, no, they are not compatible with any of the Security Council resolutions or with the statements of the ministers of the ISSG. A siege is not just only unlawful military encirclement of military opponents, that's legal. It is two elements that are illegal. One is strangulation of the civilian population by denying humanitarian aid, and the other one is a lack of freedom of movement of the civilians, including evacuation of wounded. Those two are crimes according to international law, war crimes if you like. So no they are not compatible and it is a shame that the members of the task force were not able to lift a single siege

by negotiations in 2016. There is commitment to try to do that in 2017, it could happen through talks in Astana and Geneva and elsewhere. Lift the sieges is our appeal, sieges belong to the middle-ages, they don't belong to 2017 and there are thirteen areas still besieged, and the people of Four towns and in eastern Ghouta are very afraid of what is happening to them. There was very good signals today, I mean I think they all agreed with my assessment of the good, the bad and the ugly that we saw in 2016 and that we need to perform better. We need to come back to the most effective days of the Humanitarian Task Force. Co-chairs Russia and the United States signal that it is their ambition, so does the Astana Nations, Russia, Turkey and Iran, and so do the other members of the task force.

"Transcript of press stakeout by Mr. Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy on Syria, after Humanitarian Access Task Force Meeting," [U.N. Geneva](#), 16 Feb 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 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."

On 16 February 2017, the U.N. Secretary General issued his monthly report for January, of which one paragraph says:

The Syrian conflict continues to feature attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure with seeming impunity. I strongly believe that the lack of respect for international human rights and humanitarian law must be brought to an end. I note, in this regard, the importance of the establishment, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 71/248, of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. I also reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court. Efforts to ensure a proper framework for transitional justice and reconciliation are elements necessary for durable peace and for the Syrian Arab Republic to overcome the horrors of war.

Antonio Guterres, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016)," S/2017/144 at ¶50 (16 Feb 2017).

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, the Secretary General missed his own deadline to appoint a head of the Mechanism. More than 70 days after 71/248 was passed by the General Assembly, the Mechanism still has *no* personnel.

Also, 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 392 Iraqi civilians killed in "terrorism, violence, and armed conflict" during February 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 less inclusive than past numbers, 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.

February 2017: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

During early February 2017, journalists focused on criticizing Trump's Executive Order that temporarily banned travel from seven Muslim-majority nations, including Iraq and Syria. That means there is less news about Islamic terror attacks in Iraq.

On 10 February 2017, ISIL suicide bombers attacked a restaurant and checkpoint in eastern Mosul, killing at least 5 people. The same day, a parked car detonated in Baghdad, killing at least 6 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 15 February 2017, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated a pick-up truck at a used car dealership in Sadr City, an eastern suburb of Baghdad, killing at least 15 people. [Reuters](#)(15Feb); [Reuters](#)(16Feb).

On 16 February 2017, an ISIL car bomb killed at least 55 people at an automobile dealership in Baghdad. The AP incidentally says: "Another four attacks in and around Baghdad on Thursday [16 Feb] killed eight people and wounded around 30, police and medical officials said." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

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.

February 2017

On 22 February, The [Washington Post](#) bureau chief in Baghdad reported that ISIL is "taking advantage of rampant corruption in Iraq's security forces and institutions" to re-enter areas (e.g., Ramadi) that had been previously liberated from ISIL. The Post said: "Reformed police forces are again riddled with corruption, and governance has been left to chronically weak institutions."

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.

February 2017: Mosul

My essays for [October 2016](#), [November 2016](#), [December 2016](#), and [January 2017](#) 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.

In August 2016, retreating ISIL forces set 25 oil wells on fire in Qayyara, south of Mosul. Five of those fires are still burning on 9 Feb 2017. [Reuters](#). The air pollution from the smoke is a health hazard, and the burning oil is a waste of natural resources.

On 15 February 2019, the United Nations temporarily suspended humanitarian assistance to eastern Mosul, because of terrorists attacks by ISIL. [Associated Press](#).

On 19 February 2017, the Iraqi government finally began an assault toward western Mosul. The fighting on 19 Feb was in villages southwest of Mosul. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 23 February 2017, Iraqi forces captured the Mosul airport. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 28 February 2017, it was reported that ISIL is fleeing from Mosul, with the ISIL personnel disguised as civilian refugees. [Reuters](#).

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

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

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

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

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

This continuing condemnation by Muslim clerics is *not* something that is nice to have. It is an essential element in fighting against Islamic terrorism. On 3 Dec 2014, sixty nations agreed that "ideological delegitimization" was one of five "lines of effort" that would be used to defeat ISIL, see my essay for [Dec 2014](#). However, this program was quickly ignored by nearly everyone.

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

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

a secular government. ISIL is even more extreme with its caliphate. These Islamic governments are part of the attraction of young Muslims to Al-Qaeda, ISIL, and jihadist groups.

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

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](#).
-

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 at Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands

Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."

21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
25. On 12 June 2016, an Islamic terrorist perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando Florida. The terrorist pledged allegiance to ISIL, although there is *no* evidence that ISIL communicated with him. See my essay for [June 2016](#).
26. On 16 June 2016, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, testified before a committee of the U.S. Senate that "Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#).
27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) ("... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered diners in a restaurant."); [Reuters](#) ("... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State."). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More

about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).

29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).
31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 85 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
32. On 18, 24, and 26 July 2016, there were ISIL terrorist attacks in Würzburg in Germany, Ansbach in Germany, and Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in France. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
33. On 2 August 2016, [NBC News](#) published an exclusive report of a classified National Counterterrorism Center briefing to the White House, that showed a "fully operational" ISIL had spread to 18 nations during Obama's presidency. ISIL is "aspiring" in six additional nations.
34. On 6 August 2016, an Islamic terrorist — and illegal immigrant from Algeria — used a machete to slash the faces of two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium. See my essay for [August 2016](#).
35. On 20 August 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. On 7 Feb 2017, an ISIL bomb at the Supreme Court building in Kabul, Afghanistan

killed 22 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

40.

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

As of January 31, 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIS since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$11.4 billion and the average daily cost is \$12.7 million for 908 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 22 Feb 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 disenchanted with their new home, and some will become radicalized. The radicalization will most likely occur via the Internet, but could also occur from personal contact with Islamic radicals in Europe.
2. It is possible that some Islamic terrorists will enter Europe along with migrants. These could be terrorists sent to recruit more fighters for ISIL or Al-Qaeda. Or they could be Europeans returning from battle in Syria, but using a new name to avoid criminal prosecution for fighting in Syria.

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

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

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

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

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

some immigrants are criminals

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

See:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 24 October 2016, the French government began demolishing the shanty-town migrant camp in Calais. The approximately 6500 immigrants will be moved to other locations in France. Reuters reported that some immigrants threw rocks at police. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 26 October, the last of the immigrants were bussed out of Calais. Some of the immigrants set fire to part of the shanty town. The Associated Press reports that four immigrants from Afghanistan were arrested for arson. [Reuters](#)(fire); [Reuters](#);

[Associated Press](#).

fraudulent passports

As an example of criminal fraud committed by some of the migrants, on 6 September 2015 the [Associated Press](#) reported that non-Syrian migrants were discarding in Serbia their identity cards, passports, drivers's licenses, and other documents, so they could fraudulently claim to be refugees from Syria. On 23 September, *The Washington Post* has a similar report about fraud by migrants, and also tersely mentions "Islamic State sympathizers" are included in the migrants. On 25 September, the German interior ministry estimated that 30% of migrants in Germany are falsely claiming to be from Syria. [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#). Given that 527,000 migrants arrived in Germany during 2015 (as of 25 Sep), fraud by 30% of the migrants is a *huge* problem.

It is *not* possible to reliably vet the so-called refugees who enter Europe:

1. Some of these migrants have no passport and no identity documents, so their name and past history can *not* be verified, except laboriously through fingerprints.
2. After the attacks in Paris on 13 Nov 2015, it took European police three days to trace *one* Syrian passport issued to Ahmad al-Mohammad and determine that the passport was fraudulent. When there are thousands of migrants each day demanding entry, border guards can not spend three days checking each passport. Moreover, a second fraudulent Syrian passport with the same name was discovered in Serbia, which hints at widespread fraud. [The Guardian](#).
3. It is unlikely that Assad's government will cooperate with European requests for criminal background checks on emigrants from Syria, because European leaders have repeatedly called for the ouster of Assad.
4. Governments in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. have primitive criminal databases and can *not* do complete criminal background checks on tens of thousands of migrants. Moreover, police in those nations arrest only a few of the terrorists, so most terrorists may be unknown to police.

Additionally, on 18 November 2015, five Syrians were arrested in Honduras for using stolen Greek passports. The five Syrians intended to travel to the USA. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). This incident shows that some so-called refugees from Syrian engage in fraudulent use of passports, and they successfully passed through several borders with the fraudulent passports.

On 10-11 December 2015, [ABC News](#); [CNN](#); and [Reuters](#) reported that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement had determined that ISIL was now able to issue fake Syrian passports, using genuine blank passports and genuine passport printing machines. This means that *all* Syrian passports are now worthless, because border guards can not distinguish a real Syrian passport from a fake Syrian passport. See [Reuters](#) for 20 December.

After politicians assured the public that there were *no* terrorists in the refugees entering

Europe, the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 showed that at least two Islamic terrorists entered Europe with refugees. Then on 26 November, the Associated Press reported:

The Austria Press Agency cited German federal police chief Hans-Georg Maasen as saying that some who blend in with the migrants fought with IS and are planning a "combat mission" once they arrive in Europe. He said Thursday [26 Nov] that his office knows of 7,900 Islamic radicals in Germany who advocate violence to advance their goals, with some trying to win migrants to their cause.

He said German authorities receive one or two "fairly concrete tips" a week of planned terrorist activity. And he described IS extremists as "combat-hardened professionals" more dangerous than those from al-Qaida.

"The Latest: German official says some migrants IS radicals," [Associated Press](#), 15:21 GMT, 26 Nov 2015.

On 22 December 2015, the *Bild* newspaper in Germany reported anonymous German government officials said approximately 12 people entered Germany with fake Syrian passports and then they disappeared in Germany. The presumed terrorists entered sometime before 13 Nov, when the terror attacks in Paris occurred. Two of the attackers in Paris had similar fake Syrian passports. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

politics

At the middle of the immigration debacle in 2015, the German Chancellor, Dr. Angela Merkel, famously said that "asylum laws have no upper limit". [Associated Press](#) (5 Sep); [Politico](#) (1 Oct); [Deutsche Welle](#) (21 Nov); Commentators suggested that Dr. Merkel's absolute, "no limits" compassion for refugees had its origins in her moral upbringing as the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. My comment is that the asylum law has *no* limit because legislators forgot to put a limit in the law.

By 6 January 2016, Merkel was willing to reduce the flow of migrants to Europe. The Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) has demanded a limit of 200,000 migrants/year to Germany, which would mean that 80% of the migrants who entered Germany in 2015 would need to be expelled. [Reuters](#).

On 29 November 2015, the European Union and Turkey reached an agreement in which Turkey promised to reduce the number of migrants to Europe and Europe agreed to pay Turkey US\$ 3.2 billion. On 7 January 2016, [Reuters](#) reports that the European Union says it is "a long way from being satisfied" with Turkey's efforts to limit migrants.

The wave of hundreds of sexual assaults and robberies by Islamic immigrants in Cologne, Hamburg, and at least 5 other cities on the night of 31 Dec 2015 was the critical turning point in which many Germans went from welcoming refugees to wanting to expel immigrants. This incident showed that some immigrants were *not* going to conform to German concepts of law-and-order. Furthermore, the police waited 5 days to mention that Islamic immigrants were suspected of the assaults and robberies, a delay that does *not* inspire confidence in the German police.

Three German states (Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony-Anhalt) held elections for their state legislatures on 13 March 2016. The anti-immigrant party, Alternative für Deutschland, came in second place in Saxony-Anhalt, and made a strong showing in the other two states. These results indicate widespread dissatisfaction with Merkel's policy of welcoming Muslim immigrants. [Reuters](#); [tagesschau](#) at ARD; [Der Spiegel](#).

On 18 March 2016, the European Union and Turkey reached a new agreement about Muslim migrants to Europe. The EU will pay Turkey US\$ 6.6 billion for housing of refugees in Turkey during 2016-2018. Turkey promises to end the flow of boat people across the Aegean Sea to Greece. Those boat people who do reach Greece will be returned to Turkey. Europe will accept some refugees from Syria, but *not* from other nations. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); Text of agreement at [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 24 March 2016, Poland refused to accept more Islamic migrants, because of the Islamic terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March. [Associated Press](#).

Immediately after the Islamic attacks on the office of the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical newspaper in Paris in Jan 2015, there was a slogan "Je Suis Charlie". And immediately after the Islamic attacks in Brussels on 22 March, there was a slogan "Je Suis Bruxelles". Now there is a new slogan: "Je suis sick of this shit". [France24](#); [NY Times](#). But one needs to be extremely careful. Instead of "sick of this shit", if one were to say "sick of Muslims", one might be arrested for having an unapproved thought. Indeed, a man in England was arrested on 23 Mar 2016 for inciting racial hatred. [BBC](#); [Evening Standard](#); [Associated Press](#). (On 25 March, charges were dismissed, although it is possible he will be charged later. [Associated Press](#).) Personally, I am an absolutist in matters of freedom of speech: freedom of speech includes the freedom to be offended. Hate speech statutes are an attempt by the majority to force everyone to conform their speech to what pleases the majority, which is a blatant attempt by governments to impose orthodoxy on its citizens.

France and Belgium admitted millions of Muslim immigrants, mostly from Algeria and Morocco. Many of these immigrants failed to assimilate into European culture, and now live in ghettos. The biographies of Islamic terrorists arrested in Europe since 2014 show this common pattern of living in a ghetto and sometimes being arrested for ordinary crimes.

On 22 May 2016, an anti-immigrant candidate was defeated for the position of President of Austria, but he received 49.7% of the vote, in a very strong showing. But on 1 July 2016, the highest court in Austria invalidated that election and ordered a new election. The new election was held on 4 Dec 2016, and the anti-immigrant candidate lost again, with 46.2% of the vote. [ÖRF](#).

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

On 4 September 2016, there was an state parliament election in Angela Merkel's home state

of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) captured 30.6% of the vote. In an upset, anti-immigrant party, Alternative für Deutschland, came in second place with 20.8% of the vote. Merkel's party, the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), came in third place with 19.0% of the vote. [dpa](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

3 Feb 2017: Egyptian Brings Aerosol Spray Paint to Louvre

Abdullah Reda al-Hamamy [or al-Hamahmy], a 28 or 29 year-old Egyptian citizen, arrived in France on 26 Jan 2017 with a one-month tourist visa. At about 09:40 Paris time on 3 February he carried two machetes to the Louvre art gallery and attacked two French soldiers who were checking bags. The Islamic terrorist shouted "Allahu Akbar" during the attack. One soldier shot the Islamic terrorist four or five times. French president Francois Hollande immediately called it "a terror attack". Aside from the attack on the soldiers, Abdullah the Terrorist was carrying aerosol spray paint cans in his backpack, with the obvious intention of ruining some unique art works in the Louvre.

In the minutes before his attack, Abdullah the Terrorist posted several messages to his Twitter account. *The Telegraph* reports from Cairo, Egypt:

An Egyptian man suspected of launching a machete attack outside Paris's Louvre museum is believed to have professed support for ISIL in social media messages posted minutes before the assault, it has emerged.

....

"In the name of Allah... for our brothers in Syria and fighters across the world," an account in the name of Abdallah Hamahmy posted in Arabic on Twitter on Friday [3 Feb] morning, before making reference to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) jihadist group in another tweet.

"Why are they afraid of the establishment of the Islamic State?" it said. "Because the Islamic State defends its resources and dignity and honor, and respond fight back."

In the last message posted before the attack, he wrote: "No negotiations, no compromise, no retreat, relentless war."

Magdy Samaan, "Louvre machete suspect Egyptian who posted 'support for ISIL minutes before attack'," [The Telegraph](#), 13:04 GMT, 4 Feb 2017.

Surprisingly, ISIL did *not* claim Abdullah the Terrorist as a soldier of the caliphate.

We know very little about Abdullah the Terrorist. He graduated from law school in Egypt, then went to work in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). *The Telegraph* said Abdullah worked in a law firm drafting commercial contracts, according to his father. But *The National* newspaper said Abdullah was a "sales manager" at an unspecified firm.

The [Associated Press](#) reported on 4 Feb: "... an initial investigation in Egypt found no record of political activism, criminal activity or membership in any militant group by [Abdullah]." I have *not* found any news reports of prior criminal activity by Abdullah.

Bibliography:

- "The Latest: Louvre attacker near death; said to be Egyptian," [Associated Press](#), 20:31 GMT, 3 Feb 2017. ("The attacker was shot five times." On 28 Jan "he bought two military machetes at a gun store in Paris.")
- "Louvre terror attack: Egyptian man, 'who arrived in France in January' shot five times after attacking soldier with machete," [The Telegraph](#), 20:33 GMT, 3 Feb 2017.
- "French soldier shoots, wounds machete-wielding attacker at Paris Louvre," [Reuters](#), 21:30 GMT, 3 Feb 2017. ("Paintspray cans — but no explosives — were found in his back pack....")
- "Soldiers thwart attack on Louvre, tourists held in lockdown," [Associated Press](#), 22:29 GMT, 3 Feb 2017. (Terrorist was shot four times. "French prosecutor Francois Molins said the suspect's return flight to Dubai was scheduled for Sunday [5 Feb]." "The backpack the man was carrying contained cans of spray paint, but no explosives, Molins said.")
- "Louvre machete suspect Egyptian who posted 'support for ISIL minutes before attack'," [The Telegraph](#), 13:04 GMT, 4 Feb 2017. ("He was shot five times in the stomach and is in a critical condition in hospital.")
- "Louvre museum reopens; Egypt identifies machete attacker," [Associated Press](#), 15:56 GMT, 4 Feb 2017. ("The attacker was shot four times after slightly injuring a soldier patrolling the nearby underground mall but his injuries on Saturday [4 Feb] were no longer life-threatening, the Paris prosecutor's office said." Also mentions his tweets.)
- "Louvre attacker put under formal detention after condition improves," [Reuters](#), 20:40 GMT, 4 Feb 2017. ("His life is no longer in danger,' an official at the prosecutor's office said.")
- "Father of Louvre attacker says son is not a terrorist," [Reuters](#), 20:40 GMT, 4 Feb 2017. ("The father of the machete-wielding man who was shot by a guard as he tried to enter Paris's Louvre museum said on Saturday [4 Feb] his son was not an Islamist and the French were only accusing him of terrorism to excuse the brutality used to stop him.")
- "Egyptian behind Louvre terror attack worked in Sharjah," [The National](#) in UAE, updated 03:26 GMT, 5 Feb 2017. (Abdullah the Terrorist was a "sales manager" in the UAE, who had "a law degree from Egypt's Mansoura University.")
- "Louvre attack suspect silent during initial questioning," [Associated Press](#), 17:09 GMT, 5 Feb 2017. ("The Paris prosecutor's office said the suspect, who allegedly shouted 'Allahu akbar!' while rushing toward the soldiers and was shot four times after slightly injuring one, remained silent during the interview and will remain in custody.")

- "Louvre attacker refuses to speak to investigators — source," [Reuters](#), 07:37 GMT, 6 Feb 2017. (Abdullah Reda al-Hamahmy "refused to answer investigators on Sunday [5 Feb] after being formally placed into custody at a hospital, a source at the Paris prosecutor's office said.")
- "Louvre attack suspect speaks to investigators," [Al-Arabiya](#), 12:51 GMT, 7 Feb 2017. ("The Egyptian suspect in the attack on soldiers outside the Louvre museum in Paris has begun speaking to investigators and confirmed his identity, a source in the inquiry said Tuesday [7 Feb]. He 'gave his version of the facts', the source said, without giving more details.")
- "Suspect in Louvre attack wanted to harm paintings, avenge Syrian people — source," [Reuters](#), 21:07 GMT, 7 Feb 2017. (Abdullah the Terrorist "was carrying spray paints in his backpack and said he wanted to damage the paintings at the world-famous museum, the [judicial] source said, adding that the suspect's statements should be taken with caution. The suspect also spoke of wanting to 'avenge the Syrian people', the source said,")
- "Condition of hospitalized suspect in Louvre attack worsens," [Associated Press](#), 24:22 GMT, 7 Feb 2017. (On 7 Feb, prosecutor fears Abdullah the Terrorist will become a sausage, as he takes a turn for the Wurst. Prosecutor hands Abdullah to magistrates investigating terrorism.)
- "Suspect in Louvre attack says he did not get orders from Islamic state," [Reuters](#), 19:29 GMT, 8 Feb 2017. (Abdullah the Terrorist "told police he identifies with the beliefs of Islamic State but said he did not carry out the attack on orders from the militant group".)
- "Louvre machete attack suspect faces attempted murder charge," [Associated Press](#), 18:17 GMT, 10 Feb 2017.

My search on 3 March 2017 found nothing more recent than 10 February.

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 317,000 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/syria42.pdf>
begun 3 February 2017, revised 1 March 2017.

The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to historical documents.

[my homepage](#)