

Syria & Iraq: March 2017

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 40 essays on Syria. That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

When I was a full-time student in universities during 1967-77, I learned not to write documents full of facts, without also explaining the significance of those facts and drawing conclusions from those facts. So, I include my opinions in this essay, to show the reader omissions, inconsistencies, propaganda, and other defects in the conventional wisdom or in journalists' reports. In science and engineering, we keep our opinions separate from facts, and in that spirit I label most of my opinions and my comments.

Copyright law allows an author to make brief quotations for purposes of scholarship, news reporting, or comment, but *not* to copy an entire article. (17 U.S.C. §107) That is why I quote only a small part of an article by a news agency or newspaper. Furthermore, I post each of my essays at least a few days — typically a week — after the end of the month described in that essay, so I am *not* distributing "hot news", but only creating a scholarly historical record.

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

I use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) for events in Europe and Syria. On 12 March 2017, the USA went on daylight savings time. On 26 March 2017, the United Kingdom went on British Summer Time (BST). Eastern Daylight Time in Boston is -4 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 the sixth anniversary of the Syrian civil war, the the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published a cumulative death toll.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented the deaths of 321358 persons on the Syrian territory since the start of the Syrian revolution on the 15th of March 2011, and the casualties were distributed as follows:

- 96073 Syrian [civilians] including 17411 children under the age of eighteen and 10847 citizen woman over the age of eighteen.
- Syrian fighters in the ranks of the rebel and Islamic factions and the Syria Democratic Forces and other factions, movements and organizations: 52333
- Defected of the regime forces: 2603
- Number of persons who were killed by Bashar al-Assad's regime forces: 60901
- Fighters of NDF and gunmen loyal to the Syrian regime: 45290
- Fighters of the Islamic factions, Fateh al-Sham Front "Nusra Front formerly", the "Islamic State" organization, the Islamic Turkestan Party, Jund al-Aqsa organization, Jund al-Sham, al-Khadra'a Battalion, Jund al-Sham al-Shishan, and Islamic movements of Arab and North African nationalities: 55875
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 1421
- Gunmen of non-Syrian nationalities loyal to the regime forces of the Shiite community: 6862

The total number of civilian casualties is 96073; and it is distributed below according to party that caused the death:

- By raids of Bashar al-Assad's regime warplanes and helicopter 22596 civilian casualties, and they are: 14630 men, 4850 children under the age of eighteen and 3116 citizen women over the age of eighteen.
- By Russian rocket and air strikes 4925, they are 3036 men and a young men, 1192 children under the age of eighteen and 697 citizen women over the age of eighteen.
- By bombing by warplanes of the International Coalition 920 Syrian civilians, they are 562 men, 220 children under the age of eighteen and 138 citizen women over the age of eighteen.
- By bombing and shelling by the Turkish forces and warplanes 527 civilian casualties, they are 315 men and young men, 127 children under the age of eighteen and 85 citizen women over the age of eighteen.
- By Bashar al-Assad's regime forces and the gunmen loyal to them of Syrian and non-Syrian nationalities 41345 civilian casualties, they are 25889 men and young men, 9591 children under the age of eighteen and 5865 citizen women over the age of eighteen.
- Casualties in detention centers and prisons of the regime 14661 civilian casualties, they 14492 men and young men, and 113 children under the age of eighteen, and 56 citizen woman over the age of 18.
- By the opposition factions 7134 civilian casualties, they are 5429 men, 1058 children under the age of eighteen and 647 citizen women over the age of eighteen.
- By the "Islamic State" organization 3723 civilian casualties, they are 3291 men, 214 children under the age of eighteen and 218 citizen women over the age of eighteen.
- By the Turkish border guards 242 civilian casualties, they are 171 men and young men, 46 children under the age of eighteen and 25 citizen women over the age of eighteen.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights indicates that this statistic does not include the 45000 citizens who were killed under torture in the detention centers and prisons of Bashar al-Assad's regime, and the observatory got the information about their death during the period of their detention.

It also doesn't include the fate of more than 5200 abducted civilians and fighters in the prisons the "Islamic State" organization, in addition to that, it does not include also the fate of more than 4700 prisoners and missing of the regime forces and militiamen loyal to them, and more than 2000 kidnapped by the rebel and Islamic factions, the "Islamic State" organization and Fateh al-Sham Front (Jabhat Al-Nusra earlier) on charges of the loyalty to the regime.

Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates the real number of who were killed to be about 85 thousand persons more than the numbers that the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights was able to document, because of the extreme secrecy on the number of casualties by the fighting parties, and due to presence of information about civilians casualties the Observatory was unable to document their death, because of the difficulty of reaching some remote areas in Syria.

Also the continued military operations, shelling and explosions have injured more than 2 million Syrian citizens with different injuries and permanent disabilities, while about 12 million other citizens including hundreds of thousands of children and hundreds of thousands of citizen women were displaced between the refuge and the displacement areas, also the infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and private and public property have been destroyed greatly.

[link](#) to an infographic file that represents this statistics by SOHR

"About 465 thousand persons were killed in 6 years of the Syrian revolution and more than 14 million were wounded and displaced," [SOHR](#), 13 March 2017. [Formatting as indented list by Standler.]

When I began chronicling the Syrian civil war in September 2013, both the Associated Press and Reuters reported each announcement of death tolls by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. But in recent months, journalists stopped reporting monthly and cumulative death tolls, perhaps because of news fatigue over the continuing civil war in Syria. So I was glad to see [Reuters](#) report the 13 March announcement.

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2826 persons during the month of March 2017, they were distributed as following:

Civilian casualties: 858 including 141 children under the age of eighteen, and 131 citizen women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:

- 288 including 55 children and 61 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria.
- 67 including 16 children and 12 citizen women were killed in shelling by the regime forces using rocket and artillery shells, missiles believed to be ground-to-ground, targeting and sniper bullets.
- 7 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
- 30 including a child and 10 citizen women and 4 children were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions and the "Islamic State" organization.
- 5 citizens were killed in earlier bombing by Turkish warplanes.
- 9 including a child were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
- 15 were executed by the "Islamic State" organization.
- 7 including a child and 3 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells launched by the "Islamic State" organization and by the fire of its machineguns.
- 5 citizens were killed and executed by Islamic factions.
- 281 including 38 children and 33 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the international coalition.
- 57 including 3 children and 7 citizen women were killed in the detonating of cars

- and vehicles.
- 8 including 6 children and a citizen 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.
 - 4 citizens including a woman were killed by Syria Democratic Forces.
 - 64 including 6 citizen women and children were killed in landmines explosions.
 - 19 including 4 children and a citizen woman were killed in unknown circumstances.

And 43 of the Iraqi Shiite visitors including 6 children and 10 citizen women were killed in 2 bombing targeted a gathering of them in Bab Sghir cemetery area in the center of the capital Damascus.

[Military and insurgent death toll: 1925]

- Syrian fighters of the rebel and Islamic Factions and the Syria Democratic Forces and other movements and organizations: 426
- The regime forces: 304
- Members of popular the committees, NDF and gunmen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 407
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 5
- Fighters loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities, most of them are of the Shiite sect: 9
- Unidentified: 12
- 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: 762

"858 children, citizen women and men are among more than 2800 persons killed in March 2017," [SOHR](#), 1 April 2017. [Formatting of military deaths as indented list by Standler. Military death toll heading added by Standler.]

When I add the numbers in the two indented lists, I obtain: 866 civilians and 1925 military, which totals 2791. Adding the 43 dead Iraqis makes a total of 2834, *not* 2826. Perhaps SOHR forgot to add the 8 civilians who were killed by "poor sanitary conditions and the lack of treatment".

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* 323,000.

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, and tersely mentions Erdogan's purge after the failed coup.

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.

My essays since November 2016 continued to tersely chronicle the Turkish invasion of Syria.

Here is a terse summary of Erdogan's recent dictatorship in Turkey:

1. After an inconclusive presidential election, in July 2015 Erdogan ended a ceasefire with ethnic Kurds in Turkey, to boost Erdogan's popularity.
2. On 4 March 2016, the Turkish government seized control of the *Today's Zaman* newspaper in Turkey.
3. After a failed coup on 15 July 2016, Erdogan purged more than 125,000 people from the Turkish government, including military officers, professors, and judges. Erdogan also closed more than 140 newspapers and magazine publishers.

Basic civil liberties in Turkey, such as freedom of the press and freedom to criticize president Erdogan, have been suppressed. Criticism of Erdogan by Europe was muted, probably because the Europeans did *not* want Erdogan to unleash a flood of refugees from Syria to Europe. Similarly, criticism of Erdogan by the USA was muted, probably because the U.S.

Military wants continued use of the Incirlik air base in Turkey.

March 2017: Turkish invasion of Syria

On 5 March, U.S. Army troops arrived in Manbij to prevent clashes between Turkish invaders and Kurdish rebels. The Kurds had liberated Manbij from ISIL in August 2016. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Washington Post](#). The last U.S. ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, said about this deployment: "That's not a small policy change. It is a huge policy change. We have never in our Syrian policy ever put U.S. personnel in between warring Syrian factions or to maintain a local cease-fire." [Washington Post](#).

There was *no* discussion of this "huge policy change" in the USA, as journalists in the USA were preoccupied with discussing (1) legal challenges to Trump's second Executive Order that bans travel from six Muslim-majority nations and (2) the replacement for Obamacare health insurance being considered by the U.S. Congress.

My personal opinion is that it is *really stupid* of Trump and his government to get between Turkey and the Kurds. U.S. peacekeeping forces could be required in Syria for years under a continuation of this policy.

There is another huge problem forming as Turkey, Assad's troops backed by Russian aircraft, and the U.S.-backed Kurds all intend to liberate Raqqa from ISIL. The U.S. has been unable to stop Turkey's invasion of Syria, and — naturally — the U.S. is unable to control either Assad or Russia.

The Kurds do *not* want Turkey to participate in the liberation of Raqqa. [Reuters](#).

On 29 March, Turkey announced it was ending its "Euphrates Shield" military invasion of Syria that began in August 2016. [Reuters](#); [Anadolu](#).

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](#).

On 8 March 2017, anonymous sources in the U.S. Defense Department told journalists that "hundreds" of U.S. Marines would be "temporarily" deployed to Syria to aid in the liberation of Raqqa. Additionally, fewer than 1000 U.S. troops are going to Kuwait, as a resource in the fights against ISIL. These two deployments are "temporary" and are *not* an increase in the 503 personnel limit approved by Obama in December 2016. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 9 March 2017, Colonel John Dorrian clarified that the "hundreds" of U.S. troops who recently entered Syria was approximately 400. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). There was *no* mention of the "temporary" deployment of 400 troops at the Pentagon website, showing the Pentagon is trying to avoid discussion of this evasion of limits on U.S. combat troops in Syria.

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](#). But in December 2016, ISIL recaptured Palmyra in a surprise attack. On 2 March 2017, Assad again took control of Palmyra. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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](#).

On 30 March 2017, Rex Tillerson (the new U.S. Secretary of State) said the status of Assad would be decided by the Syrian people in an election.

QUESTION [by Lesley Wroughton from Reuters]: The other question I have is the previous administration said that Syrian President Assad must go. Nikki Haley said yesterday that the fight in Syria cannot move forward without the issue of Assad being resolved. How do you see that issue being moved forward as you move more aggressively on Raqqa? About President Assad, should he stay or should he go?

TILLERSON: I think the status and the longer-term status of President Assad will be decided by the Syrian people.

Rex W. Tillerson, "Press Availability With Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu," [State Dept](#), 30 Mar 2017.

See also: [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). Not only is Assad what former U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker called the "least-worst leader" for Syria, but also the U.S. should *not* be telling foreign nations that their leader is unacceptable. Since 2013, I have been critical of Obama's colonial-era policy of demanding the resignation of Assad. See my [review](#).

History of Negotiations in Geneva during 2016-2017

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.

My essay for [February 2017](#) described the total failure of negotiations in Astana. After 5 days of negotiations in Geneva, each of the two delegations refused to agree on de Mistura's agenda.

Failed Negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan

Previous negotiations in Astana on the Syrian ceasefire during 23-24 January and 16 February 2017 were a complete and total failure. The Syrian delegations accomplished absolutely nothing. In February, the insurgents arrived one day late and then refused to negotiate.

On 1 March 2017, [RIA-Novosti](#) reported the next round of futile negotiations in Astana would occur on 14-15 March. While RIA-Novosti omitted the word "futile", that word is necessary for accuracy.

On 11 March 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that the insurgents want to delay the Astana negotiations that are scheduled to begin on 14 March until sometime after 20 March. The alleged reason for the delay is to wait and see if the 7-20 March ceasefire will be observed by Assad. But we already know that Assad is *not* observing the ceasefire, because Reuters reports that the insurgents claim fighting continues in "opposition-held areas near Damascus, Homs, Deraa, and Idlib".

On 13 March 2017, the insurgents announced they would *not* attend negotiations in Astana that are scheduled to begin on 14 March. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP). [Reuters](#) says the insurgents blamed "Russia's unwillingness to end air strikes against civilians in rebel-held areas and its failure to put pressure on the Syrian army to abide by a widely violated ceasefire."

My comment is that there are several important conclusions:

1. The ceasefire in Syria that began on 30 Dec 2016 has unraveled, owing to repeated and continuing violations by Assad, Russia, and insurgents.
2. Russia and Turkey — the so-called guarantors of the ceasefire — have completely failed to punish violators of the ceasefire. (We have been here before — in May 2016, when the ISSG failed to enforce a ceasefire.)
3. The third round of negotiations in Astana is a complete and total failure. *All* of the negotiations in Astana have been a complete and total failure.
4. De Mistura made a miscalculation when he allowed Russia and Turkey to take control of negotiations concerning the ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid. While his decision reduced the number of agenda items in the Geneva negotiations, one can expect the opposition in Geneva to resume whining about the continued fighting and *no* deliveries of humanitarian aid. In this way, the failure in Astana can contribute to a failure in Geneva.

On 14 March 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that the opposition delegation had blamed Russia for its failure as a guarantor of the ceasefire, while Assad's delegation had blamed Turkey for its failure as a guarantor of the ceasefire. My conclusion is that there is now a consensus that the guarantors have failed to enforce the ceasefire that began on 30 Dec 2016.

On 15 March 2017, negotiations in Astana continued without any of the insurgents. [SANA](#)

reported: "Al-Jaafari [Syria's ambassador to the UN, and Assad's lead negotiator in Astana] added that the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic came to Astana to meet two guarantors who are Iran and Russia, saying 'We didn't come here as a delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic to meet a delegation of the armed factions. We came here to meet two guarantors who are Iran and Russia.'" Jaafari blamed Turkey for the absence of the insurgents. See also [Al-Arabiya](#). Both Reuters and the Associated Press ignored Astana on 15 March.

On 15 March 2017, the next round of negotiations in Astana was scheduled for 3-4 May 2017. [Reuters](#).

On the night of 15 March, after Assad's delegation had departed, some of the insurgent delegation arrived in Astana, for discussions with Russia, Turkey, and Iran on 16 March. [Reuters](#).

On 29 March, more than one month before the next scheduled meeting in Astana, [Reuters](#) reported the opposition spokesman was "suggesting that the rebels might boycott" the meeting, because of continuing violations of the ceasefire.

Futile Negotiations in Geneva

For history of the first six days of negotiations in Geneva, see my essay for [February 2017](#).

1 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 7

On Wednesday, 1 March 2017, de Mistura met separately with each delegation. The opposition delegation also met with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Gennady Gatilov. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

There are rumors that de Mistura has agreed to add "fighting terrorism" to his three agenda items, to satisfy Assad's delegation. [Reuters](#).

2 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 8

On Thursday, 2 March 2017, the HNC *refused* to discuss "fighting terrorism" at the Geneva negotiations. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

Later on 2 March, both Russia and Assad's delegation accused the HNC of attempting to wreck the Geneva negotiations. The Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman said: "The so-called High Negotiations Committee is refusing to cooperate equally with the Moscow and Cairo platforms and is in fact sabotaging fully fledged dialogue." [Reuters](#). Also, the HNC is demanding that Assad resign, something that [should](#) be decided by the citizens of Syria in an election.

3 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 9

The negotiations ended on Friday, 3 March 2017. De Mistura held a press conference, which is quoted below. The [Associated Press](#) reported: "The bar was set so low by De Mistura, who started the talks saying he expected no breakthroughs, that just keeping everyone at the table was viewed as an achievement."

On Saturday, 4 March, [Reuters](#) reported Assad's delegation agreed on an agenda for future negotiations: de Mistura's three items plus "fighting terrorism." Assad's delegation is demanding that the opposition stop being puppets for foreign meddlers in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, and Israel. Assad's delegation is also demanding that the opposition "unify", instead of the current three delegations: HNC, plus Moscow and Cairo groups. Reuters did *not* say how the opposition felt at the end of the first negotiations.

The glacial pace of negotiations in Geneva is indicated by the parties taking weeks in 2016 plus 9 days in 2017 to agree on an agenda that was essentially stated in Resolution 2254 in December 2015. One can only imagine how many years it will take to resolve one of many substantive issues in Geneva.

3 Mar 2017: de Mistura's comments

After the Geneva negotiations concluded on Friday, 3 March 2017, de Mistura held a press conference and said:

Thank you very much, since this has been an intense period you would forgive me if I read some points and then of course I will take questions and be a little bit more informal but I need to be a little bit formal because after all, this is the fourth round of the intra-Syrian talks which have just been concluded.

For your information we will [in due course] be releasing a formal mediation statement, which will be available to you and to the invitees of course, and which captures in precise language where we believe we stand after this fourth round. Let me however give you an overview of the main points of this fourth round, what we have achieved, what we have not achieved and where we could go from here.

First of all, these are the first political talks in 10 months and we talked for actually almost 10 days, intensive 10 days. So let me be a little bit formal by saying I really express my gratitude to the Syrian invitees, all those who came and were invited, for engaging with me and my colleagues in serious discussions during these last nine days.

It has not always been easy going, we had some difficult, tough meetings but we also had some very constructive meetings and this has been growing up during the last part of this round. We did discuss procedure — unavoidable after 10 months — but we also discussed substance. So what did we reach, first — it is now clear to everyone, there is no discussion on that — we are here to implement Security Council resolution 2254 and that is beyond dispute.

I believe and therefore am expecting the sides should now pursue a framework agreement containing an agreed political package so that a negotiated transitional political process can be implemented as indicated by resolution 2254. We are here to

talk about that. Everybody is aware, and we are obviously aware, that 2254 contains also very clear sequencing and target timetables or timelines.

Second, I think and believe that we have a clear agenda now in front of us. The agenda is reflected by the baskets — four baskets, 3+1.

1. Basket one addresses all issues related to the establishment within a target hopefully of six months of credible inclusive non-sectarian governance.
2. Basket two addresses all issues relating to setting within a target of six months again, a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution.
3. Basket three addresses all issues related to ensuring that free and fair elections pursuant to a new constitution can be held within 18 months, under the supervision of the United Nations, including members of the diaspora eligible to participate. Anyway, read 2254 and you will find it.
4. And then there is an additional basket which was added at the request of the Government delegation, which we will call basket four and which addresses within the context of the overall transitional political process issues related to strategies of counter terrorism, security, governance and also medium-term confidence building measures.

Astana and Geneva are complementing themselves and reinforcing each other — we know it and we did reassert that. We look at the Astana efforts, which had been and have a full UN, and active support to address issues related to the maintenance of the ceasefire: immediate confidence-building measures and operational counter terrorism issues. Let me explain. A ceasefire is meant to stop the fighting among warring parties. A ceasefire is meant therefore to facilitate other important aspects for normal people, for instance humanitarian access. And release of prisoners — we heard an interesting suggestion by the delegation of the government regarding the concrete possibility of the exchange of detainees and abducted people and obviously the place for doing that is Astana. So while Geneva in the fourth basket will be addressing naturally what is the strategy regarding terrorism or counter terrorism and see what can be done in order to address that, in Astana they are expected to actually address the issue of counter terrorism because when the warring parties stop fighting they are meant to do so in order to be able to focus and concentrate completely on the terrorist organisations which by the UN standards are only two: Al Nusra and Daesh.

This connection we raised and we will continue raising and I want to underscore the vital need for unhindered humanitarian access because it is not snow, it is not rain, it is not the earthquake, the non-access of humanitarian aid is caused by the conflict. If there is a ceasefire that means there should be no reason for not giving a chance for humanitarian aid to reach everyone. And you can imagine by us and by many, the issue of the detainees, abductees, and missing people was raised and will continue to be raised. You probably will remember the first meeting, the very first meeting on the first day was not with the delegation, it was with five women representing mothers,

daughters, wives of detained, abducted or missing Syrian people representing thousands of other like them.

Let's go back to the intra-Syrian talks, negotiations — whatever we want to call them — event, a third point, we have discussed the substance of all these baskets stimulated by the UN inputs, we have been able to actually see what were the informed positions of the parties and we have been submitting in basically some thoughts based on the previous rounds.

In other words, it was possible to begin also discussions on governance, constitution making, elections and also some discussion on this additional basket regarding counter terrorism and related issues.

Fourth, we had a clear methodology to proceed, and we [the UN] have agreed on that. Within the intra-Syrian talks process, the baskets would be addressed and will be addressed in a parallel way.

Now regarding methodology, while it remains our goal to secure an agreement to move to direct negotiations between the government and the opposition, at the moment we have noticed — and that was the case in Astana too — that there is a moment when in fact it is more effective to have proximity mediation discussions like we have had this time. The moments when the mediation and the mediator finds it in fact more useful for both sides or all sides to actually have proximity talks rather than having direct ones — but we would pursue that when we would feel that the moment is right.

In between rounds, of course, we can be very creative if the sides require so, through, in fact, technical discussions, working groups, experts committees, commissions, joint commissions or any other arrangement. We are ready for all that in order to fill up the gap between one round and the other.

And six, an important subject that you know, that have been often coming up to, we believe there was progress made this round towards the basis or the need for a basis of a single opposition delegation to participate in negotiations with the government of Syria.

We are aware, and we have been supporting and facilitating a lot of dialogue in contacts among invitees on this matter and that has continued until today.

We will continue definitely encouraging efforts in this direction and work for finalising efforts, so that in the context of resolution 2254 the various parts will be able to come with some common umbrella or understanding on what is their common position — and there are common positions.

You must have heard — and I think you've heard about it — there is a non-paper, that we produced, of 12 different points which are in fact a way, through which, we have been trying to summarise what has been picked up during the last period — we didn't start today or yesterday, we started many months ago — on commonalities that can, in a way, be felt as common, at least, principles by all those who care about the end-state

of Syria.

And then let me add another point, frankly, because in diplomacy and mediation substance and form are very much combined.

You were there with us on 23rd of February. You remember, you were there, you saw it. This picture is much more than just iconic — it is highly symbolic. This was a very special moment which in a way gave the feeling to all Syrians that everyone connected to the conflict in Syria is able indeed to sit in the same room and actually be there when the UN is trying to give them some guidelines on how to proceed, and in front of them was the whole world, all the ISSG members, the Security Council and behind me were three Syrian women representing the civil society, the victims of this conflict and those who are advising us about what is the women situation — but above all what is their advice about the peace in Syria.

Of course, after that, we had separate meetings, but the psychological barrier was broken and we could see the effects when we had then these separate proximity talks.

So, at the beginning of this period of round of talks, we said that we were not going to expect, and we should not expect a breakthrough. This is a war of six years, where people were not even looking at each other, they were just fighting each other.

I'm planning to proceed to New York to brief the Secretary-General, our Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, and the Security Council in the next few days.

And on the basis of the indications that I will be getting both from the Secretary-General and the Security Council, I'm planning to invite the Syrian invitees back here in March for a fifth round.

We believe that we have prepared everyone to actually engage, not only on methodology, but also on substance regarding the four baskets we refer to.

The train is ready, it is in the station, warming up its engine. Everything is ready, it just needs an accelerator — and the accelerator is in the hands of those who were attending this round.

I know, and you know too, there are still people in Syria and outside who still believe that there is a military option or a military solution.

That is fantasy. Only a political solution — but a political solution that addresses the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people — can solve this crisis. The UN will verify in the next weeks and months, whether such a solution can be found, we believe it must be found.

You would be hearing strong statements after mine or in the next few days. I heard what I heard during the private discussions or informal or formal discussions. I had a feeling that the sides want to find a dialogue. That's what matters, so as I told you at the beginning — don't be surprised, don't overestimate, don't overreact if there are

statements that will say “never”. This is part of the rhetoric, this is part of posturing, this is part of politics. I know what I heard and what I saw, and that gives me some feelings that we are moving in the right direction.

QUESTION: Tom Miles from Reuters. Congratulations for getting through till the end of the round, and to everybody. Would you agree that the Geneva process is now a hostage to the Astana process? And the Russians have been here this week and engaging with the Syrian opposition but what assurances do you have from the Turks and especially the Iranians that they are going to help you with your Geneva process? There is no love between Iranians and the opposition, thank you?

SdM: I must say that, if there was that analysis, in other words, that the Geneva process was a hostage of Astana, then when we would have seen in fact, those who support Astana to try to make sure that Geneva doesn't succeed, so that Astana becomes prevailing. That's been completely the contrary. The Russian delegation which came here, at a very high level, actually had a very pressing interest in pushing for Geneva to produce some type of momentum. Why? Because Astana is hostage of Geneva if you want, and we are not hostages of Astana but we are very much complementary. If, and I will almost finish, if Astana succeeds — and we want them to succeed — means ceasefire. If ceasefire takes place we can have productive talks like we had, if we don't have productive talks ceasefire will not last. You see how interconnected, so no one is really at the end hostage to anyone. We are really working hand-in-hand — but there are two hands.

Deputy Foreign Minister Gatilov was very active in supporting what we were asking him and suggesting to support, which was a momentum in these Geneva talks and there were two senior officials, one from Turkey and one from Iran, who were present. And both of them actually made sure that their opinion — which was momentum of Geneva talks — would come across. So I felt we had support. There are vested interests, but the support was about making sure that Geneva doesn't fail.

....

QUESTION: Mr. de Mistura, you stressed a lot of times that these negotiations should be inclusive. Are you planning to widen the range of participants including, for example Kurds, and we also remember the Hmaimeem group which took part last year in the negotiations. Are you planning to also invite them?

SdM: Well, you see, we are guided by 2254. 2254 has been very specific, and I have been trying to follow that, but my wish is actually instead of suggesting new groups, and new groups and new groups, that everyone will be understanding that the more they unite the better it is, because that's exactly what makes our life easier. So my inclination is not to invite new groups in order to make my job more complicated, but actually stimulate those who would like to be part of it to come into one common umbrella, that's what we have been trying to do. Thank you.

BBC: Your Excellency you have agreed on specific items in a specific agenda with particular sequencing, have all the other parties agreed to that agenda or will you have

to come back to them in the next round?

SdM: Thank you, I think and I feel quite comfortable, that the so-called three original points of the agenda 2254 and the fourth additional point which is about terrorism, and framed in the way I said, big difference between what we do in Astana and here, can be something that everyone can live with. Now I would like to see all this working in parallel. Why? Because one of them may be moving faster. I have to say that on the side of HNC it is clear their preference is for having, as first point, the issue of governance.

"Stakeout by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura — Conclusion of Intra-Syrian Talks — Geneva 4," [U.N. Geneva](#), 3 March 2017. [Brackets in original. Numbered list formatting added by Standler.]

My comment is that the Russian and Turkish governments need to do more than words to improve the ceasefire in Syria. At a minimum, there needs to be real punishment for every violator of the ceasefire.

Russia needs to squeeze Assad until Assad actually allows delivery of humanitarian aid to *all* people in Syria who need food or medicine.

De Mistura's train analogy is flawed. The negotiations will fail for reasons given in my essay for [February 2017](#). The principal cause of the failure will be both the HNC and insurgents are unwilling to surrender to Assad. Even if the negotiations are successful, the agenda is wrong, as I explained in my February essay.

My comment on deadlines. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §4 calls for elections within 18 months of the beginning of negotiations. The negotiations in Geneva were scheduled to begin at the end of January 2016, so at the end of March 2017 the Syrians have four months remaining in which to write a new constitution and hold elections. I have been generous to the Syrians, because Resolution 2254 at §2 specified a target date of "early January 2016 for the initiation of talks", which gives them only three months remaining at the end of March 2017. There needs to be consequences for violating United Nations Resolutions.

8 Mar 2017: de Mistura's U.N. briefing next Geneva meeting scheduled for 23 March

On Wednesday, 8 March 2017, after a closed-door meeting with the U.N. Security Council, de Mistura announced the next negotiations in Geneva would begin on Thursday, 23 March 2017. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#).

De Mistura's 30-paragraph briefing to the U.N. Security Council included:

Commonalities and principles

¶9. There was one early point of common ground. All invitees confirmed that the talks should not start from scratch, and instead build upon the achievements of the three rounds held in 2016. This allows me to affirm the common ground identified in last

year's points of commonalities and mediator's summary papers produced after rounds two and three. This also allowed me during this fourth round to build upon this with a twelve-point non-paper that captured certain essential principles. I was satisfied with the reactions to these principles, and feel there is a broad area of common meeting of the minds regarding the type of Syria that all invitees may want to see one day. These principles can continue to evolve as a living set of points. They can also serve to guide me as the mediator in shepherding the effort. I did not at this stage seek any formal agreement, not least because the important thing is to focus on the real substance at stake. Therefore, I am not publicly releasing them at this time, and may continue to refine them.

Agenda

¶10. It was clear and not disputed that the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva are aimed at implementing resolution 2254. As the mediator, it is my view and expectation that the sides should aim at a framework agreement containing a political package so that a negotiated transitional political process can be implemented in accordance with the clear sequencing and target timelines set out in resolution 2254.

¶11. To achieve this goal, a clear agenda has emerged consisting of four baskets — three baskets as per my invitation letter plus a new additional basket added during the round. Each is to my mind framed by the goal I have just described and contributes to developing the overall political package for a negotiated transitional political process to unfold in Syria:

1. Basket 1 addresses all issues related to the establishment, within a target of six months, of credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance.
2. Basket 2 addresses all issues related to setting, within a target of six month, a schedule and process for drafting a new constitution.
3. Basket 3 addresses all issues related to ensuring that free and fair elections, pursuant to a new constitution, can be held within 18 months and administered under the supervision of the UN, to the satisfaction of the governance and to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate.
4. The new basket 4 addresses (within the context of the overall transitional political process) issues related to counter-terrorism and security governance, and also confidence-building measures.

¶12. We have elaborated with the sides elements that could be covered in the workstream in each basket. Expert UN inputs have mapped to varying degrees substantive issues that would need to be addressed. Basket 1 should address the functions, elements and institutions of credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, their membership and decision-making, their powers and relations to other institutions, governance practices and policies and mechanisms, and the mechanisms and legal basis to ensure implementation. Basket 2 should address the type of

constitutional drafting process by the Syrians that would be set up such as a special commission, how a national conference or national dialogue could play a role, what public consultation and revision could take place on a draft, and how a draft would be formally approved by Syrians. Basket 3 should identify the balloting events that would take place, how elections would be administered, what UN supervision would entail, what free and fair elections according to highest international standards would require, and how to ensure eligibility of all Syrians including members of the diaspora to participate. Basket 4 should be informed by UN standards, such as the pillars of the UN counterterrorism strategy, and address strategic counter-terrorism issues well as security sector governance. Thus, this basket could address internal and external conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, preventing and combatting terrorism, ensuring state capacity to address terrorism, and upholding the rule of law and human rights while fighting terrorism — including in state institutions, and in particular security institutions. Issues of unity of command over armed forces, powers of and oversight of security agencies, credible and effective police forces, and dealing with foreign fighters and forces could all be usefully addressed. So could confidence-building measures.

¶13. Let me clarify that these are not as far as the UN understands the same issues as those to be addressed in the Astana effort. The UN strongly supports Astana in addressing the crucial issue of maintaining the ceasefire regime announced on 29 December. Likewise, any immediate operational counter-terrorism issues can be dealt with there, in Astana not in Geneva.

¶14. I also look to the coming meeting in Astana to do everything possible to find practical measures of confidence-building, such as securing releases of arbitrarily detained persons, and also ensuring unhindered humanitarian access. There were quite a few interactions on these issues in Geneva. I also want to make clear that in Geneva we will continue to address in the framework of the ISSG Humanitarian Task Force issues of humanitarian access. We will also pursue a systematic and sustained approach to the issue detainees, missing persons, and other confidence-building measures, as called for in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

¶15. Let me also indicate as I did to the invitees that if and as substantive talks on the four baskets deepens, additional baskets on reconstruction and international support for a negotiated transitional political package could be added in due course.

Work methods

¶16. Within the intra-Syrian talks process, as far as the UN is concerned, we aim to address the baskets in parallel. This at least means that:

- Each basket will contain its own work stream;
- We address all four baskets in-depth in each round;
- The mediator will not allow any party to prevent discussion of a basket;
- The sequencing of meetings to discuss baskets does not denote the sequence of implementation of any agreed package;
- Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed unless the sides decide otherwise;

- Any framework agreement would be a package from a comprehensive negotiation.

¶17. I urge the invitees to prepare actively for the next round of talks on all baskets. I intend to actively mediate in proximity talks, as by the way is done in Astana. Workstreams in the baskets will be pursued in formal meeting with the United Nations, as well as technical discussions, and possibly working groups, expert committees, or other arrangements, depending on the complexity of the issues, the preferences of the sides, and what I assess can be fruitful.

¶18. As we proceed in proximity mode, we will continue to explore every opportunity for direct meetings on all issues on the agenda, or on specific issues where appropriate.

Progress re opposition

¶19. In this context, I am also pleased to note that, with our active encouragement, important progress was made before this round toward the needed basis for a single opposition delegation to participate in direct negotiations with the Government of Syria. Significant dialogue and contact among invitees on this matter continued during round 4 in Geneva.

¶20. I will continue encouraging efforts in this direction, and work for finalizing efforts to this end within the context of resolution 2254. There should at the very least be cooperation among the opposition invitees in a manner that promote the effectiveness of the process. I hope that a clear agenda for the talks process will play its part in assisting the opposition in its diversity to overcome whatever differences remain. Let everyone note that success in this endeavor lies in many hands, not just mine.

....

[Way Ahead]

¶23. What is the way ahead? I am in New York to brief you but also to consult the Secretary-General, which will be later this week. It is my intention to reconvene the invitees for a 5th round with a target date of 23 March, with invitees to arrive 22 March.

¶24. In support of the talks process, I need your help. First, I would welcome this Council sending a clear signal that the outcomes of this round of intra-Syrian talks have your full support. The agenda now set should be fully backed. We cannot afford any back-sliding. You should know that I was quite prepared to adjourn meetings if no serious engagement was taking place on the baskets in the round that just passed, and that will continue. And I will not hesitate to explain why.

¶25. Second, the invitees should be preparing for intensive and substantive discussion on the baskets in the fifth round. I hope they will come with constructive inputs and fresh thinking where that is needed. That is what a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process ideally would require. But if they do not, the UN will continue to stimulate

them with inputs.

¶26. Third, I appeal to those convening the Astana meeting next week to address urgently the challenges to the ceasefire. And I urge all states with influence to use that influence now with the conflicting parties. Since mid-February, we have witnessed several worrisome developments that can be classified either as typical spoiler acts, or escalatory steps in contested areas that are of strategic interest to the parties to the ceasefire. This surge in violence is killing more civilians, and has the potential to undermine confidence in the 29 December 2016 ceasefire agreement. There is an urgent need for an effective working mechanism on verification, prevention, or correction on the ground. The UN will be present and active in the Astana meeting to support the principal players address these challenges.

¶27. Fourth, humanitarian access must be safe, unhindered and sustainable, especially in besieged and hard to reach areas, on the basis of needs assessed by the UN and its humanitarian partners. All parties to the conflict must meet their obligations under international humanitarian law.

¶28. Fifth, let us remember the enormous task of bringing about a return of those who have fled and the reconstruction of Syria once a political solution is reached. The ministerial-level conference that will take place in Brussels less than a month from now will focus on the implementation of pledges and commitments made in London last year, on supporting the resilience of millions of refugees and host communities in neighboring countries, but will also begin to look a possible concerted path forward on early rehabilitation and future reconstruction needs — if and only if a credible and genuine transitional process has firmly taken place. A well-coordinated approach to reconstruction needs can be a powerful incentive to all to replace guns with bricks and mortar, boost regional economies, and enable the return of the displaced to their homes.

¶29. Sixth, let us plainly acknowledge that, while the solution must be Syrian led and owned, Syria's future is not, tragically, only in Syrian hands. Syrians from all walks of life remind me of this on a daily basis. I appreciated the assistance of many active diplomatic counterparts during the fourth round. If we are to go further, every important outside player needs to make a firm and unequivocal decision not to pursue the illusion — the fantasy as I said in Geneva — of a military solution, or to foster that illusion among Syrians. All must recognize that only a political solution can produce a sustainable future for Syria. This requires a solution that addresses the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The Syrians must recognize this, and so must outsiders.

Staffan de Mistura, "United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Briefing to the Security Council on the outcomes of Geneva 4," [U.N. Geneva](#) 8 March 2017, posted on 10 March.

8 Mar 2017: de Mistura's press briefing

After meeting the United Nations Security Council on 8 March 2017, de Mistura gave a briefing to journalists.

Good afternoon. President of the Security Council briefed you I was not there when he did but from what I understand on the main conclusion and outcomes of the Geneva 4th round of talks and I will be doing my own comments on that basis. I just briefed the Security Council on the 4th round and you must have seen my own press conference in Geneva last Friday, but I will also release to all of you my own briefing. It is as you know a closed meeting but in this specific case it was very complicated and it was a briefing on what has happened in Geneva, and what is the outcome that we would like to build on. I think it is only normal and right that the press should get a copy of it so I will be issuing one soon.

It is the International Women's Day and I know that you must have heard it already but frankly for me, it is an important special day because of the important role the Syrian women are playing both during the conflict and what they are facing as mothers, wives, daughters, the horrors of this conflict and how they have been helping me and my team and my colleagues on how best we can address the needs of the Syrian people in a political process. So I would like to honour them today and dedicate the day to Syrian women. Every woman in the world is important but seeing it from the agenda and the file I am following, I can testify that the Syrian women deserve a very special moment of honour and respect. Their voice was clear when we were in Geneva, they said we want serious negotiations, we want the end of the conflict, we want to contribute to the future of the country not to the war and to the legitimate aspirations of the Syrians.

So as I told the Security Council, we have completed nine days of the fourth round of talks in Geneva. We did not expect miracles and frankly we did not have miracles but we achieved much more than many people had imagined we could have. No one left, everybody stayed. They were focused, we got an agenda, we got a timeline, we got some agreement on substance. You must have seen this picture, you must have seen it, it is well known to you. This picture was in the SC during the whole meeting of the SC why? Because it is much more than what it looks. It is the first time that there was involvement by everybody showing that they are serious and trying to actually achieve a dialogue among them. They would have never been seated together.

Let me now get into some points although as I told you, you will be getting my own briefing which will be quite elaborated. Our aim is to implement 2254 — you have heard it. We will be promoting talks on substance: on governance, on constitutional process, elections exactly as 2254. Now we added counter terrorism as additional basket which is now part of the four baskets. It is by far more than counter terrorism and includes other subjects such as the security organization, confidence building measures and much more and we may add more baskets. For instance reconstruction. The type of talks will still be proximity talks and by the way in Astana it is exactly the same. Getting into direct talks may take place at the right moment. We see it is much more productive when we have proximity talks because a mediator can do his job better and also facilitate the technical aspect.

Bottom line: my current intention is to bring the invitees back to Geneva for a fifth round with a target date of 23 March. Invitees will arrive on the 22nd and they will be ready to work on 23 March. I have been asking the Council for their support and that is what I have been getting. Not only support to me and my team but also support in

particular to what we consider a priority: support for building on the outcomes of the 4th round so on the 5th round no one can start trying to go backwards. We need to go forward.

I appealed to the participants of the fourth upcoming Astana meeting through the Council to address the challenges of the ceasefire. Without a strong ceasefire the talks will be fragile. People in Syria have the patience to see these discussions going on for a long time — like every discussion after a war of six years almost — but at least they have to do it while there is no heavy bombing taking place. So we have been urging meetings in Astana to actively be productive and we have been supporting them with our own technical team. But of course the responsibility of their success is in the hands of guarantors. I appealed also to the Council to support unhindered humanitarian access including to the besieged and hard to reach areas. And progress on the detainees issue, which we will never give up on until it is solved. And above all, I have appealed to Syrians and all outsiders to abandon the fantasies that are still there of a military victory. One side or the other still believe it is possible. It is pure fantasy. I will stop here and open the floor to your points and questions.

....

QUESTION: You just repeated that all parties in Geneva agreed on the agenda but we heard from the HNC at the conclusion of the previous round that they did not agree on the 3 baskets + 1 on terrorism. How can we understand that?

SdM: First of all I said “UN agreed”. When I was asked what is the position of every group, I didn't want to clarify it because they have the right to elaborate on that. I said, the UN — who is the convener and I am the one who has been calling for the invitations, calling for the agenda — the UN agreed to the four baskets but clarified it includes not only terrorism and counter terrorism but rather is a special basket that can include something else. By the way is anyone in favour of terrorism here? So the subject is an important one but needs to be clarified in the context of the UN and we have been explaining it. When you will see my briefing you will understand.

....

QUESTION: Can you give us an idea on what points the different sides had similar views or reached similar understanding? Will the invited opposition groups be the same as the previous ones in Geneva talks?

SdM: Regarding the first part, there were commonalities. There was one issue they were having common position: They all did not want to start from zero again because the problem of any negotiations is the tendency to go backwards and revisit everything. All agreed they want to build on Geneva 2 and 3. This is why I have been insisting to build from Geneva 4 to 5.

Second: some of the commonalities are crucially important because Syrians are proud people and they love their country. National sovereignty, integrity, unity, certain major aspects about the end state. How to get there? There are disagreements but what could

be the end state there is a lot of common ground. Regarding who will be invited, again I am talking on the basis of what we did in Geneva 4. Geneva 5 is a continuation of Geneva 4.

"Transcript of the Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura's Stakeout after Briefing the Security Council on the Outcomes of Geneva 4," [U.N Geneva](#) and [U.N.](#), 8 March 2017.

My comments: De Mistura praises the Syrian women, but the Truth is that the Syrian women are largely excluded from the official delegations to the Geneva negotiations, which shows both Assad and the opposition ignore women.

It is a pathetic situation when the negotiations are characterized as successful because "No one left, everybody stayed."

On 21 Sep 2016, de Mistura spoke to the United Nations Security Council and said he wanted to "move to direct talks — not anymore just proximity talks." (See my essay for [September 2016](#).) And, on 24 Feb 2017, de Mistura's chief of staff, Michael Contet, publicly said de Mistura "wishes to be able to have all the invitees present in Geneva in the same place to exchange directly, and have direct talks." That was de Mistura's intention. But the reality is that, except for the welcoming ceremony on 23 February, the opposition and Assad's delegates refused to be in the same room together. On 8 March 2017, de Mistura specifically said: "The type of talks will still be proximity talks...." De Mistura's promise is still unfulfilled, because of the refusal of the delegates to Geneva to behave in a civilized way.

The United Nations has been attempting to arrange a ceasefire in Syria, beginning in 2012. The United Nations, the ISSG in 2016, and now Russia and Turkey as "guarantors" have all failed to punish violators of ceasefires. The United Nations has been attempting to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria since Security Council Resolution 2139 on 22 Feb 2014. But deliveries of humanitarian aid have at best been intermittent and inadequate, and recently there have been *no* deliveries. The United Nations has failed to deliver humanitarian aid, *not* because the United Nations is defective, but because the Syrians are barbarians who refuse to permit deliveries and who loot trucks carrying aid.

The first question quoted above states that the HNC did *not* accept the fourth basket on terrorism, meaning the agenda is *not* agreed. De Mistura's answer did not dispute this fact. So that means that — after weeks of futile negotiations in 2016 and an additional 9 days of negotiations in 2017 — the agenda is still *not* agreed.

De Mistura asserted that "Syrians are proud people and they love their country." That seems to be correct. But the Truth is that, before the civil war began in 2011, Syria was an insignificant nation. I can not recall seeing any product made in Syria being offered for sale in the USA. Syria, together with other Arab nations, invaded Israel in wars during 1948, 1967, and 1973. Each time, Israel decisively defeated Syria. In 1967, Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria, according to well-recognized international principles that losers in wars forfeit territory, but 50 years later Syria is still whining about its loss of the Golan Heights. More recently, the Syrians have destroyed buildings, roads, and infrastructure in their country with their stupid civil war. I call it "stupid" because the *only* goal of the rebels was to depose Assad and begin a democracy in Syria, but when the rebels failed to accomplish their goal, they continued fighting. The result of this six-year civil war was to

push an insignificant country into a state of being a perpetual beggar that depends on foreign aid for its existence. Despite the fact that Assad is clearly winning the civil war, the rebels are unwilling to surrender to Assad, and so the deaths and destruction continue. To summarize, during the past 70 years, Syria's major product has been wars, and Syria's current major export is millions of unemployable refugees fleeing from their homeland.

Why are the Geneva negotiations conducted for approximately one week, following by almost a three week pause? I suggest that the negotiator is exhausted from having to sit in the same room as hysterical, irrational, belligerent, intransigent Syrian Arabs. The negotiator *needs* a long vacation in between a week of negotiations. Let me suggest — only partly in jest — that the nation of syria should be spelt with a lower-case "s" to designate its inferiority, after the syrians eagerly allowed a six-year civil war to destroy syria. After the syrians pay reparations to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Germany, ... for the cost of hosting refugees from syria, maybe syria can again have an upper-case "S".

At the end of his press conference, de Mistura seemed to confuse the fifth round of negotiations in Geneva 3 with a new series of negotiations called Geneva 5. After ten months (May 2016 to 23 February 2017) with *no* negotiations, it seems reasonable to say that Geneva 3 died in April 2016, and the current negotiations are Geneva 4. So de Mistura's "fifth round" is actually the second round of Geneva 4.

On 15 March 2017, the sixth anniversary of the Syrian civil war, de Mistura told [Reuters](#) “there is a need for an acceleration of any type of negotiations — in Astana, in Geneva, in New York, wherever.”

During 17-20 March 2017, the HNC and/or Syrian National Coalition held meetings in Riyadh, to decide on a strategy for negotiations in Geneva that begin on 23 March. *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported:

[HNC official Hisham] Mroueh said the failure of Astana talks would reflect negatively on the upcoming UN-led negotiations.

Peace talks in the Kazakh capital concluded on Wednesday [15 Mar] without any substantive negotiations taking place, after the opposition decided to boycott the meeting that took place as the deadly double suicide bombing rocked the city of Damascus.

HNC member Fouad Aliko said that the opposition would not oppose adding the issue of fighting terrorism to the agenda — an issue that the government delegation has repeatedly called for.

Aliko said he believed that the chances of Geneva talks' success were very slim. “We will go to discuss the political transition but no progress would be made, as the government will undoubtedly stick to its position,” he stated.

Caroline Akoum, "Syrian Opposition Convenes Ahead of New Round of Geneva Talks," [Asharq Al-Awsat](#), 10:00 GMT, 17 March 2017.

While *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported that the HNC was meeting, *Al-Arabiya* reported that the "National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces" was meeting. Perhaps

the reconciliation is that members of the Syrian National Coalition are part of the HNC. *Al-Arabiya* reported:

The supreme body of the Syrian Opposition is holding intensive meetings in Riyadh on Friday and Saturday [17-18 Mar], to discuss the agenda for the next round of the Geneva peace talks due on March 23. Further meetings with the negotiating team will take place on Sunday and Monday [19-20 Mar].

....

Alikou was of the opinion that the success rate of the next round was very small to non-existent.

"Intensive meetings by Syrian opposition in Riyadh for Geneva talks," [Al-Arabiya](#), 15:38 GMT, 17 March 2017.

23 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 10

On 23 March, the negotiations resumed in Geneva. De Mistura persists in calling this session the "fifth round" of Geneva3.

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, is pleased to note that all invitees to the fifth round of intra-Syrian talks have arrived in Geneva. Deputy Special Envoy, Ramzy E. Ramzy, has begun preliminary informal consultations with them today.

The Special Envoy is returning later today to Geneva, having completed a series of consultations with international and regional stakeholders. He looks forward to formally engaging the invitees to the talks starting tomorrow, 24 March.

The Special Envoy will be addressing the media at an early opportunity in the days ahead.

"Statement by the UN Special Envoy for Syria on the fifth round of intra-Syrian talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 23 March 2017.
Copy at [U.N.](#)

My comment is that the opposition usually arrives late. This time, de Mistura himself arrived late at talks that he scheduled.

24 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 11

On Friday, 24 March 2017, de Mistura gave a press briefing:

Good evening everyone and thank you for being here. As you know yesterday the delegations and invitees all arrived and that Deputy Ramzy met them informally in their own hotels. I know the importance we attach to this round in particular which is the fifth round as you know of Geneva talks. I have been particularly attentive trying to engage and asking for advice and support from all the regional players or interlocutors or stakeholders. That's why I took one more day because you know we are human beings so you can't fly everywhere at the same time. And one more day spent having been to Riyadh and then to Moscow and then to Ankara. That's why Ambassador

Ramzy had to do what was useful: Some preparatory discussions in the hotels with the various invitees.

I would not go into details as you can understand, on the various discussions which took place both in Riyadh, Moscow and Ankara. What I can tell you, [is] that everywhere I went in all three locations there was a stronger feeling that in spite of the non-totally positive development which took place in the last Astana meeting, and in spite of the recent surge of military activities, the Geneva talks according to each one of the interlocutors, need to go ahead and actually build on the fourth round of the Geneva talks.

In fact, they said just because of that indeed, it was even more urgent that we would have the fifth round of the Geneva talks. Indeed developments on the ground while we speak are very much related sadly to offensives and counteroffensives. But, all invitees and delegations who were present here and as you know we have also the Women Advisory Board which has been giving me and continues [to] give me very wise and substantial support, are feeling that it was worth it to come and all came. None of them has threatened to leave or not to come, which is a sign of maturity and of responsibility particularly in difficult moments like this one. Well obviously we have always been in favour and strongly advocating for stronger calmer or major calm during the discussions but this is also something that sadly has happened in other conflicts. They have been talking and fighting at the same time and this is not what we want but this is what can be faced by continuing having the talks in spite of the fighting.

Hence, our expectation and the stronger suggestion to the guarantors of the Astana process that they do retake the situation in hand and that hopefully there will be new Astana meeting as soon as possible in order to control the situation which at the moment is worrisome.

So, let's go back to today then, okay? Today we got into substance, there was no discussion about the agenda. The agenda has been established and actually strongly supported by the latest meeting we had with the Security Council. Well the first meeting as you know with the government of Syria delegation and its main focus was on the current security issues.

There was a long discussion on the security current developments which will be continued tomorrow because that is an issue that is concerning very much the government and will meet them again at 11 o'clock. As you know we gave the opportunity to all delegations and we will be, to actually choosing which of the baskets, but all baskets need to be addressed. Frankly the government, while focusing today on the security aspects, agreed, as indicated by interviews, both by Ambassador Jaafari and by President Bashar al-Assad, all four baskets would be addressed by the government in the next few days.

Then we had a meeting and you know with the HNC delegation which came from Riyadh. We first discussed the recent military events and we received in the context of the counter terrorism aspect a detailed report from the opposition regarding the on fighting in various locations, the threat of Daesh. We then discussed with the

opposition delegation which we met this afternoon the legal aspects of the governance in the context of political transition and resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué.

Tomorrow we will continue the meetings with all invitees and we will start at 11 o'clock and then continue the whole day with all invitees. In light of this importance that we are attaching particularly on this round of the intra-Syrian talks, and in view of the tensions that undeniably are taking place inside Syria from a military point of view, I have decided to accept an invitation from the Arab League to go for one day and try to explain to the members of the Arab League and have bilateral meetings with those who are engaged or involved or have an influence on the intra-Syrian talks and on the Syrian situation. And therefore, leaving on Monday and returning on Tuesday. Meanwhile the talks will continue under the chairmanship of Ambassador Ramzy but I felt it was important to engage as many regional players as possible and they all happen to be in one room.

Thank you this where we are at the moment but now is open for questions.

....

de Mistura: Regarding our objectives, I would try to be careful about expectations, like we were on the fourth round so I am not expecting miracles. I am not expecting breakthroughs and I am not expecting breakdowns. What I am expecting is building on the fourth round with some incremental constructive steps, which I would be able to tell you at the end of this road.

....

QUESTION: We have been witnessing escalation on many fronts including in Damascus and Hama. Escalation perpetrated by Al Nusra front and many other terrorist groups that have taken part in the Astana process. You have been visiting regional players as you said, including Turkey which has been one of the sponsors of these terrorist groups. Did these countries provide you with any guarantees to ensure the success of the fifth round of the Geneva talks and are you confident that they are going to dictate their commitment on the factions that they are supporting and how can you trust them after all these breaches?

de Mistura: Let me say one thing. I mean it when I said it and I would repeat it, for Astana process it is very important and I would have few comments because it has been able so far to actually establish quite a ceasefire. Not a complete one, we knew it was going to be difficult, but quite a ceasefire. We always knew that, as last year, every time we have a ceasefire that has been taking place, those who were not part of it, like Al Nusra, can be a major spoiler.

Having said that, I'm counting in fact on the two co-sponsors which have become three and actually more than sponsors: guarantors of the Astana ceasefire, to reconnect quickly in order to deliver what we were all expecting them to deliver:

A. a credible ceasefire — and I am convinced that we will be going back to that

- because there is no other alternative — and
- B. because to me they appeared to be sincerely trying to do so, remember in December.

Thank you, we will be having other opportunities as you know, God willing, in view of the fact that there will be regular updates. But I will do it whenever we have something substantive to share with you, not just indicating we had a meeting today or one tomorrow. Thank you very much.

"Transcript of stakeout by Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 24 Mar 2017. [brackets in original]

My comment is that de Mistura said: "hopefully there will be new Astana meeting as soon as possible". He appears to be asking for a meeting in Astana *before* the next scheduled meeting on 3-4 May 2017. But each of the three previous meetings in Astana was a complete failure, and accomplished nothing about the ceasefire. There is *no* reason to expect the next meeting in Astana to improve compliance with the ceasefire. Before Astana, the efforts of the USA, Russia, and the ISSG to establish a ceasefire in 2016 were also a failure. I suspect that neither Assad nor the insurgents want a ceasefire.

On 24 March, the head of Assad's delegation only wanted to talk about combatting terrorism (i.e., fighting against rebels, jihadists, Nusra, *and* ISIL). [Reuters](#). That focus on terrorism means Assad's delegation can avoid discussing a transition government that might not include Assad, avoid discussing elections that Assad might lose, and avoid discussing a new constitution that Assad does *not* want.

25 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 12

On 25 March 2017, de Mistura issued a statement which is quoted here in its entirety.

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, is deeply concerned by the recent escalation of fighting in Damascus, Hama and elsewhere in Syria.

He notes that the growing violations in recent days are undermining the ceasefire regime addressed through the Astana meetings, with significant negative consequences for the safety of Syrian civilians, humanitarian access and the momentum of the political process.

In this context, he has addressed letters to the Foreign Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey, as the three guarantor-States of the ceasefire in Syria that came into effect on 30 December 2016. He appealed to them to undertake urgent efforts to uphold the ceasefire regime. He has also brought these appeals to the attention of the Russian Federation and the United States as the Co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group.

The Special Envoy recalls that the joint efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey to guarantee the ceasefire are indispensable for improving the conditions on the ground and contributing to an

environment conducive for a productive political progress.

"Note to Correspondents: Statement by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N.](#), 25 Mar 2017.

My comment is that the ISSG held its final meeting in September 2016, but the ISSG was essentially dead in the months before September. The United States does *not* have a foreign policy since Trump became president on 20 Jan 2017. Therefore, de Mistura's appeal to the U.S. as co-chair of the ISSG is a waste of words.

My remark about *no* U.S. foreign policy in the previous paragraph is *not* hyperbole. Trump's foreign minister, Tillerson, who has *zero* experience in government diplomacy, began work on 1 February 2017 and was immediately swamped with crises involving nuclear weapons in North Korea, a possible nuclear weapons program in Iran, China's continuing military expansion in the South China Sea, and U.S. involvement in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Tillerson has been keeping a low profile and avoiding journalists. The first "daily" press briefing by Trump's State Department was on 7 March, and on 31 March the State Department still has *not* appointed a spokesman. Trump proposes cutting the State Department budget by 29% ([WaPo](#)), which shows Trump's disdain for diplomacy and foreign aid.

On Saturday, 25 March 2017, Reuters reported:

"Growing violations in recent days are undermining the ceasefire regime addressed through the Astana meetings, with significant negative consequences for the safety of Syrian civilians, humanitarian access and the momentum of the political process," de Mistura said in a statement on the third day of peace talks [25 Mar].

The U.N. envoy said he had written to the foreign ministers of Russia, Iran, and Turkey — the three guarantors of the ceasefire that came into effect on December 30, urging them to "undertake urgent efforts to uphold the ceasefire regime."

Nasr Hariri, lead negotiator of the opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC), said after meeting the U.N. envoy on Saturday that 15 civilians were killed and 70 wounded in the bombing of a market in Hamouriya in the Damascus countryside.

....

"Any political solution would not be meaningful or credible if it was not accompanied with a real ceasefire on the ground," Hariri said. "If we don't have that real ceasefire then things will deteriorate very badly."

Hariri said the opposition delegation and de Mistura had discussed political transition, one of four themes that the two sides have agreed to as the agenda for this fifth round.

The government delegation led by Syrian ambassador Bashar al-Ja'afari presented the U.N. mediator on Saturday with a paper on fighting terrorism, another agenda item that Damascus views as the priority.

Stephanie Nebehay, "U.N. envoy calls on powers to salvage Syrian ceasefire," [Reuters](#), 19:14 GMT, 25 Feb 2017.

The Associated Press, the major news agency in the USA, has a journalist (Jamey Keaten) in Geneva, but the Associated Press is *not* issuing news articles devoted to the negotiations in Geneva. Instead, the news from Geneva is included incidentally in articles on the war in Syria. For example, on 25 March, the Associated Press reported:

The U.N. Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said in a statement released in Geneva that he is deeply concerned by the recent escalation of violence in Syria, highlighting that it undermines a Dec. 30 cease-fire brokered by Turkey, Iran and Russia who back opposing parties in the conflict.

The statement said de Mistura had communicated with the foreign ministers of the three countries, appealing to them to exert urgent efforts to uphold the cease-fire.

Speaking after meeting on Saturday [25 Mar] with the U.N. envoy in Geneva as part of a fresh round of Syrian peace talks, Nasr al-Hariri, the head of the main opposition delegation, lashed out at Assad's "killing machine" and both named, and showed photos of some of the victims — including some featuring graphic imagery. "This is the fault of warplanes," he told reporters. "These are the ones who claim to fight terrorism who are responsible for this horrible massacre in Hamouna."

Bassem Mroue & Jamey Keaten, "Airstrikes across rebel-held Syria kill and wound scores," [Associated Press](#), 18:21 GMT, 25 Mar 2017.

26-27 Mar 2017: Days Nr. 13-14

On 26-27 March 2017, there were few reports of what happened in the Geneva negotiations by either Reuters or the Associated Press. There was also *no* press release or briefing for journalists by U.N. Geneva about the Syrian negotiations.

On 26 March, the HNC told Reuters that the HNC wanted to fight terrorists (e.g., Nusra and ISIL) but did *not* have adequate military equipment and supplies.

[Opposition negotiator Basma] Kodmani, in Geneva for U.N.-led peace talks, said the opposition's stance was "unambiguous condemnation, disassociation from, and willingness to fight the terrorist groups" designated by the U.N.

"The fact that Nusra or Tahrir al-Sham puts itself in those battles does not mean in any way that this is a new alliance or a renewed alliance," she told Reuters.

The militants liked to elbow their way into prominent roles but they never led an offensive on their own or maintained a ceasefire line, she said.

"We are fed up with Nusra. They are the biggest danger inside the areas where the opposition is sitting. But if you are bombed from above, you just have to postpone the battle against extremists, even though they are a mortal danger for you.

"The day the international community gives us anything to work with, believe me, the opposition will immediately turn against all the extremists and expel them from their areas."

Tom Miles, "Syrian opposition 'fed up with terrorists', seeks help against Assad," [Reuters](#), 21:03 BST, 26 Mar 2017.

My comment is Kodmani's remark is probably bluster, since the principal goal of the rebels and jihadists is to depose Assad. When Assad is removed, the rebels want to establish a secular democratic government, while the jihadists want a Sunni Islamic theocracy. But notice that the insurgent's excuse for not fighting against terrorists is lack of military equipment from the "international community", which means foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, USA). The rebels and jihadists lack the manpower to fight *both* Assad and the terrorists simultaneously.

The importance of the foreign meddlers may be why de Mistura was in the capital of Turkey on 23 March (when the negotiations were scheduled to begin in Geneva) and why de Mistura will be at the Arab League summit in Jordan on 27-28 March (when negotiations are continuing in Geneva). Convincing foreign meddlers to stop sending munitions to Syria, and convincing foreign meddlers to use their influence to establish a ceasefire, is more important than the actual negotiations in Geneva.

On Monday, 27 March 2017, de Mistura was at the Arab League meeting in Jordan. Ramzi Izz Eddin Ramzi, de Mistura's deputy, chaired the meeting in Geneva. [Al-Arabiya](#) reported "the chief negotiator for Syria's opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC), Nasr al-Hariri, said: 'We reiterated at the beginning of the meeting that the key aspect of political process is stepping down of Bashar Assad and all those who took part in the crimes against the Syrian people.' "

The opposition's intransigent demand that Assad resign helped scuttle negotiations in 2014 and 2016. Instead of allowing the citizens of Syria to vote for president in elections, the opposition continues to demand the result they prefer.

28 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 15

On 28 March 2017, there were *no* reports of what happened in the Geneva negotiations by either Reuters or the Associated Press. There was also *no* press release or briefing for journalists by U.N. Geneva about the Syrian negotiations.

29 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 16

On Wednesday, 29 March 2017, news from Geneva was again sparse. But Reuters reported: The Syrian opposition and a senior Russian diplomat agreed on Wednesday [29 Mar] that Syria's fragile ceasefire needed to be shored up amid growing violations in the multi-sided civil war.

Preserving the cessation of hostilities in place between the Russian-backed Syrian government and rebels since Dec. 30 is seen as key to any hope of progress in Geneva peace talks mediated by U.N. Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

But Western diplomats were sceptical about the Geneva talks. "We are in a game of

just keeping the whole thing rolling with no real sign of a substantive breakthrough at all," a Western envoy told Reuters. "We are not looking at any real negotiations here." Stephanie Nebehay, "Syrian opposition, Russia discuss reinforcing ceasefire," [Reuters](#), 17:54 BST, 29 Mar 2017.

30 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 17

Early in the morning of Thursday, 30 March, it was reported that the Kurdish delegation had quit the Geneva negotiations, in protest of the refusal of the HNC to discuss the issue of creating "a federal Kurdistan region" in northern Syria.

The Kurdish National Council (KNC) on Wednesday [29 Mar] pulled out from the negotiations in Geneva as a protest against the Syrian opposition's High Negotiations Committee (HNC).

"The KNC delegates pulled out from these negotiations as a protest against the High Negotiations Committee because they rejected the Kurdish issue to be included in the [negotiations] schedule," Zara Salih, a senior KNC-affiliated Yekiti politician told [ARA News](#).

"The Syrian opposition are against federalism and constitutional Kurdish national rights, and they want to delay discussing Kurdish rights in the future," he said. "Syrian Kurds pull out from Geneva negotiations in protest against Syrian opposition," [ARA News](#) in Kurdistan, 30 Mar 2017.

Later on 30 March, Rudaw in Kurdish Iraq reported:

Objecting to "exclusion" of the Kurdish question by the Syrian opposition High Negotiation Committee (HNC) in the Geneva peace talks, the Kurdish delegation has announced the suspension of its participation in a statement released Thursday [30 Mar] evening.

"We refuse the policy of cancellation and exclusion, and we see the need for more dialogue. And on that basis we see no reason to continue our participation in the meetings of the [High Negotiation] Committee in this round, and declare the suspension," the statement said, warning that they "do not commit to agreements that will be reached in our absence."

The Kurdish National Council (KNC) has two members within the HNC, a Saudi-backed umbrella group of political and armed opposition Syrian organizations participating in UN-sponsored Geneva peace talks.

"Kurds drop out of Geneva V talks, citing exclusion of Kurdish issue," [Rudaw](#), 17:00 GMT, 30 Mar 2017.

On 30 March 2017, there were again *no* reports of what happened in the Geneva negotiations by either Reuters or the Associated Press. There was also *no* press release or briefing for journalists by U.N. Geneva about the Syrian negotiations.

31 Mar 2017: Day Nr. 18

On Friday afternoon, 31 March 2017, de Mistura held a press conference at the end of the fifth round of Geneva3:

Good afternoon all of you. I will remember that I have to stop for the interpretation definitely. You have been already hearing quite a few stakeouts from participants to this round of talks, so I will try to summarise the spirit of it. So bear with me! I would read few points but then, of course, I will take questions and I can be more informal than just reading some points. So we have, today, now, not long time ago, completed a fifth round of the UN facilitated intra-Syrian talks here in Geneva. After the fourth round, you probably remember, I said we have finally a clear agenda and a method: the four baskets in order to advance 2254.

After this round, I think I can say — with caution but I can say — that all the invitees have gone into considerable detail on the substance of that agenda with us, using exactly the methodology that we had established. They will deny of course because it is normal, they will deny because this is a period in which you can hear statements — but you can also hear what I will tell you and what I tell you is that they were serious and they were engaged.

In fact, the invitees, all of them actually, have worked with us on a range of substantive issues across the agenda in parallel and during the last nine days. Frankly it was not much about format, it was not much about procedure, thank God, we were mostly talking about substance.

Remember, I said to myself and to all of you we should not expect a breakup, breakdown but also not any type of great success. We are in the moment of pushing ahead an agenda. So the work that has been done should not be neither underestimated or dismissed. They have worked hard with us. In every negotiation there are certain issues that need to be prepared and discussed and usefully so before the real peace negotiations start and it is clear we are not yet there. But all those parts we are taking care of them or started doing so. So from that point of view we see this as progress, preparation for progress.

This is precisely what happens in most negotiations and what in this case is required. If both the government and the opposition are to move on the substantive matters, it takes time and we need to work towards a framework containing exactly a political package and a political settlement that you know is linked to Geneva Communiqué and [resolution] 2254. But these steps on the margins are part of it and that's why I feel they worked hard and we worked well with them. They will deny it but never mind, we feel that and they know it too.

We had in fact — if I can give an example, quite useful, sometimes very useful and quite in-depth discussions, because they were on both sides experts, and they went deeply on each of most of the baskets that we have been addressing. For instance, governance issues, the issue about a political transition process, constitutional process issues although I would have liked to get little bit more on that. Election issues, counter terrorism and security, governance, and confidence-building measures.

They received, both sides, all sides, non-papers that is a UN speciality you know. We produce non-papers to stimulate a debate and discussion, and they have a life on their own so they received non-papers and oral inputs from us. They have presented actually both oral and written inputs themselves to us and they continue to seek, in various ways, until one hour ago, more inputs and responses and interaction with us on each of the four baskets.

I have been continuing receiving before, during, and just today this morning, very good advice from our Syrian Women Advisory Board. Their voice, believe it, has been very influential on me, because they have been whispering in my ear what in fact the people are asking not only the political standing which we all have and I have been using that and I know that all delegations have been aware of that. That is why there has been some interaction between our Syrian Women Advisory Board and many of them.

The other day I had the opportunity thanks to Michael Møller to participate in a luncheon in honour of the President of Chile, a strong woman, and I mentioned to her what the Syrian women are doing in terms of contribution to making the discussions more effective. I told her to be proud as we are, and she said: "Well I hope we can give an example in many countries because the senior women need to have a role that they don't have yet."

Going back to papers or non-papers we have been producing some and we're not going to share them of course because they are living papers particularly one which has some principles that we have developed. This is a UN non-paper with some principles that are based on the commonalities that we have heard during five rounds of what can be points in common at the end of this process. Things such as national sovereignty, such as integrity, territorial integrity, and this is an important issue, respect of the different communities and so on.

That non-paper which I heard that some people started calling Naumkin paper is in fact a UN paper. I just asked Professor Naumkin to read it to the government as I asked my colleagues Robert Dann and Ambassador Ramzy to read to the opposition because I was tired of reading all the time. So please don't call it Naumkin paper or Ramzy paper, it is a UN paper.

This non-paper is a living paper and is still going on. We have been getting comments and we're going to take them into account of course but you should see it always in the context of how to actually implement the Geneva communiqué, [Resolutions] 2118 and 2254. Remember in this process all what we're doing is working in parallel on several fronts and nothing is agreed until everything is agreed on and no preconditions. These are basically some of the points that we want to make sure of when we talk with the two sides.

At the end of the day today I had the indication from all sides that they are keen and ready to return to Geneva for the sixth round of the talks. I also discussed how to continue engaging all sides between the rounds in one form or another for so we continue going deeper on each of these baskets to prepare ourselves for the next round.

One of your questions could be: So when is the next round? As you know some of our partners have the tendency of announcing it before I do — and that's fair because it is always a possibility to be accurate on that — but I am going to consult the Secretary-General and the Security Council. I'm on my way at the end of next week to New York for that purpose and then based on their advice and guidance I would be then indicating when the sixth round is taking place. There are many things happening sadly on the ground because there is conflict and in the political global environment things are going to happen. For instance we are now moving to Brussels where they will be a conference dedicated to Syria and we will be there. Certainly my hope is that would be a location for a better clarity on the international engagement particularly on the issue about humanitarian assistance which is still in difficulty and the potential or the possibility of reconstruction at the right time and under the right conditions.

So after that we have New York, Security Council, after that we should have the Astana guarantors to meet in Tehran. Put it on your schedule because it is an important meeting as we hope that they would be able to revitalise the ceasefire which, at the moment, is in difficult moment. And we really mean it, a successful work in Astana on ceasefire, reinforces Geneva and vice versa. So we really hope that this will be taken up again with efficiency by the three guarantors. In fact I did during the talk write an official letter, as you probably know, to the foreign ministers of Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran urging them to actually do what they can to make sure that their own involvement and their own successful involvement in re-establishing the strong and possibly even stronger ceasefire should be accelerated.

I was also, as you know, in Amman for the meeting of the Arab League, of the Arab States at the ministerial level and I did raise this issue with them, including the need for humanitarian access. And there, I heard from them their concerns for the fact that there is a lot of fighting that is taking place these days. And that leaves me also to say that we are particularly concerned about, generally those developments in the conflict which continues to put pressure on Syrian people, particularly civilians, who are often obliged to leave their homes. And sadly we have seen this happening too often during the last six years and this undermines this wonderful typical aspect of Syria — a mosaic where everybody is present and everybody has been there for thousands of years.

So conclusion, no one can deny and I cannot deny that there are serious challenges and that I'm not seeing immediately this developing into a peace agreement, no doubt about that.

And there are real challenges on the ground, we are seeing them in front of our eyes but let's be frank, no one walked out in spite of them. No one threatened to walk out and everyone was serious and business like in pursuing and pushing their points of view, but they were there and did it professionally.

And as I told you many times before, it is normal, that happens despite the worrying situation and the unavoidable rhetoric strong statements. The truth is that both the government and opposition demonstrated a new form of maturity and commitment to continue the process notwithstanding mutual recriminations, and notwithstanding the

fact that there are many serious grave developments taking place on the military side inside the country.

So, I believe that I can speak on behalf of all those who participated, we must, we must maintain this incremental momentum on the political process, even if it is only incremental.

Last time [3 Mar 2017] we said that the train is in the station ready. I think we can say, especially in Switzerland where trains are very precise, that the train is moving out of the station slowly, but moving out of the station.

"Transcript of press stakeout by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura — End of the Fifth Round of the Intra-Syrian Talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 31 Mar 2017, posted on 1 April.

In contrast to de Mistura's optimism, Reuters reported the delegations traded insults after the conclusion of the negotiations.

Negotiators from Syria's government and opposition traded insults on Friday [31 Mar], calling each other "terrorists" and "adolescents" after an eight-day round of peace talks in Geneva.

The two sides do not meet but negotiate via U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura, saving their liveliest invective for the TV cameras after each meeting with him.

Opposition negotiator Nasr al-Hariri said the "terrorist regime" of President Bashar al-Assad had refused to discuss political transition during the talks and said Assad was a war criminal who must step down in the name of peace.

"They are solely discussing their empty rhetoric about countering terrorism," Hariri told reporters, vowing there could be "no peace without justice."

"War crimes and crimes against humanity must not be an option for negotiations. From now, venues must be found for transitional justice to ensure holding the perpetrators accountable," [Hariri] said.

....

[The government's chief negotiator, Bashar al] Ja'afari mocked the opposition delegation as "adolescents" who thought they were appearing on a television talent show such as "Arab Idol" or "The Voice", and were under the illusion that government would simply hand over the keys to the country.

"In fact they are tools, they are mercenaries in the hands of their lords, their operators, and it seems they have not received instructions from them, except instructions to continue supporting terrorism and to create havoc in these rounds."

Ja'afari said his delegation had given de Mistura documents on all aspects of talks — on elections, constitution, reformed governance and countering terrorism — but the opposition had not responded.

Tom Miles and Stephanie Nebehay, "Syria's warring sides trade insults after Geneva talks," [Reuters](#), 19:32 GMT, 31 Mar 2017.
Reprinted in [Al-Arabiya](#).

Here are a few paragraphs from the *Syrian Arab News Agency*, Assad's propaganda agency. These paragraphs probably mix truth, invective, and propaganda.

Head of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation to the intra-Syrian dialogue in Geneva Bashar al-Jaafari said that the fifth round of dialogue was concluded without the delegation receiving any response from the other platforms on any of the papers it submitted.

In a press conference on Friday [31 Mar] following the final session of talks with UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura as part of the fifth round of dialogue, al-Jaafari said that the delegation concluded this round after a session with de Mistura that lasted two hours, noting that this round began while barbaric and brutal attacks were being carried out on Damascus, attacks which failed like all the ones before it, in addition to attacks on Hama countryside and Lattakia countryside which the Syrian Arab Army and supporting and friendly forces managed to repel.

“During this round of Geneva 5, we submitted through the course of eight days several papers to the Special Envoy, the first of them being a paper on fighting terrorism, and a paper of general principles for the political solutions in Syria. These papers are about finding logical and natural grounds for addressing constitution issues. Of course, during these eight days we discussed in headlines the four baskets which are governance, constitution, elections, and terrorism, in addition to the basic principles paper which was part of our discussion about each of the four baskets,” he said.

Al-Jaafari noted that the delegation posed a number of queries about issues that the Special Envoy had brought up before and during this round, and in turn the delegation gave de Mistura papers to submit to the other sides or platforms on the basis that Geneva is based on Syrian-Syrian dialogue via a UN mediator.

“Regrettably, this round is over and we haven’t received the response of the other sides or platforms to any paper of our papers. This is no longer surprising because they don’t want to fight terrorism and they don’t want a political solution unless this political solution is tailored to their delusions which the years and facts proved that they never have and never will be realized,” he explained, adding that those sides only had one delusion in their minds which is handing over the keys to Syria and the power to them.

“They foamed and frothed, as they say in Arabic, during this round, ceaselessly making silly and tiresome statements showcasing their deviant opinions and twisted logic as if they’re contestants on one of those TV shows where competitors seek to win votes like Arab Idol or the Voice, to the point that we felt that Geneva has become hosted on satellite channels and not in the halls of Syrian-Syrian dialogue without external interference,” al-Jaafari elaborated.

He went on to say that this once again reveals that these sides are in a state of adolescence when it comes to politics, the situation on the ground, and mass media, in

addition to proving that they are agents of external forces and traitors to their homeland Syria, adding “since they are tools and mercenaries in the hand of their operators and masters, it seems that they haven’t received orders yet, except orders to support terrorism, cause ruckus and disturbance, and disrupt the entire round in clear reflection of the faces of their operators who support terrorism and who want to derail the Astana and Geneva tracks.”

Al-Jaafari pointed out that despite all of that, the Syrian Arab Republic delegation completed this round of dialogue with utmost seriousness, patience, and responsibility, because it bears the responsibility of defending Syria and stopping the bloodshed, adding “the mercenaries and traitors and those who live in Riyadh, Ankara, Doha, and other capitals cannot feel the pains and sufferings of the Syrian people.”

"Al-Jaafari following talks with de Mistura: We received no response from other platforms on papers we submitted," [SANA](#), 31 Mar 2017.

While Al-Jaafari was making inflammatory comments about the opposition, he is correct that the opposition wants Assad to resign (i.e., "handing over the keys to Syria and the power to" the opposition), something that the opposition failed to accomplish during six-years of civil war. It is also true that some of the opposition groups are controlled by foreign meddlers (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey), but then Assad is receiving massive assistance from Russia, Iran, and Lebanon's Hezbollah — so *both* sides are beholden to foreign meddlers.

The Syrian National Coalition (SNC), a major part of the HNC delegation, issued a press release blaming Assad for the failure of the Geneva negotiations:

Nasr Hariri, head of the delegation of the opposition’s High Negotiations Committee (HNC) stressed that the Assad regime is to blame for the stalled talks which wrapped up on Friday. He reiterated the HNC’s commitment to make negotiations a success.

....

“Through its participation in the Geneva talks, the opposition is seeking to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people," Hariri added. He noted that the Assad regime has killed more than 1,000 civilians since the fifth round of talks began on February 23. "Accountability for crimes committed in Syria should not be a subject for negotiations," Hariri added.

The HNC’s delegation also sought to ensure the implementation of the humanitarian provisions set out in UN resolutions and to reach a just political solution without Bashar al-Assad and his clique.

"We cannot say that negotiations succeeded or failed. We are fully aware that negotiations would be lengthy and difficult, but the other a party does not want to negotiate.”

"Hariri: Assad Regime Still Seeking to Sabotage Negotiations," [SNC](#), 1 April 2017.

Hariri's remarks, as reported by the SNC, are terse and incoherent. If the HNC really wanted to "put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people", then the insurgents should surrender to Assad. Any prosecution for war crimes should include insurgents as well as Assad's

government. Hariri was seriously misleading when he asserted: "the other a party does not want to negotiate" — history shows that from December 2015 to April 2016, the HNC issued demands (i.e., preconditions) that must be satisfied *before* the HNC would negotiate. Then the HNC walked out of negotiations in April 2016 and failed to return for ten months. In contrast, Assad's delegation has never prematurely departed from Geneva.

On 2 April 2017, [Arab News](#) in Saudi Arabia published an Agence France Presse article that focused on de Mistura's words that "real peace negotiations" have *not* begun. [Gulf News](#) in the UAE had a news article titled: "Another Geneva failure comes as no surprise."

Toward the end of this essay, I added a new concluding [section](#) on why the negotiations in Geneva were futile.

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.

My essay for [February 2017](#) mentioned more violations of the ceasefire, *zero* deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria, and reductions in military supplies to insurgents from foreign meddlers.

Nationwide Ceasefire in Syria

On 11 March 2017, two Al-Qaeda suicide bombers detonated near a Shiite shrine in Damascus, killing at least 40 people, mostly Iraqi pilgrims. The Al-Qaeda group is called the "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham" (Levant Liberation Committee). The Associated Press explained: "The Levant Liberation Committee is a coalition of several militant groups dominated by Fatah al-Sham", which was formerly called Nusra Front. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 12 March, [Reuters](#) and [Al-Arabiya](#) reported that the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

claims 74 dead in the attacks.

In May 2014, the insurgents withdrew from the city of Homs, with the exception of the Al-Waer suburb. Fighting continued in Al-Waer until 13 March 2017, when the insurgents agreed to leave Al-Waer and go to Idlib province. At least 10,000 people, including 2500 insurgent fighters, will leave Al-Waer during the next few weeks. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). On 18 March, evacuations from Al-Waer began. [Associated Press](#).

On 14 March, the United Nations and the Red Crescent delivered food and medical supplies to a total of 60,000 people in Madaya, Zabadani, Foaa, and Kafrya for the first time since 28 November 2016. Assad and Lebanese Hezbollah besiege Madaya and Zabadani, while insurgents besiege Foaa and Kafrya. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

Two Islamic suicide bombers detonated in Damascus on 15 August 2017, in celebration of the end of the sixth year of the Syrian civil war. The first Islamic bomber detonated inside the Justice Building, and about an hour later the second Islamic bomber detonated at a restaurant. The second bomber was supposed to detonate at the Justice building and kill rescuers, but police chased him and the second bomber ran into a restaurant and detonated. At least 30 people died in the Justice building, the death toll in the restaurant is unknown. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [SANA](#). De Mistura released a [statement](#) in which he declared: "[These attacks] are also plainly designed to spoil attempts to sustain political talks."

On 19 March 2017, the Levant Liberation Committee (mainly Nusra Front, now called Fatah al-Sham) attacked the Jobar suburb of Damascus. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). On 20 March, Assad's forces regained control of Jobar. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 21 March, insurgents began a second assault on Jobar. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 21 March 2017, Nusra Front and its allies began an assault on the city of Hama. [Reuters](#)(21Mar); [Reuters](#)(22Mar). On 23 March, Assad's army prepared to counterattack in Hama. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 29 March 2017, a historic agreement was reached to evacuate four towns in Syria. The pro-Assad Shiite population of al-Foua and Kefraya in the northwest Idlib province will be evacuated, ending the siege by insurgents. Sunni insurgents in Zabadani and Madaya in Rif Dimashq province will be evacuated, ending the siege by Assad's army. The evacuations are scheduled to begin on 4 April. These four towns have been the subject of numerous agreements — all of which were violated — for ceasefires and/or delivery of humanitarian aid, beginning in December 2015. [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#); [SOHR](#). The SOHR was grouching about alleged forced "demographic change". Maybe the SOHR prefers that the people in these four towns starve to death?

On 29 March 2017, at the Daily Press Briefing at United Nations headquarters in New York City, the deputy spokesman for the Secretary General said:

I've been asked about the Four Towns in Syria. The UN has received reports of an agreement between parties to the conflict to evacuate people from the besieged towns of Madaya and Zabadani in Rural Damascus, and Foah and Kefraya in Idleb, which are known as the Four Towns. The UN was not part of the negotiations or the agreement. We are monitoring the developments closely and remain concerned for the safety and

protection of the estimated 60,000 people in need in the besieged four towns. Any evacuation of civilians must be safe, voluntary and to a place of their choosing. Farhan Haq, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 29 Mar 2017.

On 31 March it was reported that a helicopter had dropped chemical weapons on a hospital in Hama province on 25 March 2017. The hospital's orthopaedic surgeon and one other person were killed. [Reuters](#); [MSF](#).

March 2017: *no* briefing on humanitarian aid

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. However, the most recent briefings were on 19 Jan and 16 Feb 2017, at which a dismal and worsening situation for delivery of humanitarian aid was described. There were *no* briefing on humanitarian aid during March 2017. 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. I say *might* because the Syrian barbarians have shown contempt for international law.

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, wherever and wherever they are, must one day be brought to account.

The Secretary-General also calls on all the parties to ensure freedom of movement of civilians and immediate unhindered access to humanitarian assistance.

"Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Syria," [U.N.](#), 20 Nov 2016.

My comment is that this U.N. statement on 20 November will be ignored by everyone in Syria. The Secretary General apparently does *not* understand that Assad is successfully pursuing a military defeat of insurgents in Aleppo city, and also starving civilians in Aleppo into submission. Why should Assad stop? Assad is slowly winning the battle for Aleppo city. Ban's call to prosecute Assad's government for war crimes at some vague future time again shows the impotence of the United Nations.

On 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).

On 22 March 2017, the Secretary General issued another monthly report on Syria:

¶42 I am concerned, however, at ongoing and seemingly indiscriminate attacks that result in civilian deaths and injuries. All parties to the conflict must respect the multiple and clear obligations that they have to protect civilians. Month after month, my reports continue to highlight the attacks against and destruction of schools, hospitals and other parts of civilian infrastructure. Such attacks and wanton destruction not only cause suffering for civilians in the conflict today, but will also slow any future recovery and negatively impact the lives of Syrians for years to come. The deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure and the use of starvation as a weapon of war constitute war crimes. I firmly believe that there must be accountability for crimes committed in this long and terrible conflict. I reiterate my previous call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

¶43 Widespread destruction is particularly painful because it is unnecessary. It has been emphasized countless times that there will be no military solution. Yet military action continues nonetheless, resulting in meaningless death and destruction. The United Nations remains committed to seeking a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict through an inclusive and Syrian-led political transition process based on the Geneva Communiqué and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015). The recent round of talks in Geneva saw some initial progress on an agenda and methodology for substantive talks. I have asked my Special Envoy to continue to seek forward momentum towards a political agreement, and I call on the parties to engage fully in the process to work to end this war at long last.

Antonio Guterres, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016)," S/2017/244 (22 March 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.](#) Not only did Guterres fail to meet his end of February deadline, but also there was *no* head appointed by the end of March 2017.

I suggest — instead of creating a new Mechanism according to Resolution 71/248 — increased funding and a broader mandate be given to the existing "Commission of Inquiry" under the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Notice that 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 548 Iraqi civilians killed in "terrorism, violence, and armed conflict" during March 2017. [UNAMI](#).

On 3 December 2016, UNAMI announced it would stop reporting casualty numbers for the Iraqi army, because the Iraqi army wanted to keep those numbers secret to prevent loss of morale. [UNAMI](#); [Associated Press](#). That change in reporting means that future UNAMI casualty numbers will be smaller 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.
-

March 2017: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 8 March 2017, two ISIL suicide bombers at a wedding party in Tikrit killed at least 26 people. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 20 March 2017 at 19:00 local time, an ISIL car bomb killed at least 23 people in Baghdad. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

On 29 March 2017, a suicide truck bomb detonated in Baghdad, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

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

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.

My essay for [February 2017](#) mentions that corruption in the Iraqi government is allowing ISIL to return to Ramadi and other liberated places.

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.

March 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.

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 4 March 2017, a total of 12 people in Mosul has been treated for exposure to ISIL chemical weapons during the past three days. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). But on 10 March, the Iraqi government said there was *no* evidence of chemical weapons attacks in Mosul. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 7 March 2017, Iraqi forces seized the unused government offices in western Mosul. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 7 March, Iraqi government troops seized the museum in Mosul. But the barbarians in ISIL had destroyed or removed *all* of the unique antiquities in the museum. The ancient manuscripts in the library had been burned. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 8 March 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that ISIL's caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has fled from Mosul and is now hiding in desert villages. My comment is that he should have told his loyal ISIL fighters in Mosul: "Goodbye, losers! Happy dying!"

On 11 March, [Reuters](#) reported that ISIL released dozens of people from jails in Mosul.

On 12 March, the commander of the Iraqi counter-terrorism forces in Mosul claimed the Iraqi government had liberated 30% of western Mosul from ISIL. [Reuters](#).

On 17 March, the Iraqi army asked the U.S-coalition for an airstrike on an ISIL truck. The truck was carrying explosives and the ensuing explosion killed at least 40 civilians — perhaps as many as 240 civilians — in nearby buildings. On 25 March, the Iraqi army paused its Mosul operations because of concern about civilian casualties. [Reuters](#)(25Mar); [Associated Press](#)(25Mar); [Washington Post](#)(26Mar); [Reuters](#)(27Mar). On 27 March, the Iraqi army resumed its push into Western Mosul. [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 Tunisian 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 Tunisian citizen who was a member of Al-Qaeda in Syria. [Pentagon](#).
- On 26 February 2017, something really important happened when a CIA drone launched a Hellfire missile that hit an automobile carrying the Nr. 2 international leader of Al-Qaeda. Abu al-Khayr al-Masri was blown to bits near the city of Idlib in Syria. *The New York Times* says "his real name was Abdullah Muhammad Rajab Abd al-Rahman" and "Since [March 2015], Mr. Masri had operated in Syria as Al Qaeda's deputy leader, providing orders and advice to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the Qaeda affiliate in Syria formerly known as the Nusra Front,...." [Associated Press](#)(27 Feb); [NY Times](#)(1 Mar); [Reuters](#)(2 Mar); [Associated Press](#)(2 Mar).

•

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](#).)

Recent Events

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.).

On 9 March 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the Oversight and Government Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives is investigating CENTCOM's failed counter-propaganda operations.

On 22 March 2016, the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, spoke at the Global Coalition Summit and said: "We are not doing enough to counter the perverse ideas and narrative of ISIS. Our challenge is to ensure these ideas are pushed to the fringes of our societies. There must be more Muslim moderate voices drowning out the extremists." [Australian ForMin](#). See also [The Australian](#).

ISIL is *not* defeated

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

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but the Iraqis have been unable to begin the liberation of Mosul.

2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.
5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at a Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42%

from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).

17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."
21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
25. On 12 June 2016, an Islamic terrorist perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando Florida. The terrorist pledged allegiance to ISIL, although there is *no* evidence that ISIL communicated with him. See my essay for [June 2016](#).
26. On 16 June 2016, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, testified before a committee of the U.S. Senate that "Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#).

27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) ("... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered diners in a restaurant."); [Reuters](#) ("... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State."). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).
29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).
31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 85 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
32. On 18, 24, and 26 July 2016, there were ISIL terrorist attacks in Würzburg in Germany, Ansbach in Germany, and Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in France. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
33. On 2 August 2016, [NBC News](#) published an exclusive report of a classified National Counterterrorism Center briefing to the White House, that showed a "fully operational" ISIL had spread to 18 nations during Obama's presidency. ISIL is "aspiring" in six additional nations.
34. On 6 August 2016, an Islamic terrorist — and illegal immigrant from Algeria — used a machete to slash the faces of two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium. See my essay for [August 2016](#).
35. On 20 August 2016, ISIL sent a suicide bomber to a wedding party in Gaziantep, Turkey, where at least 54 people were killed. Early reports said the suicide bomber was between 12 and 14 years old. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(21Aug); [Associated Press](#)(22Aug).
36. On 10 December 2016, ISIL recaptured Palmyra, Syria. Assad's army had liberated

Palmyra from ISIL in March 2016.

37. On 11 December 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated inside St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo, the seat of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, killing 25 people. [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#).
38. On 1 January 2017 at 01:15, a man dressed as Santa Claus walked into a nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey carrying a rifle. He shot 108 people, of whom 39 died. He shouted "Allahu Akbar" as he shot unarmed civilians. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters\(1Jan\)](#); [Anadolu Agency](#); [Reuters\(2Jan\)](#). ISIL claimed responsibility. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#). On 16 January 2017, police in Turkey arrested the gunman, who was a citizen of Uzbekistan who had trained in Afghanistan. [Anadolu](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
39. On 7 Feb 2017, an ISIL bomb at the Supreme Court building in Kabul, Afghanistan killed 22 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
40. On 8 March 2017, a group of four ISIL terrorists dressed as medical personnel and attacked a military hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan — killing more than 30 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- 41.

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

On 28 March 2017, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of February 15, 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIS since kinetic

operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$11.7 billion and the average daily cost is \$12.7 million for 923 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 28 Mar 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.
- My essay for [February 2016](#) describes an Islamic terrorist who brought two machetes and cans of aerosol spray paint to the Louvre art gallery in Paris.

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

Islamic Migration into Europe numbers

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

During the migration crisis in September 2015, accurate numbers were sparse. Instead, politicians and journalists spoke of "thousands" per day, "tens of thousands" per week, and at least a hundred thousand per month. On 7 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported: "An Austrian Interior Ministry official says nearly 200,000 migrants transited Austria" during September 2015. The actual number was higher, because some migrants boarded trains outside of Austria and then traveled through Austria. Also the [Associated Press](#) reported: "German authorities say 164,000" migrants arrived in Germany during September 2015.

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

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

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

disenchantment & failure of assimilation

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

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

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

In mid-September 2015, I wrote that some "migrants will become disenchanting with their new home". This has already happened. On 19 October 2015, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Syrians who arrived in Uruguay in November 2014 have complained, and "many Uruguayans ... have come to see the refugees more as rude, ungrateful guests." And on 29 October 2015, [The Guardian](#) reports that 14 migrants from Syria refused to leave a bus at

their destination in Sweden because it was "too cold". On 1 January 2016, the [Washington Post](#) reported that some migrants to Europe were returning home to Iraq, more than 779 Iraqis in November 2015 alone. Reasons for returning include: "disillusioned with the lack of opportunities or homesick, while others were forced to go when their asylum claims were rejected." On 11 January 2016, [Reuters](#) reports the Iraqi embassy in Berlin issued 1400 passports for migrants to return to Iraq since the end of October 2015. On 7 March 2016, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Iraqis were "disappointed" in Europe and were returning to Iraq.

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

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

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

some immigrants are criminals

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

See:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

fraudulent passports

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

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

1. Some of these migrants have no passport and no identity documents, so their name and past history can *not* be verified, except laboriously through fingerprints.
2. After the attacks in Paris on 13 Nov 2015, it took European police three days to trace *one* Syrian passport issued to Ahmad al-Mohammad and determine that the passport

was fraudulent. When there are thousands of migrants each day demanding entry, border guards can not spend three days checking each passport. Moreover, a second fraudulent Syrian passport with the same name was discovered in Serbia, which hints at widespread fraud. [The Guardian](#).

3. It is unlikely that Assad's government will cooperate with European requests for criminal background checks on emigrants from Syria, because European leaders have repeatedly called for the ouster of Assad.
4. Governments in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. have primitive criminal databases and can *not* do complete criminal background checks on tens of thousands of migrants. Moreover, police in those nations arrest only a few of the terrorists, so most terrorists may be unknown to police.

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

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

After politicians assured the public that there were *no* terrorists in the refugees entering Europe, the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 showed that at least two Islamic terrorists entered Europe with refugees. Then on 26 November, the Associated Press reported:

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

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

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

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

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](#).

18 March 2017: Orly Airport in Paris

Ziyed Ben Belgacem — a 39 year old man born in France of parents from Tunisia — was stopped by police north of Paris for speeding at 06:50 on 18 March. Ziyed fired a pistol at one policeman. The AP says Ziyed used "a 9 mm revolver loaded with bird shot", while Reuters says Ziyed used an air pistol. The policeman was shot in the face, and then Ziyed sped away. Ziyed abandoned his vehicle in the Vitry-sur-Seine suburb and stole a vehicle. At 08:30, Ziyed attempted to steal a rifle from a French soldier at the Orly airport, and two other soldiers shot Ziyed, who died. Ziyed had a criminal history of robbery and selling illicit drugs.

The Express in London, England reported:

Reports suggested [Ziyed] was a serial offender with 44 offences on his criminal record — his most recent being for armed robbery.

....

The family [Ziyed's parents and brother] are French citizens of Tunisian descent, and believed to be living on a council-run estate in Garges-lès-Gonesse.

The suspect was described by police sources as a drug-taking serial offender who had spent around 15 years of his life in prison.

Rebecca Perring & Sofia Petkar, "Paris Orly airport suspect named as Ziyed Ben Belgacem: What do we know about him?," [Express](#), 16:23 GMT, 18 Mar 2017.

A "council estate" is British English for taxpayer-subsidized housing provided for people unable to afford housing. In other words, French taxpayers paid for Ziyed's housing, so that Ziyed could attack the Orly airport. Ziyed had spent 3/4 of his adult life as an inmate in French prisons.

On the night of 18 March, Reuters reported:

The attacker, named as Ziyed Ben Belgacem, arrived at Orly airport on Saturday morning [18 Mar], threw down a bag containing a can of petrol and seized hold of a woman air force member who was part of a military patrol at the airport, Paris prosecutor Francois Molins said.

Using the servicewoman as a shield, he put his air pistol to her head and shouted at other soldiers with her: "Put down your guns. Put your hands on your head. I am here to die for Allah. In any case, there will be deaths." The other soldiers then shot and killed Belgacem.

....

On his body, police found a Koran and 750 euros in cash. At his home, they found several grams of cocaine, a machete and some foreign currency, Molins said.

Gus Trompiz & Emmanuel Jarry, "Man killed at Paris airport planned to 'die for Allah' — prosecutor," [Reuters](#), 21:36 GMT, 18 March 2017.

The Associated Press reported:

The prosecutors' office said [Ziyed] had a record of robbery and drug offenses. Molins said he was out on bail, banned from leaving France and obliged to report regularly to police, having been handed preliminary charges for robberies in 2016.

Molins said Belgacem was flagged as having been radicalized during a spell in detention from 2011-2012. His house was among scores searched in November 2015 in the immediate aftermath of suicide bomb-and-gun attacks that killed 130 people in Paris.

Nicolas Garriga & John Leicester, "Paris Orly Airport attacker wanted to kill, die for Allah," [Associated Press](#), 21:36 GMT, 18 March 2017.

Bibliography:

- "Radicalised Muslim known to security agencies shot dead in attack at Paris airport — as security stepped up at stadium where Duke and Duchess watch rugby,"

[The Telegraph](#), 13:56 GMT, 18 March 2017. (Ziyed "first came to the attention of the authorities in the 1990s when he was involved in a series of bank robberies. He was living with his family at their flat on a council estate in Garges-lès-Gonnesse, which police searched after the shooting.")

- "The Latest: Orly attacker used revolver to detain soldier," [Associated Press](#), 19:46 GMT, 18 March 2017. (Policewoman shot in face at 06:50.)
- "Airport shooting reignites security debate before French election," [Reuters](#), 22:34 GMT, 19 March 2017. (Autopsy finds cocaine, cannabis, and alcohol in the blood of Ziyed.)
- "Tests find drugs, alcohol in blood of Paris airport attacker," [Associated Press](#), 22:55 GMT, 19 March 2017. (Autopsy finds cocaine, cannabis, and alcohol in the blood of Ziyed.)

After 19 March 2017, Ziyed the Terrorist disappeared from the news. Three days later, another Islamic terrorist dominated the news, as reported below.

22 March 2017: London attacked again

On 22 March 2017 at about 14:40 GMT, a Hyundai 4×4 SUV hit approximately 40 to 50 pedestrians on Westminster Bridge in London, including hitting 3 policemen. Then the driver crashed his car into railings outside the Parliament building. The driver got out of the car and attempted to enter Parliament. The driver used a knife to fatally stab a policeman. The driver was then shot dead by police. Three pedestrians on the Westminster Bridge also died. (Note that journalists in the U.K. perversely counted the dead terrorist amongst the dead people. Americans do *not* consider terrorists to be ~~people~~ victims.)

The attack in London was on the one-year anniversary of an Islamic terrorist attack in Brussels that killed 32 people.

Journalists remind us that in May 2013, Lee Rigby, a British soldier, was walking on a street in London, when two Islamic terrorists hit him with their car and then used a meat cleaver to hack him to death. And on 7 July 2005, four Islamic suicide bombers exploded in three London subway trains and aboard one bus, killing at least 52 people.

There have been two similar Islamic attacks that used a vehicle to kill pedestrians. On 14 July 2016, an Islamic terrorist from Tunisia used a cargo truck to kill 86 people in Nice, France. On 19 Dec 2016, an Islamic terrorist from Tunisia used a cargo truck to kill 12 people in Berlin, Germany.

Although one expects the driver to be an Islamic terrorist, six hours after the attack journalists said only that witnesses described the attacker as an "Asian" man who was about 45 years old. Calling the attacker "Asian" is strange, because he was black.

On 23 March 2017 at 15:30 GMT, Scotland Yard identified "Khalid Masood" as the Islamic

terrorist. Khalid, 52 y old, lived in the Muslim ghetto of Birmingham, England until late December 2016. Scotland Yard said Khalid has a 20-year series of convictions for “assaults, including GBH [grievous bodily harm], possession of offensive weapons, and public order offences.” Scotland Yard also said: "Masood was also known by a number of aliases." [The Telegraph](#) at 17:31 GMT; [The Guardian](#); [Reuters](#).

The Associated Press said police raided an apartment in which Khalid had lived until late December 2016, and that apartment was in an area "that is rundown, mostly Muslim and relatively poor." That quotation was omitted in the final version of the Associated Press article, but can be found in an [earlier](#) version.

On the afternoon of 23 March, the ISIL Amaq news agency issued a statement: “The attacker ... in London was a soldier of the Islamic State, executing the operation in response to calls to target citizens of coalition nations.” [The Telegraph](#). Because Amaq did *not* mention the name of the attacker, there is doubt about whether ISIL had any contact with the attacker.

Late at night on 23 March, journalists began to reveal the early history of Khalid the Terrorist:

- Khalid was born in Kent, England in 1964 with the name "Adrian Russell Elms". His 17 y old unmarried mother, Janet Elms, is white. Adrian's biological father is black.
- When Adrian was two years old, his mother married Philip Ajao. Adrian subsequently used the name "Adrian Ajao".
- After a twenty-year string of crimes, Adrian converted to Islam while in jail sometime during 2000-2003. (His last criminal conviction was in December 2003, so his conversion to Islam apparently enabled him to have 13 consecutive years without a criminal conviction.) He then married a Muslim woman in 2004, but she abandoned him a few months later. In 2005, Adrian began using the name "Khalid Masood".
- It is *not* known when and where Khalid was radicalized.

On 24 March, British counter-terrorism investigators asked the public to identify associates of Khalid the Terrorist. Police also need information about how Khalid was radicalized. (See, e.g., [The Guardian](#); [The Telegraph](#).)

Bibliography in chronological order:

- "ISIL supporters cheer Westminster attack as 'revenge' for British air strikes on Syria," [The Telegraph](#), 18:14 GMT, 22 March 2017.
- "Four dead, at least 20 injured in parliament 'terrorist' attack," [Reuters](#), 19:21 GMT, 22 March 2017.
- "London attack: Police officer among four dead as terror strikes in the heart of Westminster," [Evening Standard](#), 19:28 GMT, 22 March 2017.

- "London attack: Police officer and shot terrorist among four dead after car ploughs into pedestrians near Parliament," **live blog**, [The Telegraph](#), begins 14:49 GMT, 22 March 2017.
- "Westminster attack: PC Keith Palmer named as police officer killed — as it happened," **live blog**, [The Guardian](#), ends 05:58 GMT, 23 March 2017.
- "Five dead, around 40 injured in parliament 'terrorist' attack," [Reuters](#), 00:06 GMT, 23 March 2017. (Mark Rowley, Britain's most senior counter-terrorism officer, "said the police's 'fast-paced investigation' was working on the assumption that the attack was 'Islamist-related terrorism'. Police believed they knew the identity of the attacker but would not provide details at this stage, he said.")
- "Westminster attack: parliament resumes with tributes to PC Keith Palmer — live," **live blog**, [The Guardian](#), begins 05:49 GMT, 23 March 2017.
- "ISIS claims responsibility for London terror attack that killed at least three victims," [The Independent](#), 13:11 GMT, 23 March 2017. ("A statement published by [ISIL's] Amaq propaganda agency said a 'soldier of the Islamic State' had carried out the atrocity by the Houses of Parliament. It said the man was following a call made by the group to launch attacks on civilians and security forces in countries allied to the US-led coalition bombing its territories in Syria and Iraq.")
- "London attack: ISIL claims responsibility as Theresa May reveals terrorist was British citizen who had been investigated by MI5," [The Telegraph](#), 13:49 GMT, 23 March 2017. (Amaq statement: "The attacker ... in London was a soldier of the Islamic State, executing the operation in response to calls to target citizens of coalition nations." *The Telegraph* reported: "A total of 29 people were treated in hospital following the carnage, with seven people remaining in a critical condition on Thursday [23 Mar] morning [08:15 GMT]." At 10:42, the U.K. Prime Minister said about the attacker: "His identity is known to the police and MI5 and when operational considerations allow, he will be publicly identified. What I can confirm is that the man was British-born and that some years ago he was once investigated by MI5 in relation to concerns about violent extremism.")
- "London defiant as IS claims attack by British ex-con, 52," [Associated Press](#), 21:54 GMT, 23 March 2017.
- "Life of Westminster terrorist Khalid Masood's mother who sews cushions from her rural Welsh farm she shares with chickens and a border collie," [Daily Mail](#), 22:01 GMT, 23 March 2017. (*Daily Mail* wins race to find parents of Masood the Terrorist. Masood was born in 1964 with the name "Adrian Elms", to Janet Elms, a 17 y old unwed mother. Two years later, Janet married Phillip Ajao. Masood has been estranged from his parents for more than ten years.)
- "Khalid Masood, the violent extremist who dropped off the police's radar before London terror attack," [The Telegraph](#), 22:21 GMT, 23 March 2017. ("The Telegraph

can disclose that Masood was not using his birth name. He was born Adrian Elms in Dartford, Kent.")

- "Police identify British-born attacker, victim count rises to four," [Reuters](#), 01:09 GMT, 24 March 2017.
- "London attack: police investigate terrorist Khalid Masood as death toll rises — live," **live blog**, [The Guardian](#), begins 01:57 GMT, 24 March 2017.
- "Westminster terrorist Khalid Masood used to be an English teacher called Adrian Elms and once stabbed a man in the FACE as his thuggish criminal history is revealed," [The Sun](#), 02:13 GMT, 24 March 2017. (*The Sun* tabloid reported: "Masood's life changed dramatically when in 2004 he is understood to have married a Muslim, Farzana Malik. What became of their marriage is unclear — or whether Masood converted to Islam at the time." During 2005-2009, he worked in Saudi Arabia, teaching English language. *The Sun* says Masood "turned to Islam after a life of violent crime.")
- Assistant Deputy Commissioner Mark Rowley of Metropolitan Police said: "We named the dead terrorist as Khalid Masood — we now know his birth name was Adrian Russell Ajao". [tweet](#), 08:10 GMT, 24 March 2017. (My comment is this is wrong, as Adrian's mother married Philip Ajao two years after Adrian was born *and* her husband, Philip, was *not* the biological father of Adrian.)
- "London attack: Terrorist Khalid Masood 'had many aliases' as police make two more arrests," [Evening Standard](#), noon GMT, 24 March 2017. ("It is now thought at least 50 people were injured in the terror attack with 31 being hospitalised. Two people remain in a critical condition and one person is suffering from life-threatening injuries.")
- "Westminster attack: police scramble to piece together past of London killer," [The Guardian](#), 24:08 GMT, 24 March 2017. ("[Masood] had converted to Islam more than a decade ago, and used several names during his life, having been born as Adrian Elms and brought up as Adrian Ajao before adopting a Muslim name.")
- "London attacker Khalid Masood: how hard-drinking, drug-taking village thug sought help over his urges to kill," [The Telegraph](#), 08:27 GMT, 25 March 2017. ("[In July 2000, when Ajao/Masood was in jail for slashing the face of Piers Mott, a local pub landlord] Ajao converted to Islam and started using the name Khalid Masood." "In 2004, ... Ajao married Farzana Malik, then aged 25, from Gillingham in Kent. On the marriage certificate, Ajao used his birth name Adrian Russell Elms and gave his profession as a teacher.")
- "Westminster attacker acted alone and motive may never be known, say police," [The Guardian](#), 22:30 GMT, 25 March 2017. ("Police investigating the Westminster attack have concluded that Khalid Masood acted entirely alone for reasons that may never be known." Deputy assistant Metropolitan police commissioner Neil Basu said: "We must all accept that there is a possibility we will never understand why he did

this. That understanding may have died with him.”)

- "Fears heighten that Parliament terrorist Khalid Masood was 'groomed for extremism in prison'," [Evening Standard](#), 23:00 GMT, 25 March 2017. ("Fears Westminster terrorist Khalid Masood was groomed for extremism in prison have heightened after it was claimed he turned to Islam whilst behind bars.")
- "'NOT A PROPER MUSLIM' Westminster terror attack killer Khalid Masood loved marathon crack sessions with hookers and slashed pal's face after paranoid row," [The Sun](#), 22:32 GMT, 25 March 2017, updated at 22:03 on 26 March. (Khalid's landlady in early 2000s assassinates what little remains of Khalid's character: "He wasn't a proper Muslim. He s*****d prostitutes, smoked copious amounts of crack [cocaine] and stuck knives in people's faces. He was a madman.")
- "Terrorist Khalid Masood was 'benefits cheat who took drugs and slept with hookers'," [Birmingham Mail](#), 10:33 GMT, 26 March 2017.
- "Mother of Westminster terrorist says she is 'shocked' by his actions and does not condone the attack," [The Telegraph](#), 17:25 BST, 27 March 2017. ("While Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has claimed responsibility for the attack, calling Ajao 'a soldier of the Islamic State', detectives said they could find no direct links with the group. Ajao, who was born into a middle class Christian family, went off the rails as a teenager and has got a string of criminal convictions for violence spanning 20-years. Former friends said he converted to Islam while in prison in 2003, but police said they can find no evidence he was radicalised while inside.")
- "Westminster attacker Khalid Masood had interest in jihad, say police," [The Guardian](#), 19:30 BST, 27 March 2017. ("Scotland Yard confirmed that he had changed his name from Adrian Ajou to Khalid Masood in 2005.")
- "London terrorist Khalid Masood showed no extremist tendencies, says ex-boss," [The Guardian](#), 19:48 GMT, 28 March 2017. (Boss who knew Khalid during 2010-2012 said Khalid was "apolitical". *The Guardian* says: "Masood appeared ignorant about many of the issues that extremist groups play on to recruit followers, such as Israel and Palestine or global jihad.")

Conclusions

During September 2013, I began chronicling the history of chemical weapons in Syria and the futile peace negotiations. I now see four 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.
4. [On 23 Feb 2017](#) — after a ten month suspension owing to the refusal of the opposition to negotiate — negotiations resumed in Geneva. But there was *no* realistic hope of progress.

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.

My essays for February through April 2016 document the refusal of the HNC to negotiate in Geneva. Instead of negotiating, the HNC issued demands (i.e., pre-conditions) that must be satisfied before the HNC would negotiate. The charade of so-called negotiations ended when the HNC walked out of negotiations on 18 April 2016, and the HNC failed to return until ten months later.

My essay for [February 2016](#) said: "As a result [of Hijab's demands], I suggest that Hijab's [HNC] be banned from attending the Geneva negotiations, and that de Mistura appoint an opposition delegation that is representative of the Syrian people and insurgents fighting on the ground." My essay for [April 2016](#) contains a section with suggestions for ending the futility of talks in Geneva, principally replacing the HNC with a different opposition delegation.

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, 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.

4. February 2017: *No Reasonable Hope*

for Geneva Negotiations

The Syrian opposition to Assad is in deep trouble:

- The rebels — and to a lesser extent the jihadists — are being clobbered by Assad's army, Russian airstrikes, and attacks by Iran and Hezbollah. After the insurgents were defeated in Aleppo in December 2016, foreign meddlers appear to have reduced their support of insurgents.
- Beginning in 2014, besieged towns in Syria are negotiating agreements directly with Assad's government that banish insurgents to Idlib province.
- Beginning in August 2015, the Syrian National Coalition — once recognized by some nations as the legitimate Syrian government — was being ignored.
- The HNC (which includes a number of members of the Syrian National Coalition) has been ineffective in negotiations in Geneva since January 2016.
- After 30 March 2017, the U.S. Government no longer supports the insurgents' demand that Assad resign — but the removal of Assad has been, and continues to be, the principal goal of the opposition.
- The opposition to Assad continues to be fragmented and disorganized, a problem that has persisted at least since mid-2013, perhaps earlier.

On 23 February 2017, negotiations in Geneva resumed after a ten month suspension caused by the refusal of the HNC to negotiate. My essay for [February 2017](#) gave five reasons why the negotiations in Geneva were futile:

1. Critically important issues (e.g., ceasefire and delivery of humanitarian aid) have been pushed to the parallel negotiations in Astana, but those negotiations in Astana were a complete failure. Russia and Turkey — the so-called guarantors of the ceasefire — have completely failed to punish violators of the ceasefire that began on 30 Dec 2016.
2. After weeks of negotiations in the year 2016, plus 9 days of negotiations that ended on 3 March 2017, the parties finally agreed on an agenda that was specified in United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 that was issued on 18 Dec 2015:
 - A. credible, inclusive, and non-sectarian governance.
 - B. new constitution for Syria.
 - C. elections in Syria.

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](#).

As I explained in my essay for February 2017, this is the *wrong* agenda. What Syria

really needs is:

- A. *all* insurgents stop fighting,
 - B. punishment of violators of the ceasefire,
 - C. unimpeded deliveries of humanitarian aid to all who need food or medicine, and
 - D. reconstruction of Syrian cities and towns, roads, electricity infrastructure, and water infrastructure.
3. The delegates are too uncivilized to meet in the same room, face-to-face. Further, the opposition intransigently demands that Assad resign — a result that the opposition has failed to achieve in six years of civil war.
 4. I have the impression that neither Assad nor the opposition want a negotiated end to the Syrian civil war. Instead, they want a military victory.
 5. Will *all* of the insurgents in Syria 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.

As I said in my essay in February 2017, 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. But such a surrender is supported by neither the rebels nor the jihadists, who continue their futile fight against Assad.

Conclusion for Syria

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 323,000 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 five million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, (see [Reuters](#)); plus 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 six 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/syria43.pdf>
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and links to historical documents.

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