

# Syria & Iraq: May 2017

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## Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 42 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 That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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. Beirut and Damascus are +3 hours from GMT (summer time in effect). Baghdad and Moscow are each +3 hours from GMT (*no* summer time).

Every day, I checked the websites of

- 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.

Sometime around 6 May 2017, the English-language website of the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) — Assad's official propaganda agency — disappeared from the Internet.

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

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### Terse Summary of Syria Fighters

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

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

On 28 July 2016, Nusra voluntarily ended its affiliation with Al-Qaeda. [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". From July 2016 to January 2017, Nusra Front called 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."

On 28 January 2017, the former Nusra Front became the dominant member of the new **Tahrir al-Sham** coalition, along with four other jihadist groups. [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#).

- 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.

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".

[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](#).

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, in 2013-2014 the Coalition was the least objectionable alternative government for Syria.

In my essays for [August 2015](#) to [December 2015](#), I observed that the Syrian National Coalition was "fading".

In December 2016, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) was formed in Saudi Arabia to represent the opposition in the Geneva negotiations. But the HNC refused to negotiate during 2016. The HNC scuttled the Geneva negotiations in April 2016 when the HNC walked out and did not return until February 2017.

Since October 2013, several commentators have noted that Assad is preferable to having Al-Qaeda or ISIL control Syria. The topic of a future government for Syria is discussed in my separate [review](#).

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## Chemical Weapons

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

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

On 4 April 2017, there was a chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhun — also spelt Khan Sheikhoun and Khan Shaykhun — in Idlib province. For a detailed history of events in April, see my essay for [April 2017](#).

### May 2017

On 4 May 2017, the [BBC](#) reported that "Syria's chemical weapons are manufactured at three sites — Masyaf, in Hama province, and at Dummar and Barzeh, both just outside Damascus." This is a major breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention treaty that Syria signed in 2013.

On 16 May 2017, the U.N. publicly released an OPCW Fact-Finding Mission report that concludes sulphur mustard had been released in Aleppo province on 16 Sep 2016. OPCW could not visit the site of the chemical weapons attack, but Russia provided samples to OPCW. OPCW was only tasked to determine whether chemical weapons had been used, *not* to determine who released the chemical weapons. S/2017/400 and [Reuters](#). However, it is likely that ISIL released the sulphur mustard.

On 19 May 2017, OPCW released a Fact-Finding Mission "status update" on the use of chemical weapons on 4 April 2017 at Khan Shaykhun, United Nations Security Council document S/2017/440. They found traces of "Sarin, or a Sarin-like substance", in blood from survivors and in autopsy samples. The Fact-Finding Mission did *not* visit the site of the attack, because of lack of security guarantees.

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## ***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 reasonable 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 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](#).

In a colossal instance of poor planning, the United Nations Security Council allowed the JIM to expire in September 2016, then renewed the JIM in November 2016, *after* the JIM had closed their offices in the Hague and Damascus, and after the JIM discharged employees. The OPCW monthly report for March 2017, U.N. Security Council document S/2017/260, says the JIM "continued to build up its capacity."

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## **Syria Futile Peace Negotiations in Syria Disorganization of the Syrian Opposition & Politics of the Peace Process**

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

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### **Diversions**

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

1. Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the **Ukraine**, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. By 30 May 2014, the crisis in the Ukraine appeared to be winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border. But on 28 June 2014, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil war. On 17 July 2014, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug 2014, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels.

On 5 Sep 2014, another ceasefire began. On 24 Jan 2015, Russian rebels violated agreements and began an offensive against Mariupol. From the end of April 2014 to 2 Feb 2015, the United Nations says 5358 people died in the war in the Ukraine. During the first two weeks of Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was negotiated.

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

9. For many years, **Yemen** has been an impoverished, failed nation, infested by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2012, longtime president Saleh was deposed. On 19 Jan 2015, Houthi (Shiite) rebels surrounded the home of the president (a Sunni) who is supported by the U.S.-government. On 22 Jan 2015, the president and cabinet resigned, plunging Yemen deeper into anarchy. On 10 Feb 2015, the U.S. [State Department](#) closed the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, because of rapidly deteriorating security. On 20 March, ISIL attacked two Shiite mosques in Yemen during Friday prayers, killing at least 137 people. [AP](#). On 26 March 2015, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
10. On 6 January 2016, **North Korea** detonated a fourth nuclear weapon, in another blatant violation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. On 7 February 2016, North Korea apparently launched a nonfunctioning satellite into orbit in a forbidden test of ballistic missile technology. On 5 September 2016, North Korea launched three missiles that landed in the ocean near Japan. And on 9 Sep 2016, North Korea detonated a fifth nuclear weapon, which was more energetic than any of their previous weapon tests. Each time, the United Nations Security Council condemns the violations by the North Korean government, but these condemnations are clearly *not* effective in stopping the belligerent behavior of the North Koreans.
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## Deaths in Syria

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2311 persons during the month of May 2017, they were distributed as following:

- **Civilian casualties:** 840 including 181 children under the age of eighteen, and 138 citizen women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
  - 112 including 36 children and 21 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria.
  - 43 including 6 children and 7 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.
  - 11 including a child and 1 citizen woman and 8 children were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
  - 1 man was killed in shelling by the Turkish Forces.
  - 11 including a child and a citizen woman were killed by the fire of the Turkish and Jordanian border guards.

- 114 including 15 child and 14 citizen women were executed by the “Islamic State” organization.
  - 85 including 20 children and 4 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells launched by the “Islamic State” organization and by the fire of its machineguns.
  - 1 man was killed by the Islamic factions.
  - 293 including 62 children and 63 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the international coalition.
  - 21 including a child and 3 citizen women were killed in the detonating of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
  - 4 including 1 child were killed by Syria Democratic Forces.
  - 82 including 19 children and 10 citizen women were killed in landmine explosions.
  - 48 including 4 children and 5 citizen women were killed in unknown circumstances.
  - 6 citizen including 2 children were killed during clashes between the Islamic Factions.
- Also the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 136 persons including 42 children under the age of eighteen, they are:
    - 106 persons including 42 children of family members of the “Islamic State” organization were killed in shelling by the “Islamic State” organization on al-Mayadeen city in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor,
    - 16 of the organization’s families were killed in bombing by warplanes (it is unknown whether they were Russian warplanes or regime’s warplanes), and
    - 14 Iraqi persons were killed in airstrikes by International Coalition on al-Bokamal.
  - **[Military casualties: 1317, distributed as follows:]**
    - Syrian fighters of the rebel and Islamic Factions and the Syria Democratic Forces and other movements and organizations: 473
    - The regime forces: 136
    - Members of popular the committees, NDF and gunmen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 157
    - Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 9
    - Fighters loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities, most of them are of the Shiite sect: 29
    - Unidentified: 18
    - 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: 495

"Despite the truce, the month of May takes the lives of about 980 civilians including 87 persons killed in the ‘de-escalation zones’," [SOHR](#), 1 June 2017. [Formatting of military casualties as indented list by Standler.]

When I add the numbers in the doubly indented lists, I obtain a total of 2292, *not* 2311.

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SOHR [reported](#) a total of 49,742 people killed during the year 2016, which is an average of 4145/month. This number should be compared with 2311/month during May 2017 — during the ceasefire that began at the end of December 2016, and during the de-escalation zones that began on 6 May 2017. The imperfect ceasefire has reduced fatalities by approximately 44% from the average during 2016.

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* 328,000.

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## Turkey is an ally from Hell

### Introduction

In my essay for [July 2015](#), I gave five reasons why "Turkey is an ally from Hell."

My essay for [August 2015](#) mentions that Turkish airstrikes inside Iraq were a sixth reason why "Turkey is an ally from Hell."

My essay for [November 2015](#) said "The arrests of journalists and reckless shooting down a Russian airplane are more reasons why Turkey is an ally from Hell." My essay for November also says Turkey conducted "*only four* airstrikes against ISIL from 24 July to 31 Oct."

My essay for [February 2016](#) mentions the Turks were shelling the Kurds in Syria at a time when the United Nations was trying to arrange a ceasefire in Syria. Also, the U.S. Government continues to urge Turkey to seal their border with Syria.

My essay for [March 2016](#) tersely mentions that the Turkish government seized control of *Today's Zaman* newspaper in Turkey, and also the Turks had failed to seal their border to prevent foreign fighters and munitions from entering Syria to reinforce ISIL and Nusra.

This history that I chronicled shows that Turkey is really an ally from Hell. Erdogan is more interested in exterminating Kurds (ethnic cleansing) than in fighting against ISIL.

My essay for [July 2016](#) mentions a failed military coup in Turkey on 15 July 2016.

My essay for [August 2016](#) chronicles the beginning of the Turkish invasion of Syria during 24-31 August, 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, which ended on 29 March 2017.

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.

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### May 2017: Turkey and Syria

On 9 May 2017, the U.S. Military announced that they would provide weapons, ammunition, and armored vehicles to the Kurds in northern Syria, for the fight to liberate Raqqa. The Turkish government strongly objected. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 30 May 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that the U.S. had begun supplying weapons to Syrian Kurds.

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### U.S. troops in Syria

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

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

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

On 28 April 2016, Syria claimed that 150 U.S. soldiers entered Syria on 27 April. The Syrian

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

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

On 10 December 2016, the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced the deployment of an additional 200 U.S. Military personnel to Syria, to assist in the liberation of Raqqa from ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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.

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## **Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War**

### **Introduction**

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

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

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

My essay for [Dec 2014](#) cites a *Washington Post* article on 28 Dec that Assad's army has been

depleted by recent "soaring casualties" and desertions. Replacements are not arriving because of "evasions of compulsory military service". Further, in a rare speech on 26 July 2015, Assad admitted a shortage of soldiers in the Syrian army. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

From December 2014 through September 2015, I no longer believed that Assad can win the civil war against a large number of opponents, when only two nations (i.e., Russia and Iran) are supporting Assad with military equipment and money. Not only are there *only two* nations supporting Assad, but also both of those two have their own significant problems. Iran was suffering crippling economic sanctions because of its development of nuclear weapons, and Iran is diverting resources to fighting ISIL in neighboring Iraq. Russia is suffering economic sanctions because of its support for rebels in the Ukraine, beginning in Feb 2014.

My essay for [November 2015](#) explains that the massive Russian airstrikes in Syria that began on 30 Sep 2015 was a game changer, which swung the balance of power in favor of Assad.

On 16 December 2015, Zeina Karam, the Associated Press bureau chief in Beirut, wrote:  
Weeks of Russian airstrikes in Syria appear to have restored enough momentum to the government side to convince President Bashar Assad's foes and the world community that even if he doesn't win the war he cannot quickly be removed by force. That realization, combined with the growing sense that the world's No. 1 priority is the destruction of the Islamic State group, has led many to acknowledge that however unpalatable his conduct of the war, Assad will have to be tolerated for at least some time further.

Zeina Karam, "Russian airstrikes restore Syrian military balance of power," [Associated Press](#), 17:10 EST, 16 Dec 2015.

My essay for [January 2016](#) explained that Assad's recent successes on the battlefield made Assad unlikely to compromise during peace negotiations in Geneva.

On 27 March 2016, Assad liberated Palmyra from ISIL, as described in my essay for [March 2016](#). On 29-30 March, Assad seems confident after his victory in Palmyra. [Associated Press](#). 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.

On 3 April 2017, Assad gave an interview to a Croatian newspaper, [Vecernji List](#), in which Assad declared near the end of the interview: "we do not have any other option except victory." See also the transcript at [SANA](#). In Assad's reply to Question 2, Assad said "we cannot, practically, reach any actual result with this part of the opposition" because the opposition groups are Jihadi terrorists "in the perverted sense of Jihad of course." [Reuters](#) reported on the interview after it was published on 6 April. [The Independent](#) newspaper in London repeats what Reuters said: "... Assad appears militarily unassailable in the areas of western Syria...." My comment is Assad's military superiority will make Assad less likely to compromise in negotiations in Geneva.

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## Peace Negotiations for Syria

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

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

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

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254, at §1, says the Council "... stresses that the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria".

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

On 12 May 2016, Dr. Philip Gordon — a former U.S. National Security Council adviser to Obama, and now a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations — publicly called for the U.S. Government to stop demanding that Assad resign as president of Syria. [McClatchy](#); [The Hill](#).

Here I notice a little detail. The Vienna Communiqué of 30 Oct 2015 (at ¶2, item 7) calls for elections in Syria "with all Syrians, including the diaspora, eligible to participate." This inclusion of the diaspora was copied into the ISSG Statement of 14 Nov 2015 at ¶10. This inclusion of the diaspora was copied into United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §4. The little detail was included by John Kerry, in an attempt to influence the result of the election — assuming that the majority of the diaspora would vote against Assad. (See [NY Times](#): "... Mr. Kerry, who is betting that if Syrians around the world can participate in the vote, Mr. Assad will not be able to win.") I agree with Kerry — but for different reasons — that Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey should be able to vote in Syrian elections, because those refugees are only temporarily outside of Syria. However, some of the Syrian refugees in Europe will apply for citizenship in an European nation, which effectively renounces their Syrian citizenship. Other Syrian refugees in Europe may lack a Syrian

document that conclusively proves they are Syrian citizens.

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

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](#).

On 30 March 2017 it appeared that Assad might have a future as a long-term leader of Syria, but on 4 April 2017 Assad allegedly released nerve gas on civilians. As explained in my essay for [April 2017](#), that alleged war crime changed Trump's opinion of Assad and caused Trump to order an airstrike on Assad's airbase from which the alleged chemical weapons attack was launched. Although it is *not* entirely clear (Trump's government has *no* plan for Syria), on 6 April Tillerson said there is "no role for [Assad] to govern the Syrian people." But, on 9 April 2017, Tillerson again said it was for the Syrian people to decide the fate of Assad, but that decision would occur *after* ISIL was defeated. And on 11 April, Tillerson took two different positions on Assad in one press briefing.

On 15 May 2017, the White House press spokesman spoke about the U.S. position on Assad. The State Department also had a few briefings today on the next step in addressing the Assad regime and the horrors it has committed on the Syrian people. The Trump administration believes that Syria's political future should be decided by Syrians in a free, credible and transparent process. However, we also believe that in a free process it's unimaginable that Syrians would choose to continue under the Assad leadership.

Syria will never be stable and secure as long as Assad is in power. The Assad regime has sunk to a new level of depravity, and it has done so with seemingly unconditional support from Russia and Iran. For these reasons, we continue to support the political

transition process contained in U.N. security resolution 2254, and support the political process taking place under U.N. oversight in Geneva.

Sean Spicer, "Press Daily Briefing by Press Secretary Sean Spicer — #48," [White House](#), 15 May 2017.

My comment is that Syrians will have a choice between Assad, someone from the opposition who has *no* experience in government and who has difficulty making decisions, or a leader from Nusra or ISIL. Assad is clearly the least worst leader for Syria. UN Security Council Resolution 2254 is seriously flawed and the "political process" in Geneva has accomplished nothing in 17 months.

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## 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.

My essay for [March 2017](#) described the last 3 days of negotiations in Geneva during 1-3 March, during which time an agenda was finally agreed. The insurgents failed to attend a 14-15 March 2017 meeting in Astana, making that meeting a total failure. I also described 9 days of negotiations in Geneva during 23-31 March, but, as expected, nothing was accomplished.

My essay for [April 2017](#) mentions that *no* negotiations occurred in Geneva during April, as de Mistura futilely waits for the ceasefire to improve.

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## Negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan

Previous negotiations in Astana on the Syrian ceasefire during 23-24 January, 15-16 February, 14-15 March 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. In March, the insurgents failed to attend any of the two-day meeting. There was *no* meeting during April. The fourth round of so-called "negotiations" in Astana occurred on 3-4 May 2017.

On 25 March 2017, de Mistura wrote to the three guarantors asking them to "undertake urgent efforts" to improve the ceasefire. They ignored de Mistura — there was there was *no* change in Astana meeting dates.

On 3 May, [RIA-Novosti](#) published a history of the Astana negotiations, obviously with a Russian bias.

On 3 May 2017, the first day of the fourth round of so-called negotiations in Astana, the insurgents arrived, but then "suspended" their participation because of continued bombing by Assad's warplanes. On 3 May, it was *not* known whether the insurgents will attend the second day of the Astana negotiations. [Reuters](#). Mohammad Alloush, who caused the Geneva negotiations to fail in 2016, is leading the insurgent delegation in Astana. De Mistura issued a [statement](#) urging the insurgents to return to negotiations.

On 3 May 2017, Russia proposed that the three ceasefire guarantor states (i.e., Russia, Turkey, and Iran) create four safe zones inside Syria: "one in the Idlib province, a second in the north of the city of Homs, a third in eastern Ghouta, and a fourth in southern Syria." Details are sketchy, but apparently various nations would send armed peacekeepers to the safe zones to enforce the ceasefire. The three guarantors would impose the safe zones on Syria and the insurgents, so the insurgents would be "obligated" to obey the safe zones, even if the insurgents refuse to agree to the safe zones. [RIA-Novosti](#). See also [NY Times](#).

Assad's government supported the creation of the four zones. [Reuters](#). However, the insurgents are seeking a nationwide ceasefire. [Associated Press](#).

On 4 May 2017, Russia, Turkey, and Iran approved the creation of the four safe zones. The insurgent delegation walked out of the press conference in Astana that announced the safe zones. Al-Jazeera's correspondent reported: "We saw several members of the opposition delegation stand up furiously condemning what was going on. They shouted that Iran should not be a signatory to this. In fact, they went as far to saying that Iran is a criminal entity that shouldn't be here and they stormed out." The next meeting in Astana will be in mid-July 2017. [Reuters](#); [Al-Jazeera](#); [NY Times](#); [The Guardian](#); [BBC](#).

I posted the full-text of the agreement at [rbs0.com](#)

On 4 May 2017, de Mistura told journalists that "Today in Astana I think we have been able

to witness an important promising positive step in the right direction in the process of de-escalation of the conflict." The conference in Astana "has produced something that we believe as a UN is a very significant, and in my opinion — our opinion — is a promising step." De Mistura says the safe zones will be established within two weeks (i.e., by 18 May). [U.N.](#)

But the agreement at ¶6 says in two weeks a working group will be formed. The agreement at ¶7 specifies a 4 June 2017 deadline for the working group to precisely establish borders of each safe zone and "to resolve other operational and technical issues". The agreement is consistent with a news report in [RIA-Novosti](#) that said: "The working group of the Syrian ceasefire guarantor states within the framework of the project will complete the preparation of the necessary maps [of borders of safe zones] by June 4."

One wonders why a delegation of insurgents is invited to the so-called "negotiations" in Astana, when foreign meddlers (i.e., Russia, Turkey, Iran) *imposed* ceasefires and safe zones on the insurgents. Also, Russia has been bombing insurgents and civilians in Syria since September 2015, in support of Assad's army, so Russia is *not* a neutral party that is seeking peace. *If* Russia sincerely wanted peace in Syria, then Russia — along with Turkey and Iran, and maybe also Assad's delegation — would remain in Astana for a few more days and negotiate the details, instead of postponing the details for weeks. If the details are controversial, as I expect, it might take months to reach an agreement, especially with the infrequent meetings scheduled by Russia.

The insurgents claim that the safe zones will "divide" Syria. [Reuters](#). But Syria has been divided into enclaves controlled by various insurgent groups, or by Assad's government, since 2011. The objection about division of Syria is propaganda. Furthermore, the safe zones exist for only six months, with the possibility of renewal — the zones are *not* a permanent solution to the Syrian civil war.

On 4 May 2017 — Heather Nauert, the new U.S. State Department spokesperson since 24 April — [said](#): "In light of the failures of past agreements, we have reason to be cautious. We expect the [Assad] regime to stop all attacks on civilians and opposition forces, something they have never done. We expect Russia to ensure [Assad] regime compliance."

On 5 May 2017, the chief Russian negotiator in Astana, Alexander Lavrentyev, said the safe zones would be no fly zones for aircraft from the U.S.-led coalition against ISIL. Russia says the agreement goes into effect at midnight Syrian time on 5 May. [RIA-Novosti](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#). Note that this is Lavrentyev's opinion — the written agreement is silent about airplane flights and airstrikes, except to say in ¶2(A) that use of "aerial assets shall be ceased" between "the government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the armed opposition groups" that have joined this agreement. But the U.S.-led Coalition to defeat ISIL is *not* a party to the Astana agreement, so the Astana agreement does *not* prohibit airstrikes in Syria by the U.S. Coalition. Furthermore, nearly all of the U.S. Coalition airstrikes are against ISIL targets, and ISIL is excluded from the Astana agreement.

There are several big problems with trying to enforce this agreement during May 2017:

1. precise borders of each safe zone have *not* yet been specified, but are scheduled to be

specified on 4 June 2017.

2. there are currently *no* armed monitors on the ground in Syria to enforce this agreement.
3. Russia, Turkey, and Iran intend to send armed monitors. But none of these three nations are neutral. Russia and Iran militarily support Assad. Russia has previously been blind to violations of ceasefire by Assad — Russia's [reports](#) of ceasefire violations beginning on 28 Feb 2016 mention *neither* violations by Assad *nor* violations by Russia. Turkey has repeatedly violated the sovereignty of Syria by invading Syria to control the Kurds in northern Syria.
4. As with all previous ceasefire agreements in Syria, the safe zone agreement does *not* apply to Al-Qaeda or ISIL. In practice, Assad's warplanes and Russian warplanes can bomb moderate insurgents, but claim they are bombing Al-Qaeda or ISIL. That is why the armed peacekeepers must come from nations that are aligned with *neither* Assad's government *nor* with Russia.

Violations of the safe zones are mentioned [below](#).

On 8 May 2017, the Syrian foreign minister, Walid al-Moualem, declared:

1. Assad's government accepted the Russian agreement on de-escalation zones, provided that the rebels also accepted that agreement.
2. There was *no* role for international (e.g., United Nations) observers in Syria, thereby closing a possibility in ¶4 of the Astana agreement.
3. Insurgents should assist in the expulsion of Al-Qaeda (i.e., Nusra) from opposition-controlled areas
4. Reuters says: "Moualem said separate peace talks under U.N. auspices in Geneva were not progressing. Local reconciliation deals that the government is pursuing with rebels were an alternative to that, he said."

[Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). The Syrian government's news agency has been offline for the past few days, so I can not quote the official version.

Assad's conditional acceptance of the Astana agreement is a potential problem, because any rejection by a rebel group could also kill the Syrian's government's acceptance of the agreement. Assad's rejection of possible U.N. observers means that the agreement will *not* be fairly enforced, so Assad's warplanes can continue to bomb inside the safe zones.

Meanwhile, on Sunday, 7 May, Russia submitted to the United Nations Security Council a draft resolution endorsing the Astana agreement. Russia wants a quick approval on 8 or 9 May of the incomplete agreement signed on 4 May in Astana. [RIA-Novosti\(7May\)](#); [RIA-Novosti\(8May\)](#); [Associated Press\(8May\)](#).

On 9 May, the [Canadian Broadcasting Corp.](#) reported that several members of the U.N.

Security Council (e.g., Sweden and Japan) wanted more information before endorsing the Astana agreement. But by 14 May there was *no* further news on the possible U.N. approval of the Astana agreement. Apparently, Russia abandoned U.N. endorsement of the 4 May Astana agreement.

On 11 May 2017, Nusra Front (now known as Tahrir al-Sham) warned other insurgent groups *not* to implement the safe zones in the Astana agreement. Nusra declared that those who abided by the Astana agreement would be "traitors of the Syrian revolution" and would be attacked by Nusra. [RIA-Novosti](#).

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## Negotiations in Geneva

On 5 April 2017, [TASS](#) reported that de Mistura would schedule the next round of negotiations in Geneva for sometime in May 2017. One wonders why there is at least a four-week pause in April with *no* negotiations, after a ten-month pause caused by the HNC's refusal to negotiate and then *no* accomplishments during 9 days of negotiations in March 2017.

On the evening of 8 May 2017, de Mistura announced the next round of negotiations in Geneva would begin on Tuesday, 16 May. [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#).

On 11 May 2017, de Mistura said the next round of negotiations in Geneva would end sometime around 19 May. While de Mistura acknowledged the meeting would be "rather short comparing to other meetings", he did *not* clearly explain why the meeting would be only four days. [U.N.](#) I think de Mistura's promise of "a more business-like type of approach" in the forthcoming Geneva negotiations is like "improved" on a box of soap.

The current set of Geneva negotiations began on 29 Jan 2016, which is 472 days ago on 15 May 2017. [Reuters](#) correctly says "no progress has yet been made on any topic" in the Geneva negotiations. Meanwhile, Assad's government has negotiated agreements in numerous towns to ship insurgents to Idlib province and stop airstrikes and artillery shelling on the towns. It should embarrass the United Nations that Assad is making more progress toward peace than de Mistura.

On 15 May 2017, de Mistura held another press conference at which he reiterated: "The intention, however this time, is to go a little bit more deeply and actually be more business-like, both in our meetings and in the way we hope we can get some progress." De Mistura explained that the alternative to negotiations was "no discussion, no hope, no political horizon, just waiting for [the war] to take place". [U.N. Geneva](#).

In my essays for February and March 2017, I counted days of negotiations with day 1 on 23 Feb 2017. But de Mistura and others are calling the negotiations that begin on 16 May 2017, the *sixth round* of negotiations, after the first round began on 29 Jan 2016. Accordingly, I am changing the day numbers of negotiations in my essays. The last day of negotiations in 2016 (end of third round), on 27 April 2016, was day 26. There have been 18 days of negotiations in 2017, with day 18 on 31 March 2017 (end of fifth round).

### 16 May 2017: Day Nr. 45

On the first day of the sixth round of Geneva negotiations, Agence France Press reported: "hopes for a major breakthrough remain dim." [Arab News](#)(AFP); [Al-Jazeera](#). De Mistura met with Assad's delegation, then with the HNC, for a total of four meetings in one day. [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that de Mistura will establish "a technical, consultative mechanism on constitutional and legal issues" that will draft a new constitution for Syria. On 16 May, neither Reuters nor the Associated Press reported on the Geneva negotiations.

Back on 18 December 2015, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 at §4 expressed its support for "drafting a new constitution", but also emphasized that the process should be "Syrian-led". And §2 calls for negotiations in Geneva to begin in "early January 2016". Now, 17 months later, the Syrians still have not begun to draft their new constitution. So I think it is appropriate for de Mistura to establish a committee to begin to draft a new constitution.

### 17 May 2017: Day Nr. 46

On 17 May at 17:00 GMT, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the opposition will request that the sixth round of negotiations be extended for more than a total of four days. [Al-Arabiya](#) and [RIA-Novosti](#) reported that de Mistura withdrew his proposal for a "consultative mechanism" on a new constitution for Syria, after the opposition delegation objected to his proposal.

On 17 May, for the second consecutive day, Reuters ignored the negotiations in Geneva. I mention this, not to criticize Reuters, but to show that the negotiations are unimportant.

### 18 May 2017: Day Nr. 47

On 18 May, [Al-Jazeera](#) confirmed that de Mistura withdrew his proposal yesterday. [Al-Arabiya](#) reported that the Free Syrian Army withdrew from negotiations in Geneva, over an alleged "lack of clarity regarding the strategic vision of the negotiations", whatever that means.

On 18 May, the third day of the sixth round of talks in Geneva, [Reuters](#) had a headline: "Fresh Syria peace talks off to another stumbling start". The Reuters article said there was "no hint of tangible progress towards a deal to end the six-year-old civil war." The Associated Press did *not* report on the Geneva negotiations on 18 May.

On 18 May, [Anadolu Agency](#) in Turkey reported that the United Nations Office in Geneva revoked the press credentials of a journalist employed by Assad's regime, after that journalist insulted the opposition delegation. My comment is that this is equivalent to showing a cartoon in a movie theater.

### 19 May 2017: Day Nr. 48

On 19 May, the last day of the sixth round, the HNC submitted a memorandum to de Mistura, demanding that Assad release political detainees, and demanding that Assad expel Iranian fighters from Syria. [RIA-Novosti](#). My comment is that this is a propaganda stunt, as neither issue is on the agenda for the Geneva negotiations.

[Reuters](#) reported that de Mistura held a press briefing at which he announced "incremental progress" and a seventh round would be held in June 2017. Reuters says the HNC "reiterated the opposition's demand to remove President Bashar al-Assad."

On Saturday morning, 20 May, the United Nations Office in Geneva posted a transcript of de Mistura's press briefing after the conclusion of the sixth round of futile negotiations.

Let me read to you some comments and then of course I will take some questions, so don't be intimidated by the formality of my comments.

Today we concluded a sixth round of the intra-Syrian talks. You must have seen and you have seen, it was a short round and this was intentional. We wanted a focused, concentrated round to actually deepen the process further and I think we have done that. As we seek to facilitate a political process as per Resolution 2254, during the round number five, the previous one, we discussed in parallel all four baskets of the agenda. Well this agenda remains and is the agenda of the talks.

However, for quite a while actually, we have noticed from all concerned, in one form or the other, about the fact that they felt there was a genuine need to ensure a stronger legal and constitutional foundation for any negotiated political transition process, and at all stages of such a process, so we got the message. Therefore, I took this time the decision to establish a process of expert meetings and to invite the parties to participate. Then, in order to stimulate them, I did indicate to the parties that I was going to share with them, which I did, an internal UN paper. The purpose was never to negotiate the paper, which was supposed not to become an object of negotiation for the Treaty of Versailles. It was basically an internal paper to give them an indication in what direction our vision could have been.

In fact rather than spend a lot of time, although we did spend some time negotiating or discussing the internal paper, which we had proposed, we actually moved beyond that and quite effectively beyond the paper, simply focused on what we wanted to have, what I decided, as I told you to have. And we simply started a process of separate experts meetings on legal and constitutional issues chaired by the OSE, the UN experts.

I am pleased that this process has indeed began. It began yesterday, we had only four days so we had to start after some preparation, and it began yesterday and continued indeed today and I look forward to push this additional element forward and enriching through that the UN facilitated intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. These expert meetings obviously, it is clear, do not aim and do not replace the main negotiating track. The intra-Syrian talks are focused on all four baskets and they are meant to assist, this process is meant to assist, the formal sessions to enable discussions at the political level to proceed more smoothly. Expert meetings can help identify complex issues, identify options and so on. We are not planning or aiming through this to draft a new

constitution. We are not planning or aiming through this to draft a new constitution for Syria. This has to be done by the Syrians.

We are rather trying and we intend to pursue trying to lay the ground for the Syrians, to do exactly that in the context of an overall political solution which in terms is in the context, as you know, of Resolution 2254. So, because this was a short round and because it took us some days to ensure that everyone had reach a sufficient level of comfort to add this new important element to our work, we did not have the physical time for in-depth discussions in the formal discussions, in the formal sessions, to cover all four baskets and address the four baskets. But we did discuss several substantive issues of key concern to the parties and we intend to move ahead on all four baskets during the coming rounds while the new process of having expert meetings will also continue as I described.

Let me also note that the real efforts, and I have to admit there were real efforts, were made in this round to have experts from the Cairo and the Moscow platforms to attend the UN hosted expert meetings, which I just referred to you, with the main opposition delegation announced on the 11th of February. This was not yet possible, they are still been discussing and negotiating about it but we will continue to push for this effort since this would send, in our opinion, a positive signal that the opposition groups, at least at the level of the technical discussions, are willing and capable to work together.

We therefore urge the opposition sides to continue their efforts in this regard and our hope is, that in fact through this, there could be an additional element of unification of the opposition when we talk about very technical but important issues. I would also like to thank once again, and let me say it because I believe strongly in it, the Women's Advisory Board for providing timely and incisive contributions, even to this round, in fact very much to this round, which helped shape our own thinking and how to approach the talks.

We facilitated exchanges of views between them and the members of the ISSG in the margins of the talks and I would also like to indicate that next week, not here in Geneva but nearby, the Office of the Special Envoy will be promoting and pushing and working together with the civil society, within the context of the civil society support room, I'm sure you're familiar with that.

I would also like to thank the regional and international stakeholders who have been here, and have been actively involved and I'm going to see them very soon, for the close involvement in this round of talks, which certainly facilitated our work and that of the Syrian parties. Last night I went to Mont Pèlerin to brief the Secretary General, Antonio Guterres in detail on the talks, and he, you should know, continues to follow them very closely. For him Syria is a priority, and to appeal to all Syrians to support this very difficult but important process of intra-Syrian talks.

As you may also know, I had also today a constructive and timely trilateral meeting with senior representatives of the United States and Russia early this afternoon. We discussed the talks and beyond. I plan to brief the Security Council early next week as a customary and as a customary and as my duty I will be consulting with the Secretary

General on dates for the next round of talks. Together with my team we also feel that it might be very useful to have an internal review of where we stand because things are moving but we want them to move even more deeply and more intensely and incrementally. We also feel the need to do an internal review so we can stand and actually better approach the next round as effectively as we can.

Based on all this, I would be letting the invitees know what preparatory steps can be taken before the next round of talks which will happen as soon as we have, in a position of doing so, and frankly and the expert process and I think sometime in June, but I will not commit a date at this stage due to many elements that are taking place. We will let you know. Let me add one last point which is something we are noticing and I hope the participants are noticing, although sometimes they feel differently, this round of talks there is less rhetoric, more business-like atmosphere and we make incremental progress. Our goal remains clear, a negotiated framework agreement and a negotiated political transition process as per [resolution] 2254. One step at a time, thank you very much.

....

QUESTION: Mr. de Mistura mentioned that the experts committee which is going to start its work with the opposition and the government in the presence of UN experts who are going to head the [session]. He mentioned that we do not aim at drafting a new constitution for Syria, but Syrians are the one to draft the constitution, and we would pave the way for Syrians to find a political solution, the question is, what will be the role of the experts, whether it is the formulation of specific constitutional provisions or general lines of the Syrian constitution, and are there specific ideas in which foreign experts from the UN are involved?

SdM: You are quite correct in quoting what I just said; it is exactly what is the intention of our decision to establish this group of experts. I think we should leave it also to them to establish the best way we can proceed. We are meeting separately, we are not yet in a combined environment yet, even this is proximity, remember, but every meeting it is chaired by us, by our experts, and it is on the basis of our own meeting with each of the different group of experts, to then establish how to proceed further in the preparation. We are not going to draft the new constitution, it is very clear, but this can help a lot, believe me.

QUESTION: We started this process a couple years ago with sort of a timeline of months, in which we are going to have elections and constitutional development, and that seems to be junked, and we also had questions about sieges and trying to get detainees deals and ceasefires, and these things are rumbling and rumbling with no apparent progress and this latest round, it sort gives the impression of now getting mind in a kind of subcommittee and small print, rather than making a great leap forward towards actually some sort of real progress and real conclusions. So can you give us any reassurance about things moving ahead and a timeline for example, how we really junked this timeline, could you give a time when we can actually see a conclusion?

SdM: History is not written by, I learned it long time ago, sadly, especially in a conflict environment, written by timelines that we setup artificially, they could be a target, a dream, a wish, a day for us to try to aim at, even conferences we decide on a certain day for a conference and then events, fighting or explosions will then postpone it or cancel it, so I don't think we should be focusing on that. It is true we have, and we will have, and constantly use some type of timelines in order to be able to push ourselves and those who are participated to the meetings to actually see that there is an obligation to which they are committing themselves. But facts on the ground will, and can and unfortunately will probably still change whatever plans we have. Meanwhile we have to continue working, preparing for what, for the moment when the actual environment will be ready for the real discussion about how we get a political solution. Example, you know that we had in the memorandum in Astana, there is one or two dates which have been mentioned, they have been doing it based on experience, that you have to have some timing on which you will then aim, but it does not mean that on that very date there would be an outcome, we are in the most intractable, so far, conflict of recent history.

But we're not going be passive and even small incremental moves, you will see when the solution will be arriving, you will be, I hope with us saying, well it is good that you had that expert new mechanism, because by the time we would be already to actually discussing constitution, all that would have been already put aside or prepared, that is, plus, any momentum provides some type of hope that we are not just waiting for the golden day, but we actually working for it.

Staffan de Mistura. "Transcript of Press Conference by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura Conclusion of the 6th round of Intra-Syrian talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 19 May 2017. Copy at [U.N.](#)

In all of de Mistura's verbose statements and run-on sentences, he overlooks that there have been **no concrete results** during 17 months of negotiations in Geneva. De Mistura knows that concrete results are needed: my essay for April 2017 quotes him in April 2016 and June 2016 as saying concrete results are needed. The lack of results is *not* de Mistura's fault, the blame should be on the HNC for refusing to negotiate during 2016 and refusing to compromise in 2017.

Given this lack of progress, it is surprising that there were *no* negotiations in April 2017, and only four days of negotiations in May 2017. One might suggest that the negotiations be held continuously until concrete results are obtained, but that would be really stressful for de Mistura. Also the negotiations will be futile as long as the parties are intransigent, and as long as the HNC continues to demand what they can not win on the battlefield.

De Mistura mentions the ISSG once in his speech. The ISSG died sometime around August 2016. The final meetings of the ISSG were in September 2016, but those meetings produced *no* written statement. A fragment of the ISSG continues in Humanitarian Task Force that meets in Geneva every Thursday, but produces *no* results.

In his answer to the second question quoted above, de Mistura refused to give a schedule for a new Syrian constitution, election, release of political prisoners, ending sieges in Syria, .... De Mistura admitted that the Syrian civil war was "the most intractable conflict of recent

history."

On Monday, 22 May 2017, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council via videolink from Geneva. Here are his substantive remarks:

3. Astana produced [on 4 May 2017], in my modest opinion, a promising step: a memorandum between the three guarantors on the creation of de-escalation zones. The reports which I received so far indicate a significant drop in violence, including in aerial bombardment, in most of the areas identified by the memorandum. UN contacts on the ground have described tangible change: clear skies and areas quickly come back to life, that is typical of Syrian reality, whenever there is a moment of peace, or at least of the stopping of the fighting, they take their own future and their present in hand. Including markets started functioning in those locations. We welcome this and the efforts of the Astana guarantors should be praised because we want them to succeed. And I thank the Kazakh Government for ably hosting the Astana meetings.

4. That's the good news. There is also not-so-good news. Despite the nationwide ceasefire announced last December, and the de-escalation zones now created to deepen the effort, we have received reports of on-going hostilities and even bombardment, between the government and armed opposition groups, in areas such as Hama, Homs, and Damascus. Some of these areas appear to be outside of the current de-escalation zones, however as you know, though their precise ambit will only become clear when the guarantors complete what is an extremely important process, the so-called mapping. These clashes resulted in another evacuation of armed opposition fighters and civilians from areas of Eastern Damascus city (Barzeh and Qaboun). Separately, following the memorandum, we saw some government attacks on armed opposition groups who were otherwise engaged in fighting Daesh, in the desert near Homs and al-Sweida.

5. While we have registered that the government of Syria has made some significant advances against Daesh, we also note, with great concern, the continued activities of Security Council-listed terrorist groups. We condemn, in particular, the ISIL attack on civilians in rural Salamiya last week on a very important community which has been there for hundreds of years, and the ISIL assault on Deir-ez-Zor city on-going today. These incidents show that, despite losing further territory this month, ISIL still has the capacity to cause great harm.

6. We are also aware of the reports that the anti-ISIL coalition carried out airstrikes on armed convoy allegedly composed of forces of the Syrian Government and its allies in the desert East of Homs.

7. I am also encouraged by recent Government of Syria and AOG agreements which are resulting in the release of detainees and abducted.

8. These facts remind us that there are still important details to clarify to ensure full implementation of the Astana memorandum by all parties. We therefore urge together the ceasefire guarantors to address those details quickly, diligently and fairly, within the timeframe stipulated by themselves in the memorandum. All relevant international actors, specifically regional ones, as well as the ISSG Co-Chairs, have a particular

interest in this regard. The UN remains ready to provide its technical expertise. Our goal is not just de-escalation but actually at least on the military side the realization of the nationwide ceasefire, and thus we have a common interest in ensuring that no party of the conflict takes advantage of any ambiguities still taking place and existing in the memorandum in order to make sure the memorandum can be implemented fully.

9. We urge the parties, the Astana guarantors, and those who have influence on the parties, to take steps to ensure rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to the more than 4.5 million people in need in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. When there is a reduction of violence, that should be the first consequence, the first positive effect. We haven't seen enough of that. The UN stands ready to respond to any opportunity for increased humanitarian access, based on needs of the people and in line with international humanitarian law.

10. Finally, on Astana, we were encouraged to note that the guarantors seriously engaged in discussions on two additional important — for us and for the Syrians — subjects: detainees, abductees and missing persons; and humanitarian demining. Indeed, on detainees, they finalized at the technical level an agreement on a process for addressing the issue, in which the UN would be closely involved and we are ready and willing to do so. I have urged the Astana guarantors to formally confirm as soon as possible that technical agreement without delay. Meanwhile, the UN Mine Action Service, based in New York, which was part of the UN team in Astana, is indeed ready to do its part to advance an effective approach to humanitarian demining in Syria.

11. In the immediate aftermath of Astana, I invited the parties of the Intra-Syrian talks to a 6th round in Geneva, and all came, meeting in proximity format. The round was kept short so as to proceed in a focussed manner. Four days, but intense, including one case of night discussions.

12. In the previous round, the parties had already begun to engage in substance, across all four baskets of the agenda that this Council, yourself, had approved after the fourth round. They also had in the previous case, showed that the process is now facing fewer obstacles related to possible walk-outs, procedural objections, long statements attacking each other or even the questioning of the other side's legitimacy. We strongly insisted on that and we got that. There are, of course, major gaps, still, and I don't deny it, between the parties. But we had also seen a deepening of the process across the baskets and a greater understanding of what is required if the parties are to succeed in negotiating a framework for a transitional political agreement that safeguards the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence of Syria, based on the Geneva Communiqué and SCR 2254, adopted by all of you.

13. I assessed that the parties needed to be ready to roll up their sleeves, we had only four days and had to make use of it, and go even deeper. Specifically, I saw an opportunity and a need to increase focused thought and work at the constitutional and legal dimensions as the talks proceed, as the talks proceed. Everything is touched by that, every question which comes out as either a constitutional or a legal aspect. Why not going deeper? Why not preparing before that? I think we can all agree that no stakeholder — Syrian, regional or international — will accept any constitutional, or

legal, or institutional vacuum in Syria before, during, or after any negotiated transitional political process. So at least, we all I believe agreed etc. Most importantly, that process needed to be owned by the Syrians. They are the ones who should be drafting their constitution. We can help in preparing the ground for it.

14. Therefore, to this end, I informed the parties that I intended to establish a technical consultative process to move more deeply and examine more deeply relevant constitutional and legal issues raised within the formal sessions. In other words, sessions more informal where we can go a little bit deeper, especially when the subject can have common ground in order to prepare better for the time there will be a peace conference, and most of these issues could have been more or less — if not sorted out, at least prepared. I shared, therefore, initial ideas with participants in the talks, sketching out a possible vision for this type of approach. This stimulated intense and indeed valuable discussions and many constructive, oral and written, observations from the parties. We met the sides, days and evening, to answer their queries, and urged them to indicate the basis of their own participation in the expert consultative process. This enabled us to move beyond the paper and the initial set of ideas we had prepared and focus on the real deliverable: establishing a consultative process, at the technical level, as an additional, effective new tool and piece of architecture in the intra-Syrian talks process.

15. Participants wasted no time and agreed to two separate technical meetings with experts from my own team on the 18 May — one with experts from the Government who until then have been hesitating about entering into some type of expert groups, and one with experts from the delegation of the Syrian opposition as announced on 11 February. Two further technical expert meetings were also held under the consultative process on 19 May with the Cairo and Moscow platforms, separately. The meetings were business-like, constructive and informative. We can now say that the process is up and running and it has already shown its potential.

16. We also had constructive discussions on finding a formula by which experts from the Cairo and Moscow platforms might join at least the expert meetings of the Syrian opposition delegation, the one announced on 11 February. Intensive conversations took place on this within the main opposition and between it and the other platforms, and we should encourage them to make this a reality during the next round. This would send an important new signal of opposition unity. As you know, the opposition mentioned by the Security Council indicate that I should be inviting the HNC, the Cairo and the Moscow Platform and we all have been hoping this, thinking that, one day, at least on some technical areas, this could be the beginning of having a common umbrella of ideas. It might be a step towards a common understanding initially on some of the issues, and international and regional actors like yourselves, in my opinion should do everything they can to support this so we do have a unified opposition as soon as possible. And while it is not an immediate prospect, which we do realise that we cannot see it happening immediately, we hope this would take us closer to the possibility for direct negotiations between government and opposition.

17. I would like to thank, once again, the Women's Advisory Board (WAB) who provided valuable feedback on the UN's proposal on a technical consultation process,

in fact they came up with many valid ideas that we were able to use, as well as timely and constructive suggestions on the process at large, with a view to making it as inclusive as possible for all Syrians, men and women alike. Separately, I am today starting, in two hours time, engagement in a series of in-depth consultations with representatives of Syrian civil society — they are important, particularly when we get to a point where we are now, and those consultations which have already provided extremely insightful and practical advice.

18. Finally, I would like to acknowledge with appreciation the support of members of this Council, those who were present and active here in Geneva, the International Syria Support Group, and other countries that dispatched their senior officials or Syria envoys in Geneva during the talks. Their close involvement and efforts, in consulting with me and engaging the sides in order to make them actually closer to a possible formula, remain an invaluable tool of diplomatic leverage for my own mediation. And I also took welcome note of the fact that, no matter what side of the conflict each of the groups have been closer too, these players all welcomed a proactive United Nations making concrete proposals to the parties, and supporting these proposals.

19. Before closing, please let me add a few important points of clarification on the expert meetings, to be clear about what they are, and what they are not. And importantly, what the link with the four baskets is and could be:

- 20. First: these expert meetings are not intended to replace the formal negotiations. This process is intended to support the four baskets and the principle of parallelism, which remain the focus and agenda of the talks. We have agreed on that. The work of these experts remain fully framed within the terms of reference which we all know for the intra-Syrian talks. We were not able to go in depth on the four baskets during this round, but we did talk about important issues for both parties, and we hope to now address these further into the substance during subsequent rounds.
- 21. Second: our focus on constitutional and legal issues does not in any way take away the Syrian people's right to draft and determine their constitutional future. We are not seeking to draft a new Syrian constitution in Geneva, or in Astana or anywhere else, I want to believe. We are laying foundations for the time when the Syrians can do that. But in Geneva, yes, the UN is ready to help in preparing the ground for that because there is a lot of homework to be done.
- 22. Third, any framework agreement that is legally and constitutionally solid will require important technical underpinnings and details. We hope that experts can work through those details together or separately, continuously. In this regard, I have strongly encouraged the experts to have meetings in-between rounds of the Geneva talks, and not just during the talks. Although, if anyone wants to be coming during the talks, he or she is welcome. The experts will not take any decisions but rather propose options, solid options, well-thought options, well discussed option, to the official participants in the formal talks.

23. Naturally, there is still a great deal of work to be done. We are aware that important gaps remain between the parties on major issues. But having established an agenda, and gone into substance of all baskets, we now have taken a new further step in preparing the ground for a real negotiation, which I hope will be possible before too long. For the first time, we received the consent of all parties to engage with us on an expert concrete level. I am also pleased that all parties were receptive to the UN convening a 7th round, which we intend to target sometime in June.

Staffan de Mistura, "Briefing to the Security Council by the UN Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 22 May 2017.

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Toward the end of this essay in March 2017, I added a new concluding [section](#) on why the negotiations in Geneva were futile. I hope sometime the Syrians prove me wrong.

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## Continuing Civil War in Syria

### Introduction

Full-text of agreements on a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria is posted at [rbs0.com](#). The first two agreements collapsed during April 2016 and 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. December 2016 was the final month for the section in my essays on bombing hospitals in Syria.

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.

My essay for [March 2017](#) mentioned the withdrawal of insurgents from Al-Waer suburb of Homs, and the planned withdrawal of insurgents from the Four Towns (i.e., al-Foua, Kefraya, Zabadani, and Madaya). During March, there was *no* United Nations press briefing on humanitarian aid to Syria.

My essay for [April 2017](#) mentions the evacuation of Al-Waer suburb of Homs and the evacuations of the Four Towns. On 15 April 2017, an Islamic car bomb exploded at the edge of Aleppo city, near buses that were carrying people evacuated from Foua and Kfraya, killing at least 126 people, mostly children.

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## Continuing War in Syria

On 7 May 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) that during the first day of the safe zones, Assad's army "advanced" "in areas around the village of al-Zallaqiyat in the northern countryside of Hama" province. The violence included "more than 260 rocket and artillery shells and dropping about 25 barrel bombs by helicopters". But the Observatory documented the death of only 7 fighters and 1 child on the first day of the safe zones. The Observatory emphasizes the *violations* of the safe zones agreement by Assad. But I think the low death toll on 6 May should be compared with an average of 93 dead/day nationwide during April 2017 and an average of 136 dead/day during 2016.

On 8 May 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights [reported](#) that during the first two days of the safe zones, a total of 32 fighters (including both insurgents and Assad's forces) and 1 child died. Later on 8 May, the [SOHR](#) reported a second dead civilian during the first 60 hours of the safe zones. The low death rate in the safe zones is really amazing because none of the insurgent groups have formally agreed to the Astana memorandum imposed by Russia.

On 8 May 2017, Assad's army continued to advance, by capturing the village of Zalaqiyat (aka al-Zallaqiyat), in Hama province. But it is *not* known if the captured village is inside the safe zone, because the borders of the safe zones will not be established until 4 June. [SOHR](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 8 May 2017, evacuation of insurgents began from the Damascus suburb of Barzeh. Buses carried the insurgents to Idlib province. [Reuters](#).

On 15 May 2017, the Syrian government completed the evacuation of more than 3300 people from Qaboun, a suburb of Damascus. [Reuters](#).

On 15 May 2017, the U.S. [State Dept](#) accused the Assad regime of building a crematorium at the Saydnaya military prison, near Damascus. The crematorium hygienically and neatly disposes of "as many as" 50 dead prisoners/day, destroying evidence of crimes by the Assad regime. On 16 May, Assad's government angrily denied the existence of the crematorium. The Syrian Arab News Agency website continues to be offline, but [Reuters](#) reported the news.

On 18 May 2017, the U.S.-led Coalition conducted an airstrike on a convoy of Iranian-sponsored militias inside Syria, as the convoy was approaching a base where U.S. and U.K. troops train Syrian rebels. The base is near the border with Jordan, but inside Syria. The U.S. Defense Secretary, Jim Mattis, claims the base is "inside an established and agreed-upon deconfliction zone." [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#). It is *not* clear whether Mattis means "de-escalation" zone from the 4 May Astana agreement, or something else. The U.S. has attacked Assad's military personnel only twice before: (1) accidentally on 17 Sep 2016 near Deir Ezzor, and (2) deliberately on 7 April 2017 in retaliation for releasing nerve gas.

On 19 May, Syria and Russia condemned the U.S. airstrike on pro-Assad forces. [NY Times](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). The Syrian Arab News Agency has been offline since about 6 May, so I can not link to their official propaganda.

On 21 May, the last buses departed from the Al-Waer suburb of Homs, carrying insurgents to Idlib province. [Reuters](#). The evacuation of insurgents from Al-Waer began on 18 March 2017.

In his 23 May 2017 monthly report, S/2017/445, the United Nations Secretary General reported on the car bomb near Aleppo city on 15 April 2017 that killed "at least 125 people". Last month, journalists reported that the car bomb deliberately targeted children. The Secretary General noted that "No party or group has claimed responsibility for this terrorist attack." Apparently a deliberate attack on refugee children is too atrocious even for Islamic terrorists.

On 29 May 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that the evacuation of insurgents from Barzeh, in Damascus province, had been completed. Reuters said: "Barzeh and the adjacent districts Qaboun and Tishreen, in northeast Damascus, will now come under the sway of President Bashar al-Assad's government, giving him almost complete control over the capital for the first time since 2013."

#### **Disappearing Rebels in Syria**

In March 2011, the Syrian civil war began in response to Assad's brutal repression of "Arab Spring" pro-democracy demonstrations. By 2013, Al-Qaeda and the predecessor of ISIL had begun to dominate the insurgency, as they hijacked the revolution in Syria. The other big insurgent groups since 2013 are jihadists, who want to impose a Sunni Islam theocracy on everyone in Syria. My essay on Syria for [Sep 2013](#) describes the original rebels as "fragmented and disorganized". Now, in May 2017, the original rebels are insignificant on the battlefield, although they are significant amongst the opposition at the Geneva negotiations. The Associated Press explained:

They are veterans of Syria's rebellion, trying for years to bring down President Bashar Assad. But these days they're doing little fighting with his military. They're struggling to find a place in a bewildering battlefield where several wars are all being waged at once by international powers. Syria's civil war has become a madhouse of forces from Turkey, the United States, Syrian Kurds, the Islamic State group, al-Qaida as well as Assad's allies Russia, Iran, Lebanon's Hezbollah, Iraqi and Afghan Shiite militias — all with their own alliances and agendas.

....

“We have become political dwarfs, fragmented groups which hardly have control over the closest checkpoint, let alone each other,” said Tarek Muharram, who quit his banking job in the Gulf to return home and join the rebellion in 2011.

....

The Associated Press spoke to a series of veteran rebels who move between Syria and Turkey and found them desperate for resources and support but intent on fighting for years to come. Nothing blurs Muharram's vision and determination to fight Assad. Not the loss of his beloved Aleppo. Not the hours he and his comrades now spend in a small apartment in the southern Turkish city of Gaziantep, watching TV and smoking, waiting for the next battle.

Sarah El Deeb, "Short of allies, Syria's rebels are down but not out," [Associated Press](#), 13:19 GMT, 1 June 2017.

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### May 2017: Briefings 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, there were only a few briefings during 2017: 19 Jan, 16 Feb, 6 and 20 April, and 11 May, at which a dismal and worsening situation for delivery of humanitarian aid was described.

On Thursday, 11 May 2017, Egeland gave a press briefing on humanitarian aid:

The Humanitarian Task Forces is, of course, devoted to focus on the situation of the civilian population in Syria, and I would say that in some respect more has happened the last first four months of this year than in the previous four years.

We have gone from a largely entrenched, frozen trench warfare, to enormous changes in the battlefield, new frontlines and new local agreements that profoundly affect the lives of vulnerable civilians. This has also led us to revise now more frequently the numbers of people living in-hard-to-reach areas, they have gone from roughly five million to now four and a half million people.

We have access to more people in the Aleppo area and we have access to people that previously lived in areas controlled by the so-called Islamic state, for example.

The number of people in besieged areas remain roughly the same, it is down some 20,000 people, it is now about 625,000 people still in 13 areas, 80% of those besieged in Syria are besieged by government or allied forces. There is still 95,000 people in Deir Ez-Zor besieged by the Islamic State. There is now down to 12,000 people in Foua and Kefraya that is besieged by armed opposition groups and then it's the poor people of Yarmouk besieged twice by government forces on the outside, and internally also by armed opposition groups, eight, nine, and 10,000 people there.

Now, we can deliver to 350,000 people per week with inter-agency cross-line convoys. It is a big capacity, we have a big humanitarian muscle in Syria, other countries envy us. In Yemen, we do not have that kind of a pipeline, we do not have that kind of a human program, we have not been funded generously to the same extent by donors.

In Syria however, we have such a tremendous access crisis, and protection crisis that

the assistance arm cannot really function, so it is down to now an average of one convoy per week, instead of the four convoys that we could and should have been fielding every single week of a month to people who have been besieged for years. Last week, we were able to reach Douma, first time since, I think October of last year. It took, you know, endless hours, it is an hour away from the warehouse in Damascus, it's next door to Damascus.

It took a whole day, a whole evening, a whole night and a whole morning, so courageous humanitarian workers in 51 large trucks spent endless hours on checkpoints, endless hours waiting for fighting to stop, and finally an admission — it was close to be called off many times — was able to reach 35,000 people for the first time since October.

It took good diplomats from many countries to help us, including out the two co-chairs, Russia and the United States, but also regional powers and counties with influence and forces on the ground. There has to be a simpler way really, because if it takes this kind of an effort to get one convoy to Ghouta, to reach 35,000 people in a place that has roughly 400,000 people, we will not succeed. I also mentioned this tremendous protection crisis, and since the beginning of April, we have seen 23 attacks on hospitals and clinics, 23 attacks, nine of the hospital ended completely inoperable in the hours of greatest needs for these civilians; the area with the largest number of hospitals and clinics destroyed or damaged by attacks, mostly aerial attacks, was Idlib. This was something that came through, very strongly, from the non-governmental organisations that I consulted with yesterday, these are courageous non-governmental organisations in Damascus, in Gaziantep, in Amman and in Beirut. They all report on shrinking humanitarian space, increased problems of operating, they are very worried for the future and they are, among other things, worried for attacks against the facilities and against humanitarian workers.

Is there a hope? Yes, I think there is a hope here, and it's connected now to the memorandum agreed in Astana on the 4th of May. It says, in no uncertain terms, that not only will fighting cease, hopefully, in a large part of the de-escalation zones, but also rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access shall be provided. Conditions to deliver medical aid to local populations and to meet basic needs of civilians shall be created, and measures to restore basis infrastructure including water and electricity will be established, and there would be conditions for safe and voluntary return by refugees and internally displaced.

Now, Russia, Turkey and Iran explained to us today and yesterday, I also met them, that they will work very openly, proactively with the United Nations and with humanitarian partners to implement this agreement. We do have a million questions and concerns, but I think we don't have the luxury that some have of this distant cynicism and saying it will fail.

We need this to succeed, so we were sitting down now to try to make it a workable agreement both for the people in these de-confliction zones, that the security zones outside can work to the benefit of civilians for aid in, and civilians to go in and out, and for the basic services to be restored, so that the three signatories and this is a

signed agreement. Russia, Iran and Turkey have a big responsibility, but so do we, and trying to make this change lives in these areas, that basically encompass all of the besieged areas except for Deir Ezzor, which is an IS control area. It basically encompasses the areas that we have been working since the beginning to ensure protection and assistance.

Any questions?

....

QUESTION: On the Astana deal, do you see any signs that you are actually now getting more humanitarian access? You talked about the convoy in Duma for example, do you have anything concrete in your hands? Do you see also or do you have certain areas where you think is more pressing to get the access?

JE: One concrete thing, the only one I have in my hand, is a lot of reports that there is a decrease in fighting, that there is a decrease in aerial attacks since 4 May. That is positive in itself. The Duma convoy coincided with the Astana talks, I don't know, I hope really it was because we have been working on it for such a long time. We are working this afternoon in new meetings with diplomats who can help us for new convoys to Eastern Ghouta, East Harasta, the Kaf'r Batna area has well over a hundred thousand besieged people. We need to reach them, we want to reach them in the next few days. But to be honest with you, even since the Astana agreement, were down to one convoy per week, so trucks, food supplies that could have gone to people on the brink of starvation, is not getting through because the parties are not allowing us, still not allowing us.

....

QUESTION: Do you have the facilitation letters for the five convoys?

JE: We are not getting facilitation letters and that's among the issues that we bring to the attention every meeting, including this one, to Russia and Iran, China and others who have their contact with the government of Syria. We need facilitation letters, we need the permits. But we also need on the other side conditions to be able to deliver. Infighting between armed opposition groups have been among the problems we have been facing that have inhibited delivery to also places in Eastern Ghouta.

Jan Egeland, "Transcript of joint Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura and UN Senior Adviser, Mr. Jan Egeland after their meeting with the Humanitarian Task Force," [U.N. Geneva](#), 11 May 2017.

There was no briefing on 18 May 2017, during the Syrian negotiations in Geneva.

There was no briefing about humanitarian aid on 25 May 2017 or 1 June 2017. Apparently the United Nations believes that silence is preferable to admitting failure.

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## U.N. Reports

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

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

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### Prosecution for War Crimes ?

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

But in his 19 April 2017 monthly report, S/2017/339, the United Nations Secretary General did *not* mention referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court, and he did *not* mention any accountability for war crimes in Syria.

In his 23 May 2017 monthly report, S/2017/445, the United Nations Secretary General again said: "I continue to reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court, ...." Amongst the possible war crimes during April 2017, the Secretary General noted:

1. "There were 30 credible reports of attacks on hospitals and medical facilities" in Syria during April 2017 alone.
2. The 4 April use of Sarin gas in Khan Shaykhun, Syria.
3. "The United Nations estimates that, as of the end of April, some 624,500 people were living under siege in the Syrian Arab Republic, ...." 82% of whom are besieged by Assad's government. Both Assad's government and insurgents are impeding delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians in besieged towns.

### **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 May 2017. My searches of the website of the [Spokesman](#) for the U.N. Secretary General — and my searches of Google News — found nothing substantive about the Mechanism in Resolution 71/248 since January 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.

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## 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 354 Iraqi civilians killed in "terrorism, violence, and armed conflict" during May 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.

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## Atrocities in Iraq

### Introduction

My previous [essays](#), beginning in June 2014, documented numerous atrocities by Islamic terrorists:

- ISIL executed hundreds of captured Shiite soldiers in Mosul and Tikrit during 11-14 June 2014.
- ISIL *crucified* eight rebels near Aleppo in Syria on 28 June 2014.
- ISIL threatened genocide of Yazidis in Iraq during August 2014 and 20-22 Oct 2014.
- an attack on a Sunni mosque in Iraq on 22 Aug 2014.
- ISIL executed captured Syrian soldiers in Raqqa, Syria in August 2014.
- Shiite militias in Iraq are murdering innocent Sunnis (reports: 14 Oct 2014, 26 Jan 2015).

- ISIL burned alive al-Kasasbeh, a pilot in the Jordanian Air Force, (see my essay for [Feb 2015](#)).
- ISIL in Libya beheaded 21 Christians on 15 Feb 2015.
- and — beginning with my essay for [Oct 2014](#) — I documented some of the car bombs in Iraq that killed large numbers of people, most commonly in or near Baghdad.

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### May 2017: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 19 May 2017, two car bombs in Baghdad killed at least 11 people. [Associated Press](#).

On 19 May 2017, two ISIL suicide car bomb killed "several people" in southern Basra province. [Reuters](#). ISIL later claimed responsibility. [Reuters](#). On 20 May, Agence France-Press [reported](#) 24 died in Baghdad and 11 died in Basra province. ISIL claimed responsibility for all of these bombings.

Early on 30 May, an ISIL car bomb in Baghdad killed at least 13 people. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). At 14:38 GMT on 30 May, the [Associated Press](#) reported 17 dead in the first bombing (outside a busy ice cream shop) and then 14 dead by a second ISIL car bomb in Baghdad during the morning rush hour. See also [Reuters](#).

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq reports a total of 86 civilians killed in Baghdad province during May 2017. [UNAMI](#).

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### Conclusion to Atrocities in Iraq

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

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## Iraq is a Failed Nation

### Introduction

During an existential crisis — the invasion of Iraq by ISIL — the Iraqi parliament held infrequent meetings, had small attendance when they met, and made glacially slow progress on solving Iraq's problems. This abysmal performance of parliament was chronicled in my essays for [July 2014](#) through [February 2015](#). The data for July through October 2014 are summarized in my [table](#).

My essay for [June 2015](#) mentions corruption in Iraq, and criticism of the Iraqi government by journalists. The Iraqi parliament — which has failed to end corruption in the Iraqi army, and failed to create a nonsectarian National Guard that integrates Sunni tribesmen and Shiite

militias under the firm control of the federal government in Baghdad — was on vacation beginning 31 May until 1 July 2015. My essay for [July 2015](#) mentions that the Iraqi parliament was on vacation again from 6 July to 25 July 2015.

My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions the Iraqi government is planning to sell unsecured junk bonds to obtain money to operate its government, the slow progress of the draft National Guard Law, and a cholera epidemic in Iraq.

My essay for [October 2015](#) mentions Iraq cancelled its bond issue, because potential investors demanded a high interest rate. That essay also mentions arrest warrants were issued for one former and one current Iraqi ministers who were accused of corruption, but both ministers have disappeared. Also, Abadi's reforms proposed in August 2015 stalled in October 2015.

My essay for [January 2016](#) mentions that Iraq was eighth from the bottom of an international survey of 168 nations for corruption.

My essay for [April 2016](#) chronicled Abadi's attempt to reformulate the ministers in Iraq to reduce corruption. But Abadi's new ministers need to be approved by the Iraqi parliament, which does *not* want to disrupt their personal enrichment and power. The Iraqi parliament refused to vote on Abadi's proposals during April.

My essay for [May 2016](#) mentioned that, on 30 April 2016, Iraqi protesters from cleric al-Sadr stormed the Iraqi parliament building. In response, the Iraqi parliament did *not* meet during May. On 20 May, Iraqi security forces violently repelled demonstrators, killing at least four.

The Iraqi parliament also did *not* meet during June 2016, the second consecutive month of vacation for the dysfunctional parliament.

My essay for [July 2016](#) mentioned Abadi finally banned the use of bogus bomb-detector wands, and a protest demonstration in Baghdad on 15 July. Apparently, the dysfunctional Iraqi parliament failed to meet during July, the third consecutive month of no meetings.

My essay for [August 2016](#) mentioned that the Iraqi parliament sacked the Defense Minister, after he accused several members of parliament of corruption.

My essay for [September 2016](#) mentioned that the Iraqi parliament sacked the Finance Minister. That essay also contained my final text on the absence of criminal prosecution for corrupt Iraqi army officers who hired "ghost soldiers", as well as the lack of criminal prosecution of Iraqi army officers who gave orders to flee from Mosul in 2014 and from Ramadi in 2015. Although criminal prosecution had been promised by Prime Minister Abadi, the prosecution never occurred.

My essay for [October 2016](#) mentions that Iraq's Supreme Court ruled it was unconstitutional for Abadi to abolish three of the highest level positions in the Iraqi government. Also, the Iraqi parliament banned the sale of alcoholic beverages.

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

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## U.S. combat troops in Iraq

On 1 December 2015, U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, told the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee that the U.S. would send more "special operations forces" to Iraq, to engage ISIL in combat in both Iraq and Syria. My essay for [December 2015](#) reported that the Iraqis quickly objected to foreign combat troops in Iraq, and the U.S. program stalled.

On 13 January 2016, the [Pentagon](#) paraphrased what the U.S. Secretary of Defense told troops: "A specialized expeditionary targeting force announced in December is in place, preparing to work with the Iraqis to begin going after ISIL fighters and commanders". [Reuters](#) reports approximately 200 special operations troops have arrived in Iraq.

The Pentagon does *not* want publicity for the U.S. Special Forces in Iraq, partly because the Iraqi government is very sensitive about foreign combat troops in Iraq, and partly to keep secret operational details to deprive ISIL of information.

On 21 March, the U.S. military revealed that it had created Fire Base Bell sometime around 7 March, to protect U.S. troops at an Iraqi military base near Makhmour. Fire Base Bell has approximately 150 Marines and four 155mm howitzers. Although Obama has limited the number of U.S. troops in Iraq to 3870, the Marines at Fire Base Bell are *not* included in this limit. [Pentagon](#) press briefing; [Associated Press](#); [Associated Press](#)(24 Aug). ISIL learned of Fire Base Bell before the U.S. taxpayers learned of this combat mission. On Saturday, 19 March, ISIL fired two rockets into the outpost, killing one U.S. Marine. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#). On the morning of 21 March, ISIL again attacked Fire Base Bell, this time with rifle fire.

In my opinion, the failure to include the Marines at Fire Base Bell in the limited number of U.S. troops in Iraq is a deliberate evasion of Obama's limit. Further, Fire Base Bell is *not* considered a combat mission, because it is behind the front lines, despite the fact that ISIL has attacked Fire Base Bell twice in three days.

On 21 March 2016, the [Washington Post](#) published an article with the headline: "The U.S. military has a lot more people in Iraq than it has been saying". Obama's official upper limit is 3870 personnel, but there are now approximately 5000 personnel in Iraq.

On 18 April 2016, it was announced that the number of U.S. troops in Iraq would be increased by 217, and also that 8 Apache helicopters operated by the U.S. Army would be available to support the Iraqi army. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Reuters reported: "The increase raises the authorized troop level in Iraq to 4,087, not including special operations personnel, some logistics workers and troops on temporary rotations."

On 11 July 2016, the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced that an additional 560 U.S. troops would be sent to Iraq. The additional 560 soldiers makes a total of at least 4647 U.S. military personnel in Iraq. (I say "at least" because the Pentagon does *not* count personnel deployed to

Iraq for fewer than four months.) [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

On 28 September 2016, the U.S. Secretary of Defense announced that an additional 615 U.S. troops would be sent to Iraq, to assist Iraqis with the assault on Mosul. The additional troops makes a total of 5262 U.S. military personnel in Iraq. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).

On 20 October 2016, Jason Finan was killed by an ISIL roadside bomb near Mosul. He was the fourth U.S. military person to be killed in combat in Iraq. [CENTCOM](#)(20 Oct); [Associated Press](#)(night of 20 Oct); [Pentagon](#)(21 Oct); [San Diego Union-Tribune](#)(21 Oct); [Washington Post](#)(22 Oct).

On 29 April 2017, U.S. Army 1st Lieutenant Weston C. Lee, an infantry platoon leader, was killed by an ISIL "explosive device" near Mosul. He was the fifth U.S. military person to be killed in combat in Iraq. [CENTCOM](#); [Reuters](#)(29Apr); [Associated Press](#)(29Apr); [WRAL](#)(30Apr); [Pentagon](#)(1May); [Associated Press](#)(1May).

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## Future liberation of Mosul

### More Empty Promises

My previous essays — see my monthly essays for [December 2015](#) to [March 2016](#) — list a series of *10 promises* by Iraqi politicians or senior army officers from 25 May 2015 to 8 December 2015 that Ramadi would be liberated within the next few days. All of those promises were exposed as false. And those false promises have led to greatly diminished confidence in the Iraqi army and Shiite militias. That adds to what U.S. Defense Secretary Carter said on 24 May 2015: the Iraqi army "showed no will to fight."

A similar series of false promises appeared 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. On 30 April 2017, the Iraqi army's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Othman al-Ghanmi, was quoted by [Reuters](#) as saying the battle to liberate Mosul should be completed "in a maximum of three weeks" (i.e., no later than 21 May).

*All* of these promises quoted above were unfulfilled by the Iraqi army.

### May 2017: Mosul

My previous monthly essays have the history of the liberation of Mosul, which began in October 2016. 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. News about Mosul seems to be sparse, perhaps because journalists are concentrating on the larger problems in Syria.

On 15 May, the Iraqi army is planning to declare victory in Mosul before 26 May, when Ramadan begins, "even if the militants [i.e., ISIL] continue to hold out in pockets." [Reuters](#).

On 16 May 2017, Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool told journalists that ISIL now controls only about 10% of western Mosul. [Associated Press](#). ISIL now controls 12 km<sup>2</sup> in Mosul. [Reuters](#). Both the Associated Press and Reuters report that the Iraqi army hopes to liberate *all* of Mosul sometime in May 2017.

On 21 May 2017, ISIL controls 8 km<sup>2</sup> in Mosul, including the Old City. [Associated Press](#).

On 25 May 2017, the U.S. Military acknowledged that a U.S. airstrike on a building in Mosul on 17 March 2017 led to the deaths of 101 civilians in that building. [Reuters](#) reported: "The United States and nearby Iraqi forces did not know there were civilians in the building or that it had been rigged with explosives, the probe found. .... The investigation found that the chemical signature found in the residues was not associated with the bomb used by the United States, but rather with explosives usually used by Islamic State militants." The single 500-pound bomb dropped by the U.S. did *not* cause the collapse of the building, instead the ISIL explosives stored in the building caused the collapse.

On 26 May 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the Iraqis are demanding "Justice" (i.e., "money to rebuild their homes"). My comment is that first the Iraqi government should fully reimburse the U.S. Government for the cost of helping the corrupt and incompetent Iraqis liberate their so-called nation from ISIL, a reimbursement of approximately ten billion dollars. Second, the Iraqi government should fully reimburse the USA for the cost of humanitarian aid to Iraq. Third, the Iraqis should sue their military leaders who fled from Mosul and allowed ISIL to capture Mosul in June 2014.

On 27 May 2017, [Reuters](#) reported "Iraqi armed forces launched an operation on Saturday [27 May] to capture the last Islamic State-held enclave in Mosul". "The enclave includes the

Old City centre and three adjacent districts along the western bank of the Tigris river."

On 28 May 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL snipers and suicide bombers had slowed the liberation of remaining areas in Western Mosul. An additional complication is at least 200,000 civilians remaining in Western Mosul.

On 30 May 2017, [Al-Arabiya](#) reported that the leaders of ISIL in Mosul have either fled from the city or been killed. The remnants of ISIL in Western Mosul have begun burning records of ISIL, to destroy evidence of war crimes.

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## Islamic Public Relations Problem

### Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## My Proposal

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

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

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

On 8 May 2015, I suggested creating hundreds of small companies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere to hire Arabs to counter propaganda from ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

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

few thousand Arabs might be able to swamp ISIL's propaganda operation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. **Collect and display truth about Islamic terrorism:**  
Create and operate websites that
  - A. explain why ISIL and Al-Qaeda are violating teachings of Islam,
  - B. collect and display Fatwas against ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
  - C. list atrocities committed by ISIL and Al-Qaeda,
  - D. hire Muslim clerics to write blogs or essays about how terrorism is evil.Each website to have versions for Arabic, French, and English languages.
2. **Social media:** Monitor social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and refute propaganda. Cite URLs of websites that display truth about Islamic terrorism.
3. Produce press releases that can be published by newspapers or reported by radio/television stations.
4. Use ridicule and parody to humiliate ISIL and Al-Qaeda.

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

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

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

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### **Need to Kill *Ideology* of Islamic Terrorism**

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

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).
- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.
- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).
- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.

- On 15 October 2015, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December 2015, U.S. airstrikes killed al-Qaida leaders in Libya and Somalia. [Pentagon](#).
- In "late November" 2015, a U.S. airstrike in Iraq killed Abu Salah, the financial minister of ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 29 December 2015, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes had killed 10 senior ISIL leaders during 7-27 December. Some of the dead leaders were involved in the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 Nov. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 29 Dec; [Reuters](#) on 30 Dec.
- On 25 March 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military had killed Haji Imam, "who was an ISIL senior leader, serving as a finance minister and who is also responsible for some external affairs and plots." Imam is also known as Abdul-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) spells the dead man's name as "Haji Iman — an alias for Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli".
- On 4 May 2016, Australia announced that a Cambodian immigrant who had joined ISIL had been killed by a U.S. airstrike in Mosul on 29 April. His name was Neil Prakash, also known as Abu Khaled al-Cambodi. Neil had been featured in ISIL recruiting videos. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [ABC](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#).
- On 9 May 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that an airstrike on 6 May had killed "Abu Wahib, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's military emir for Iraq's Anbar province". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 21 May 2016, the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, was killed by an airstrike from a U.S. drone in Pakistan. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). [Reuters](#) reported: "The death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour ... could further fracture the Taliban — an outcome that experts cautioned might make the insurgents even less likely to participate in long-stalled peace efforts." And [Reuters](#) reported the Pakistani government is wailing about the U.S. violation of Pakistani sovereignty. [Obama](#) was pleased that Mansour — also spelled Mansur — was killed by the U.S. military. Four days after Mansour was killed, the Taliban elected a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 4 August 2016, an Egyptian military airstrike killed the leader of ISIL in Egypt,

- Abu Doaa al-Ansari. [Ahram](#); [Associated Press](#); [Ahram](#)(18 Aug confirmation); [Al-Arabiya](#)(19 Aug).
- On 30 August 2016, a U.S. airstrike near Al Bab, Syria, splatted Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani. He is said to be the head of external operations of ISIL (i.e., in charge of attacks in Europe, etc.), a tactician, and their chief spokesman. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#)(31Aug); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Pentagon](#)(12Sep).
  - On 8 September 2016, Abu Hajer al Homsy, also known as Abu Omar Saraqeb, the top military commander of Nusra Front (now called "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham") was killed by an airstrike in the village of Kafr Naha, Syria. [Reuters](#); [Middle East Eye](#). On 9 Sep, [FRANCE24](#)(AFP) and [Al-Arabiya](#) reports that the Pentagon denied a U.S.-airstrike killed him.
  - On 7 September 2016, a U.S. airstrike splatted Wa'il Adil Hasan Salman al-Fayad, a senior leader of ISIL and the ISIL minister of information, who prepared terrorist videos. [Pentagon](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#)(10 Oct).
  - On 3 October 2016, a U.S. airstrike in Idlib province of Syria killed Sheikh Abu al Faraj al-Masri (real name = Sheikh Ahmad Salamah Mabrouk), an Egyptian terrorist who in the 1980s fought in Afghanistan with Ayman al-Zawahri (the current Al-Qaeda leader). Reuters says the dead Sheikh was a "prominent member" of Nusra Front in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
  - On 26 November 2016, a U.S. drone airstrike in Raqqa killed Boubaker el Hakim, an ISIL member who allegedly was involved in planning the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper offices in Paris on 7 Jan 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
  - On 4 December 2016, a U.S. drone splatted three ISIL members in Raqqa. The three were allegedly plotting attacks in foreign nations, and two of them had allegedly been involved in the Islamic attacks in Paris on 13 Nov 2015. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(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).

- On 7 May 2017, journalists reported that the leader of ISIL in Afghanistan, Abdul Hasib, had been killed by U.S. and Afghani ground troops on 27 April. [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#).
- On 26 May 2016, the U.S. Military announced that three ISIL senior leaders had been killed by coalition airstrikes: Mustafa Gunes was killed on 27 April in Syria, Abu Asim al-Jazaeri was killed on 11 May in Syria, Abu-Khattab al-Rawi was killed on 18 May in Iraq. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
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The deaths of bin Laden and al-Awlaki had little effect on Al-Qaeda, and it is expected that the deaths of the leaders since June 2015 will also have little effect on Islamic terrorism.

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](#).

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## ISIL is *not* defeated

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

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but, as of April 2017, the Iraqis have been unable to liberate Mosul.
2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.
5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at at Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).

9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).
16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."
21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing

- 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
25. On 12 June 2016, an Islamic terrorist perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando Florida. The terrorist pledged allegiance to ISIL, although there is *no* evidence that ISIL communicated with him. See my essay for [June 2016](#).
26. On 16 June 2016, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, testified before a committee of the U.S. Senate that "Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach." [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#).
27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) ("... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered diners in a restaurant."); [Reuters](#) ("... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State."). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).
29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the

mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).

31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 85 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
32. On 18, 24, and 26 July 2016, there were ISIL terrorist attacks in Würzburg in Germany, Ansbach in Germany, and Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray in France. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
33. On 2 August 2016, [NBC News](#) published an exclusive report of a classified National Counterterrorism Center briefing to the White House, that showed a "fully operational" ISIL had spread to 18 nations during Obama's presidency. ISIL is "aspiring" in six additional nations.
34. On 6 August 2016, an Islamic terrorist — and illegal immigrant from Algeria — used a machete to slash the faces of two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium. See my essay for [August 2016](#).
35. On 20 August 2016, ISIL sent a suicide bomber to a wedding party in Gaziantep, Turkey, where at least 54 people were killed. Early reports said the suicide bomber was between 12 and 14 years old. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(21Aug); [Associated Press](#)(22Aug).
36. On 10 December 2016, ISIL recaptured Palmyra, Syria. Assad's army had liberated Palmyra from ISIL in March 2016.
37. On 11 December 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated inside St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo, the seat of the Egyptian Orthodox Church, killing at least 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. On Palm Sunday, 9 April 2017, ISIL terrorists attacked Coptic Christian churches in Tanta and Alexandria, Egypt, killing at least 45 people. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
42. On 12 May 2017, an ISIL bomb exploded targeted a convoy of automobiles for the deputy chairman of the Pakistan Senate, killing at least 25 people in the town of Mastung. [Reuters](#).
43. On 26 May 2017, ISIL attacked buses carrying Coptic Christians in Egypt, killing 29 people. The Egyptian government retaliated with airstrikes on ISIL training camps in Libya. [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Los Angeles Times](#).
- 44.

This long list of continuing terrorist attacks by ISIL shows that ISIL is *not* defeated. ISIL — and Islamic terrorists inspired by ISIL — continue a global campaign of terrorism.

Let us not forget that ISIL captured huge amounts of weapons, ammunition, and vehicles when the Iraqi army fled from Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014, and again when the Iraqi army fled from Ramadi in May 2015. The U.S. taxpayer funded these equipments and supplies to the Iraqi army, but the equipment and supplies enabled ISIL to become more ferocious.

In my essay for [June 2015](#), in the section titled "U.S. Propaganda", I was critical of citing body counts to show success in a military campaign. There I noted that "it may be that ISIL can recruit new fighters at a higher rate than ISIL fighters are being killed." During the Vietnam war in the 1960s, U.S. Government propaganda cited body counts to show we were winning the war against the communists. Now, U.S. Government propaganda cites the number of airstrikes to show we are winning the war against ISIL.

Beginning in August 2014, I stressed the need for Muslim clerics and Islamic opinion leaders to continually condemn Islamic terrorism, see the section [above](#). Beginning in my essay for June 2015, I suggest that instead of focusing on killing leaders of Islamic terrorist organizations, we focus on killing their [ideology](#).

In June 2016, I began a new concluding [section](#) about how the U.S. War on Terror has decreased security in Europe and the USA.

## Cost of U.S. War Against ISIL

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

As of March 31, 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$12.5 billion and the average daily cost is \$13 million for 967 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 24 May 2017.

Note that the Pentagon's accounting ends *before* the 7 April airstrike on Assad's airfield. Publicly available estimates are it will cost about \$90 million to replace the 59 Tomahawk cruises missiles used in the 7 April airstrike on Assad's airfield.

Note that the numbers in the Pentagon's 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.](#)

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## Terrorism & Migration in Europe

### Islamic Terrorism in Europe

History in my previous essays:

- My [first essay](#) tersely — and incompletely — recounts a history of Islamic terrorism from 1972 to 2013.
- My essay for [June 2014](#) mentions the Islamic terrorist attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels on 24 May 2014, and an attack in France on March 2012.
- My essay for [Jan 2015](#) describes the Islamic terrorist attacks in France on 7-9 January.
- My essay for [Feb 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Copenhagen on 14 Feb.
- My essay for [September 2015](#) mentions a 15 y old girl in Denmark who stabbed her mother to death after repeatedly watching on the Internet (YouTube) videos of ISIL executions with her 29 y old boyfriend who was a so-called "refugee" from Iraq. That essay also mentions an Iraqi terrorist in Berlin who was killed by police in an attack on 17 Sep 2015.
- My essay for [November 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Paris that killed 130 people on 13 Nov 2015.
- My essay for [December 2015](#) describes an Islamic terror attack in San Bernardino, California on 2 Dec 2015.
- My essay for [January 2016](#) describes Muslim immigrants running amok in Cologne, Hamburg, and at least five other European cities on the night of 31 Dec 2015.
- My essay for [March 2016](#) describes ISIL terror attacks on the airport and subway in Brussels that killed 32 people on 22 March 2016.

- My essay for [June 2016](#) describes an Islamic terrorist who perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, by killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando, Florida.
- My essay for [July 2016](#) describes four ISIL attacks in Europe: 84 dead in Nice, France on 14 July; immigrant from Afghanistan or Pakistan uses axe in Würzburg, Germany on 18 July; refugee from Syria detonates bomb in Ansbach, Germany on 24 July; two ISIL attackers murder Catholic priest in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, France on 26 July.
- My essay for [August 2016](#) describes an ISIL attack on two policewomen in Charleroi, Belgium and how Canadian police prevented one ISIL bombing in London, Ontario.
- My essay for [September 2016](#) describes how (1) French police arrested a group of women before they could detonate a bomb, (2) series of bombings in New Jersey and New York City, and (3) an attack in St. Cloud, Minnesota.
- My essay for [October 2016](#) describes the arrest in Germany of an immigrant from Syria, before he could detonate a bomb at an airport in Berlin. The suspect committed suicide in jail.
- My essay for [November 2016](#) describes an Islamic immigrant from Somalia who wounded 11 people at Ohio State University, before a policeman killed the immigrant.
- 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.
- My essay for [March 2017](#) described an Islamic terrorist who died at the Orly airport in Paris, and another Islamic terrorist who killed five people at and near Parliament in London, England.
- My essay for [April 2017](#) described an Islamic terrorist who killed 15 people in the subway in St. Petersburg Russia, an Islamic terrorist who killed 5 people in downtown Stockholm Sweden, and an Islamic terror attack in Paris France.

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

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## **Islamic Migration into Europe numbers**

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

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

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

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

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

### **disenchantment & failure of assimilation**

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

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

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

In mid-September 2015, I wrote that some "migrants will become disenchanting with their new home". This has already happened. On 19 October 2015, the [Associated Press](#) reported that Syrians who arrived in Uruguay in November 2014 have complained, and "many Uruguayans ... have come to see the refugees more as rude, ungrateful guests." And on 29 October 2015, [The Guardian](#) reports that 14 migrants from Syria refused to leave a bus at their destination in Sweden because it was "too cold". On 1 January 2016, the [Washington Post](#) reported that some migrants to Europe were returning home to Iraq, more

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

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

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

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

### **some immigrants are criminals**

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

See:

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

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

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

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

On 15 January 2016, after multiple complaints of sexual harassment of women, the town of

Bornheim, Germany banned adult Muslim men from the town swimming pool. [Reuters](#); [The Guardian](#).

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

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

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

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

### fraudulent passports

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

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

1. Some of these migrants have no passport and no identity documents, so their name and past history can *not* be verified, except laboriously through fingerprints.
2. After the attacks in Paris on 13 Nov 2015, it took European police three days to trace *one* Syrian passport issued to Ahmad al-Mohammad and determine that the passport was fraudulent. When there are thousands of migrants each day demanding entry, border guards can not spend three days checking each passport. Moreover, a second

fraudulent Syrian passport with the same name was discovered in Serbia, which hints at widespread fraud. [The Guardian](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### politics

At the middle of the immigration debacle in 2015, the German Chancellor, Dr. Angela Merkel, famously said that "asylum laws have no upper limit". [Associated Press](#) (5 Sep);

[Politico](#) (1 Oct); [Deutsche Welle](#) (21 Nov); Commentators suggested that Dr. Merkel's absolute, "no limits" compassion for refugees had its origins in her moral upbringing as the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. My comment is that the asylum law has *no* limit because legislators forgot to put a limit in the law.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the freedom to be offended. Hate speech statutes are an attempt by the majority to force everyone to conform their speech to what pleases the majority, which is a blatant attempt by governments to impose orthodoxy on their citizens.

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

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

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

On 4 September 2016, there was an state parliament election in Angela Merkel's home state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) captured 30.6% of the vote. In an upset, anti-immigrant party, Alternative für Deutschland, came in second place with 20.8% of the vote. Merkel's party, the Christian Democratic Party (CDU), came in third place with 19.0% of the vote. [dpa](#); [Deutsche Welle](#).

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## **22 May 2017: Islamic bombing in Manchester, England**

On Monday, 22 May 2017 at 22:30 BST (21:30 GMT), a suicide bomber detonated as people were leaving a concert for teenagers in Manchester, England. At 07:00 BST on 23 May, police announced 22 deaths and 59 wounded in hospitals. At 11:00 BST on 23 May, the U.K. Prime Minister said police believe they know the name of the suicide bomber, but police did not publicly announce his name. At 17:22 BST on 23 May, police named the suicide bomber as Salman Abedi, 22 y old.

Police quickly determined that Salman was unlikely to know how to build the sophisticated bomb used in Manchester, so police began to search for accomplices of Salman — and especially search for whoever made the bomb. On 23 May, police in the U.K. increased the terror alert to its highest level, given the fear of additional bombings. On 27 May, the terror alert was returned to its second highest level, after police arrested most of Salman's alleged accomplices. But on 31 May, police changed their opinion to Salman built the bomb himself.

On 23 May, U.S. Government leaked the name of the suicide bomber to journalists, despite the U.K. Government wanting to keep his name confidential. [BBC](#); [The Telegraph](#). Then

on 24 May, the [New York Times](#) published photographs of parts of the bomb used in Manchester, again revealing confidential information from the U.K. government. The U.K. Government was again "furious" with the U.S. leakers. [BBC](#). On 25 May, the U.K. stopped sharing intelligence about the Manchester bombing with the leaking U.S. Government. [BBC](#); [The Guardian](#). On 25 May around 17:00 BST, the U.K. resumed sharing intelligence with the U.S. Government after Trump promised an FBI investigation would find and punish the leakers. [The Guardian](#).

*Any* terrorist attack is bad, but the attack in Manchester was especially Evil in two ways. First, it targeted a concert that would be attended by children and teenagers, making it an attack on innocent young people. Second, the suicide bomb was surrounded by metal bolts that acted as shrapnel, increasing damage and pain to victims.

My essay for [March 2016](#) gives 5 links to an X-ray image of a steel bolt with a length of 7.5 cm in the thorax of an Islamic bombing victim in Brussels. I explained: "A bolt does not belong there. It was put there by an Islamic terrorist." Fourteen months later, surgeons in Europe are again removing bolts from victims of Islamic terrorism. Meanwhile, politicians in Europe still can *not* say the words "Islamic terrorism". Before we can solve the problem of Islamic terrorism, we need to clearly identify the problem that we want to solve.

Monday, 29 May 2017, is Spring Bank Holiday in the U.K., which gives the British a three-day weekend. The major scheduled public activities all occurred on that weekend, but with more police and military present. The news about the Islamic bombing declined on Friday, 26 May and trickled to a stop on Saturday, 27 May. *The Guardian*, the major newspaper in Manchester, ended its website's live blog of news about the Islamic bombing on Saturday afternoon.

#### **Trump's reaction**

Donald Trump, speaking in Bethlehem, had the following to say about Islamic terrorist attack on Manchester:

We stand in absolute solidarity with the people of the United Kingdom. So many young, beautiful, innocent people living and enjoying their lives murdered by evil losers in life. I won't call them monsters because they would like that term. They would think that's a great name. I will call them from now on losers because that's what's they are. They're losers. And we'll have more of them. But they're losers — just remember that.

This is what I've spent these last few days talking about during my trip overseas. Our society can have no tolerance for this continuation of bloodshed, we cannot stand a moment longer for the slaughter of innocent people. And in today's attack, it was mostly innocent children.

The terrorists and extremists, and those who give them aid and comfort, must be driven out from our society forever. This wicked ideology must be obliterated — and I mean completely obliterated — and innocent life must be protected. All innocent lives. Life must be protected. All civilized nations must join together to protect human life and

the sacred right of our citizens to live in safety and in peace.  
Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump and President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in Joint Statements," [White House](#), 23 May 2017.

Donald Trump frequently hurls insults and invective, making his speech needlessly inflammatory. I wish that the Islamic terrorists would be "completely obliterated". But military attacks on ISIL, Al-Qaeda, and other Islamic extremist organizations have succeeded in radicalizing more Muslims, and inspiring more terrorist attacks. As I have said in my essays beginning in June 2015 — and in the [conclusion](#) to my essays beginning in February 2015 — the key to fighting Islamic terrorism is countering the ideology of Islamic terrorism, *not* attacking Muslim extremists with bombs and bullets.

Trump was wrong to fling the label "losers" at ISIL. A loser is someone who is defeated, weak, ineffective, or unsuccessful. But Islamic terrorists successfully kill innocent people nearly every month in Europe or the USA, showing that ISIL continues to be a *real* threat.

Additionally, the intrusive security inspections for all airplane passengers in the USA has made air travel an unpleasant experience, making every airline passenger in the USA a kind of victim of Islamic terrorism. I suggest that the citizens of Europe and the USA are losers in the sense that they have lost some of their freedom, lost some of their security, and too many have lost their lives in Islamic terrorist attacks. Meanwhile, the U.S. Governments and European governments are ineffective in the fight against Islamic terrorism, because political correctness is more important than stopping Islamic terrorism. Trump should have simply applied the "Islamic terrorist" label to ISIL and avoided the casual invective "losers".

On 26 May 2017, ISIL attacked buses carrying Coptic Christians in Egypt, killing 29 Christians. Trump responded with a statement that said, in part, "The bloodletting of Christians must end, and all who aid their killers must be punished." [White House](#). Trump is wrong to say the attacks on "Christians must end", because that characterizes Islamic terrorism as attacking Christians, while ignoring Islamic terrorist attacks on Shiite Muslims, non-extremist Sunni Muslims, *and* Jews. Islamic terrorism is a bigger threat to Muslim-majority nations than to either Europe or the USA, as shown by death tolls in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, and Libya.

#### ISIL claims credit

At 13:22 BST on 23 May, [The Guardian](#) reported that ISIL had claimed credit for the Manchester bombing. The religious nature of the ISIL propaganda is shown by the [re-tweet](#) claiming that "Crusaders" were killed or wounded, and stating: "And what comes next will be more severe on the worshipers of the Cross and their allies, by Allah's permission. And all praise is due to Allah, Lord of the creation."

Politicians are probably wise to ignore the fact that ISIL claims that the Christian victims in Manchester were deliberately targeted because of their religion. Escalating a sectarian conflict between Muslims and Christians would be counter-productive. Technically, the conflict only involves Muslim extremists who encourage, sponsor, or engage in terrorism — but that distinction might be lost on angry Christians or fearful Muslims.

But there were flaws in ISIL's claims, which cast doubt on whether ISIL had either directed or sponsored the attack. Reuters reported:

Islamic State, now being driven from territories in Syria and Iraq by Western-backed armed forces, claimed the attack as revenge against "Crusaders". But Western experts were skeptical, noting it had offered two accounts of the attack partly contradicting each other and the British police version.

"British police raid houses after bombing decried by PM as sickening attack on young," [Reuters](#), 16:29 BST, 23 May 2017. [article no longer available]

Two hours later, Reuters reported:

Islamic State, now being driven from territories in Syria and Iraq by Western-backed armed forces, claimed responsibility for what it called a revenge attack against "Crusaders", but there appeared to be contradictions in its account of the operation.

.....

Islamic State, while claiming responsibility on its Telegram account, appeared to contradict British police's description of a suicide bomber. It suggested explosive devices were placed "in the midst of the gatherings of the Crusaders".

"What comes next will be more severe on the worshippers of the cross," the Telegram posting said.

It did not name the bomber, which it usually does in attacks it has ordered, and appeared also to contradict a posting on another Islamic State account, Amaq, which spoke of "a group of attackers". That reference, however, was later removed.

"Police name Manchester suicide bomber, May condemns 'sickening' attack," [Reuters](#), 18:28 BST, 23 May 2017.

ISIL's claim that explosive devices were placed "in the midst of the gatherings of the Crusaders" contradicts the fact that there was one suicide bomber with *one* bomb.

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saw the explosives America drops on children in Syria, and he wanted revenge. Whether he got that is between him and God.”)

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09:35 BST, 3 June 2017. (Police have now arrested a total of 17 suspects, but released 6 of them without charge, so 11 suspects remain in custody.)

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  - "Police: Suspects in Manchester bombing freed without charge," [Associated Press](#), 11 June 2017. (All 22 suspects arrested in the Manchester bombing case have now been released from custody, without any criminal charges.)
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## Conclusions

During September 2013, I began chronicling the history of chemical weapons in Syria and the futile peace negotiations. I now see 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 2016**

In my essay for December 2015, I wrote:

I predict that in February 2016 people will realize the operative principle is the German saying "von nichts, kommt nichts" (out of nothing, nothing comes).

Ronald B. Standler, "Syria & Iraq: December 2015," [www.rbs0.com/syria28.pdf](http://www.rbs0.com/syria28.pdf), 4 Jan 2016.

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

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.

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#### 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. From what they have said and from how they act, 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.

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## 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 328,000 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.

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## Conclusion for Iraq

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

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

1. The Iraqi government is corrupt. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [January 2016](#))
2. The Iraqi government is dysfunctional. During July-October 2014, the Iraqi Parliament *slowly* formed a new government — during an existential crisis. My essays for July 2014 through February 2015 summarized the infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. (See the summary for July through October 2014 in my [webpage](#).)
3. The Iraqi army was unable to stop the ISIL invasion during the first six months of 2014. In June 2014, the Iraqi army was exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout in Ramadi.
4. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable or unwilling to prosecute:
  - A. corrupt politicians or corrupt government officials,
  - B. army officers who hired ghost soldiers,
  - C. desertion at Mosul on 10 June 2014,
  - D. fleeing from Ramadi on 17 May 2015, and
  - E. terrorists who kill innocent civilians in frequent bombings in or near Baghdad.(See my essay for [September 2016](#).)
5. Beginning in August 2014, my essays each month have chronicled suicide bombings, car bombs, kidnappings, and other horrible crimes in Iraq. Such attacks have become an almost routine part of life in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. These continuing attacks are an indication that civilization has collapsed in Iraq.

I conclude that the government of Iraq is dysfunctional and unworthy of assistance. But the Iraqi people do *not* deserve to suffer at the hands of the barbaric ISIL terrorists. Furthermore, ISIL in Iraq and Syria must be annihilated to protect neighboring nations from future invasion by ISIL terrorists, as ISIL expands their caliphate.

It will take years to fix the defects in the Iraqi army, while effective troops on the ground are needed *now* — truly were needed back in January 2014 — to prevent ISIL from capturing more cities and infrastructure. This lack of competent ground forces in Iraq is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

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## Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## U.S. War on Terror

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

The phrase "war against terrorism" was first used by U.S. President George W. Bush in a

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

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

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

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

The U.S. war against terrorism began in Afghanistan in 2001. Fifteen years later, the U.S. Military is still fighting against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, with *no* end in sight. On 15 October 2015, Obama postponed the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan until sometime after the year 2016. The next U.S. president will inherit 5500 U.S. Military personnel in Afghanistan in January 2017. [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#) (commentary). On 6 July 2016, in response to an apparently worsening situation in Afghanistan, Obama decided to leave 8400 U.S. Military personnel in Afghanistan in January 2017. [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

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

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

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

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

- Orlando ([June 2016](#)).

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

- "Are airstrikes successfully weakening ISIS?," [PBS](#), 1 May 2016. (Doug Ollivant interviewed by Soledad O'Brien. "We are hearing some reports, that actually now is what ISIL is telling people that they're talking to on social media: Don't come here [to Iraq or Syria]. Stay home. .... But that's obviously something we're just as concerned about, if not more so, are these radical jihadists in their home countries doing these lone wolf or very small group attacks. .... This is bad news particularly for Europe, where a much larger percentage of these foreign fighters come from....")
- Colin P. Clarke & Chad C. Serena, "Commentary: Islamic State may be down, but it's far from out," [Reuters](#), 25 May 2016. ("... Islamic State leaders could instruct would-be jihadists to remain home and launch attacks there.")
- "CIA chief: IS working to send operatives to the West," [Associated Press](#) 15 June 2016. ("CIA Director John Brennan will tell Congress on Thursday [16 June] that Islamic State militants are training and attempting to deploy operatives for further attacks on the West and will rely more on guerrilla-style tactics to compensate for their territorial losses." "Brennan also noted the group's call for followers to conduct so-called lone-wolf attacks in their home countries.")
- "White House says Baghdad attacks strengthen U.S. resolve in Iraq," [Reuters](#), 3 July 2016. (Brennan told Congress in June: "To compensate for territorial losses [in Iraq and Syria], ISIL (Islamic State) will probably rely more on guerrilla tactics, including high-profile attacks outside territory it holds.")
- "US official says anti-Islamic State forces gaining momentum," [Associated Press](#), 28 June 2016. (Brett McGurk told the U.S. the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "more 'lone wolf' style attacks such as the one in Orlando are possible as the Islamic State loses territory, ....")
- "Islamic State's 'lone wolf' attacks to persist in West despite territorial losses in Middle East," [Washington Times](#), 28 June 2016. (Brett McGurk: "Islamic State officials are telling recruits in the West to stay put and conduct attacks at home rather than travel to the Salafist group's base in Syria, where its control is increasingly under threat.")
- "Germany girds for potential spike in Islamic State attacks in Europe," [Reuters](#), 28 June 2016. (German Interior Minister Thomas De Maiziere: "... we fear that Islamic State will externalise, transfer its activities to Europe, especially because of military losses in the region [Syria and Iraq].")
- "As ISIS Loses Land, It Gains Ground in Overseas Terror," [NY Times](#), 3 July 2016.
- "Islamic State's ambitions and allure grow as territory shrinks," [Washington Post](#),

3 July 2016. ("U.S. intelligence officials say battlefield setbacks in Iraq and Syria appear to have driven the Islamic State's leaders to speed up their timeline for attacks abroad.")

- "More than 140 killed in Islamic State's worst ever bomb attack in the Iraqi capital," [Washington Post](#), 4 July 2016. ("U.S. officials have warned that the [Islamic State] group is likely to intensify its attacks overseas as it loses ground in Iraq and Syria, but civilians in the Middle East continue to bear the brunt of the campaign of bombings.")
- "Inside ISIS: Quietly preparing for the loss of the 'caliphate'," [Associated Press](#), 13 July 2016. ("U.S. counterterrorism experts believe the mass-casualty attacks in Istanbul and Baghdad in the past month were largely a response to [ISIL's] military reversals in Iraq and Syria." "... [ISIL]'s highly decentralized nature ensures that it will remain dangerous for some time to come, according to current and former U.S. officials and terrorism experts.")
- "As 'caliphate' shrinks, Islamic State looks to global attacks," [Reuters](#), 13:08 GMT, 31 July 2016.
- President Obama at 4 Aug 2016 press conference at Pentagon: "In fact, the decline of ISIL in Syria and Iraq appears to be causing it to shift to tactics that we've seen before — an even greater emphasis on encouraging high-profile terrorist attacks, including in the United States." [Pentagon](#). See also [Associated Press](#).

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

Soon ISIL will be defeated in Mosul Iraq and Raqqa Syria. Some people in the U.S. Government apparently expect ISIL to be defeated and disappear. But ISIL will remain alive as a brand of Islamic terrorism, which will inspire attacks worldwide.

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This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria45.pdf>  
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and my links to historical documents.

[my homepage](#)