

# Syria & Iraq: July 2017

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## Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 44 essays on Syria. That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

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

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

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

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

I use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) for events in Europe and Syria. 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.

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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 Sheikoun and Khan Shaykhun — in Idlib province. For a detailed history of events in April, see my essay for [April 2017](#).

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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. On 9 Sep 2016, North Korea detonated a fifth nuclear weapon, which was more energetic than any of their previous weapon tests. And on 4 July 2017, North Korea successfully tested an ICBM that could hit Alaska. Each time, the United Nations Security Council condemned 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 August 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) published a death toll for the month of July.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2477 persons during the month of July 2017 and they were distributed as following:

- Civilian casualties: 656 including 154 children under the age of eighteen, and 110 citizen women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
  - 149 including 45 children and 40 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria.
  - 31 including 6 children and 4 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.
  - 21 including 1 child and 9 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
  - 22 including a child were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
  - 8 were executed by the "Islamic State" organization.
  - 32 including 1 child and 6 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells launched by the "Islamic State" organization and by the fire of its machineguns.
  - 289 including 68 children and 42 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the international coalition.
  - 8 including were killed in the detonating of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
  - 6 including 2 children were killed by Syria Democratic Forces.
  - 43 including 15 children and 3 citizen women were killed in landmine explosions.
  - 16 including 1 child and 1 citizen woman were killed in unknown circumstances.
  - 16 including 6 children and 1 citizen woman were killed during clashes between the Islamic Factions.
  - 2 persons were killed by Hayyaat Tahrir al-Sham.
  - 6 including 2 children and a citizen woman were killed by Turkish shelling.
- [Military casualties: 1821, killed as follows:]
  - Syrian fighters of the rebel and Islamic Factions and the Syria Democratic Forces and other movements and organizations: 570
  - The regime forces: 255
  - Members of popular the committees, NDF and gunmen loyal to the regime of Syrian nationality: 320
  - Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 16
  - Fighters loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities, most of them are



- of the Shiite sect: 47
- 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: 595

"About 2500 people were killed in July 2017," [SOHR](#), 1 August 2017. [Formatting of military casualties as indented list by Standler.]

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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 2477 during July 2017 — during the ceasefire that began at the end of December 2016. The imperfect ceasefire has reduced fatalities by approximately 40% 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* 333,000.

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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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### **July 2017: Turkey and Syria**

On 18 July 2017, the U.S. Military was astounded when [Anadolu](#) news agency, which is operated by the Turkish government, published the location of ten secret U.S. bases in northern Syria. The publication increases the risk of harm to U.S. military personnel, and also harms French soldiers posted there. [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#); [FRANCE24](#); (Normally, I would *not* link to publication of secret information that would harm U.S. troops, but anyone can search Google and find the article at Anadolu. Thanks to our so-called allies in Turkey, the information is *no* longer secret. When I looked on the night of 20 July, the story appears to have been removed from the Anadolu website.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 10 December 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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## Isolation of Qatar

It has been known at least since the year 2013 that Qatar was funding Islamic terrorists (e.g., Al-Qaeda, Nusra in Syria, ISIL, Hamas in Palestine, Muslim Brotherhood). On 5 June 2017, a group of four Arab nations (i.e., Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain) suddenly severed diplomatic recognition of Qatar. [Associated Press](#); [New York Times](#).

Saudi Arabian Airlines, EgyptAir, Etihad and Emirates in UAE, and other airlines in the four nations cancelled all flights to/from Doha, Qatar. Qatar Airlines then suspended all flights to the four nations. [Reuters](#). Many of the residents in Qatar are citizens of other Arab nations. With the suspension of airline service to those other Arab nations, they will need to fly an indirect route that includes a change of airlines in some third nation (e.g., Turkey, Europe).

Qatar imports most of its food from Saudi Arabia and UAE, which ended food shipments to Qatar. [Reuters](#). That forced Qatar to begin negotiations with Iran and Turkey for food exports to Qatar. [Reuters](#). The Gulf nations are concerned about Qatar's friendly relationship with Iran, but ironically the Gulf nations pushed Qatar closer to Iran when the Gulf nations blocked food shipments to Qatar.

There are tantalizing hints that the incident that precipitated the diplomatic crisis was a computer hacker planted a bogus news story at the Qatar state news agency website. On Friday, 2 June, [Al-Jazeera](#) in Qatar reported that the FBI was assisting with an investigation of the hacker. On 6 June, [Reuters](#) reported that FBI personnel were in Qatar "since last week" to assist with an investigation of "hackers had posted fake remarks by the emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, that purportedly had him criticizing some leaders of fellow Gulf Arab states and calling for an easing of tensions with regional foe Iran." On 7 June, [The Guardian](#) reported that the FBI had found that Russian hackers — perhaps commissioned by some Gulf nation — had planted the fake news story.

What is the U.S. Government's role/position in the dispute with Qatar?

On 6 June 2017, Trump issued a series of tweets that appeared to take credit for the Arab nations ostracizing Qatar.

During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar — look!

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 08:06 EDT, 6 June 2017.

So good to see the Saudi Arabia visit with the King and 50 countries already paying off. They said they would take a hard line on funding...

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 09:36 EDT, 6 June 2017.

...extremism, and all reference was pointing to Qatar. Perhaps this will be the beginning of the end to the horror of terrorism!

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 09:44 EDT, 6 June 2017.

On 9 June 2017, the U.S. Secretary of State urged ending the blockade of Qatar:

Now, the situation in the Arabian Gulf over the last few days is troubling to the United States, the region, and to many people who are directly affected. ....

....

.... We ask that there be no further escalation by the parties in the region. We call on Qatar to be responsive to the concerns of its neighbors. Qatar has a history of supporting groups that have spanned the spectrum of political expression, from

activism to violence. The emir of Qatar has made progress in halting financial support and expelling terrorist elements from his country, but he must do more and he must do it more quickly.

.... We call on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt to ease the blockade against Qatar. ....

.....

We support the emir of Kuwait's efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to this agreement and progress toward eliminating all forms of support for terrorism — military, financial, moral, or ideological. The U.S. will support these mediation efforts along with the emir of Kuwait.

Rex W. Tillerson, "Remarks on the Middle East," [State Dept](#), 9 June 2017.

Less than one hour after Tillerson's statement, Trump held a press conference at the White House, where Trump said:

I addressed a summit of more than 50 Arab and Muslim leaders — a unique meeting in the history of nations — where key players in the region agreed to stop supporting terrorism, whether it be financial, military or even moral support.

The nation of Qatar, unfortunately, has historically been a funder of terrorism at a very high level, and in the wake of that conference, nations came together and spoke to me about confronting Qatar over its behavior. So we had a decision to make: Do we take the easy road, or do we finally take a hard but necessary action? We have to stop the funding of terrorism. I decided, along with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, our great generals and military people, the time had come to call on Qatar to end its funding — they have to end that funding — and its extremist ideology in terms of funding.

I want to call on all other nations to stop immediately supporting terrorism. Stop teaching people to kill other people. Stop filling their minds with hate and intolerance. I won't name other countries, but we are not done solving the problem, but we will solve that problem. Have no choice.

This is my great priority because it is my first duty as President to keep our people safe. Defeating ISIS and other terror organizations is something I have emphasized all during my campaign and right up until the present. To do that, stop funding, stop teaching hate, and stop the killing.

For Qatar, we want you back among the unity of responsible nations. We ask Qatar, and other nations in the region to do more and do it faster.

I want to thank Saudi Arabia, and my friend, King Salman, and all of the countries who participated in that very historic summit. It was truly historic. There has never been anything like it before and perhaps there never will be again. Hopefully, it will be the beginning of the end of funding terrorism. It will, therefore, be the beginning of the end to terrorism. No more funding.

Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump and President Iohannis of Romania in a

Joint Press Conference," [White House](#), begins 14:51 EDT, 9 June 2017.

The [Washington Post](#) observed that Trump appeared to undercut Tillerson. Trump appears to believe that Qatar deserves to be blockaded.

On 21 June 2017, the U.S. Secretary of State attempted to move the Qatar crisis toward a resolution, by urging that a list of "reasonable and actionable" demands be "soon" given to Qatar. [State Dept.](#)

On 23 June 2017, Saudi Arabia and 3 other Gulf nations sent Qatar a list of 13 demands, including that Qatar terminate its *Al-Jazeera* broadcaster. [Associated Press](#); [The Guardian](#); [CNN](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#). I suspect that the criticism of Qatar for funding Islamic terrorists is just pretext, and the real reason the Gulf nations are angry with Qatar is *Al-Jazeera's* reporting of news.

On 5 July 2017, Qatar rejected the list of 13 demands. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#). Some of these demands were plainly unreasonable and *not* part of a good-faith attempt to settle the dispute.

On 10 July 2017, Rex Tillerson, the U.S. Secretary of State, began shuttle diplomacy between Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia to resolve the dispute. [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

On 11 July 2017, Tillerson negotiated a written memorandum of understanding in which Qatar will stop funding terrorist groups. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 13 July 2017, Tillerson departed from the region, after failing to solve the Qatar crisis in four days. Saudi Arabia continues to insist that Qatar accept the list of 13 demands. [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

On 16 July, the [Washington Post](#) reported that anonymous U.S. Intelligence officials had determined that "the United Arab Emirates orchestrated the hacking of Qatari government news and social media sites in order to post incendiary false quotes attributed to Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani, in late May that sparked the ongoing upheaval between Qatar and its neighbors .... The [U.S. Intelligence] officials said it remains unclear whether the UAE carried out the hacks itself or contracted to have them done.". Naturally, the UAE denied hacking the Qatari websites. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Gulf News](#); [The National](#).

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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, French president Hollande, U.S. president Obama, and U.S. Secretary of State 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.

Trump's decision in June 2017 to end the secret CIA program that supplied weapons to rebels in Syria (see [below](#)) may be an indication that it is now futile to try to depose Assad.

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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 (1) Assad, (2) someone from the opposition who has *no* experience in government and who has difficulty making decisions, or (3) 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.

On 22 June 2017, the new French president, Emmanuel Macron, declared that removing Assad was *not* a priority for the French government. Macron said: "Because no one has introduced me to [Assad's] legitimate successor!" — apparently a comment on the lack of suitable leaders for Syria. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [The Guardian](#).

On 3 July 2017, a report in [Foreign Policy](#) said the U.S. Government is now focused on defeating ISIL in Syria. *Foreign Policy* said: "Tillerson's position reflects a recognition that Syria's government, backed by Russia and Iran, is emerging as the likely political victor in the country's six year long civil war. It also marks a further retreat from the 2012 U.N.-brokered Geneva Communiqué ... which called for the establishment of a transitional government with members of the regime and the opposition." [Al-Arabiya](#) noticed this report.

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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.

My essay for [May 2017](#) mentions that de Mistura held negotiations in Geneva for only four days during May.

My essay for [June 2017](#) mentions that there were *no* negotiations in either Astana or Geneva during June. The three guarantors of the 4 May Astana agreement failed to meet their own deadline on 4 June, and continued to fail during the entire month of June.

Because the third U.N. Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, frequently refers to the N<sup>th</sup> round of negotiations, I posted a [table](#) of all the rounds of negotiations in Geneva. This table reminds us how rarely the parties meet in Geneva and their failure to accomplish anything.

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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, at which the guarantors created four safe zones inside Syria.

Full-text of all publicly disclosed ceasefire agreements for Syria, including the Astana

agreements, is available at [rbs0.com](http://rbs0.com)

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The written Astana agreement on 4 May specifically promises in ¶7 that “The Guarantors shall take steps to complete by 4 June 2017 the preparation of the maps of the de-escalation areas and security zones and to separate the armed opposition groups from the terrorist groups ....” But 4 June came and went without any agreement on detailed maps of the "de-escalation areas" (i.e., safe zones) and without separation of terrorists from other opposition groups. Legally, this is a breach of the 4 May agreement by the so-called guarantors (i.e., Russia, Turkey, Iran).

The written 4 May Astana agreement also mentions "checkpoints and observation posts", but the first deployment of Russian military police was on 24 July.

The 4 May Astana agreement has a glaring defect in that it does *not* mention punishment for violations of the agreement.

#### **4 July 2017: first day of Astana meeting**

[Reuters](#) reported that "Armed opposition leader Muhammad Alloush, who led the opposition delegation in earlier rounds of the Astana process, is not attending the current talks." Reuters said "[Russian negotiator Alexander] Lavrentyev told reporters that Moscow and its partners were still discussing detailed maps and other conditions related to the Idlib and southern zones, while the borders of two other zones, in Homs province and near Damascus, had been agreed." Reuters also reports that Russian military police might begin enforcing the ceasefire in 3 weeks, assuming the three guarantors reach agreement on the exact boundaries of the four zones.

#### **5 July 2017: end of Astana meeting**

[Reuters](#) reported that "Russia, Turkey and Iran failed in talks on Wednesday [5 July] to finalise an agreement on creating four de-escalation zones in Syria after Ankara raised objections, diplomats said." Another meeting of the three guarantors is scheduled for "the final week of August". At that time, they will be three months past their 4 June deadline.

The Associated Press did *not* report any news articles from Astana on 4-5 July 2017. But in an article about Russian cruise missile strikes in Syria, the [Associated Press](#) said: "Meanwhile, a two-day round of Syria cease-fire talks in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, ended without conclusive results. The Syrian government and the opposition blamed each other for the failure to reach agreement. .... A cease-fire declared in May [2017], has been repeatedly violated."

#### **5 July 2017: comments by de Mistura on failure in Astana**

On 5 July 2017, de Mistura again gave a press conference in which he was full of optimism, despite the failure of the guarantors during the past two months to agree on borders for the de-escalation zones.

I must say, we from the UN do appreciate the persistence, the determination the constant hard work of the Astana Guarantors and all the countries who are being involved in this effort of de-escalation of violence and the strengthening of the ceasefire in Syria. We have tried already three times you know with the ceasefire in Syria in the last period of the last three years, so we really want to give a chance to what is being done here and we believe that efforts have been producing progress. There has been progress during this last three days but we heard it from particularly Ambassador Lavrentiev, there is more time if needed and required.

We have some experience about this. In Geneva, we have seen more than once we are familiar with the fact that the complexity of a conflict like this require a lot of patience, strategic patience, determination and insisting in wanting to constantly make even small steps in the right direction. Astana is particularly meant for producing a ceasefire, what they call a de-escalation, and that is why we believe that Astana does deserve patience and support, and there is more energy and time required — and we are with them in trying to make sure this will happen. You have heard the next appointment would be in July, eventually in August, but it would be a lot of work that would need to be done. The efforts by everyone involved are continuing, must continue, and the UN will continue offering his own expertise and support to the guarantors in the pursuit of de-escalation in Syria because that is exactly what the Syrian people are requiring.

There are also confidence-building measures, you heard two of them — and they are very important for the Syrians and for all of us and they are both related to what is considered as a priority in Syria. One is the issue about humanitarian demining — and our own team of UNMAS has offered and is offering his own support for what we believe in here is almost an agreed paper; it needs to be translated into action. The other one is about detainees, abductees and people who disappeared during the conflict which is mentioned specifically in [Resolution] 2254.

Now in conclusion, there are two tasks which we are all working on into different and complementary and mutually supportive action. One is Astana, which will continue and is continuing to make even sometimes small but very clear progress related to the situation of reducing the violence in Syria — but we all know, everybody agrees, the de-escalation by itself is an interim arrangement. What is needed in order to sustain is progress on the political side. That is why we are, and I confirmed today, starting again a new round of Geneva intra-Syrian talks on Monday the 10th of July, and we look forward to then use even the current progress in the Astana process in order to make sure that the atmosphere leading to some progress on the political side will take place during the next round.

....

QUESTION: In Astana, we were waiting for an agreement and there was not. Is this going to affect the next round?

SdM: First of all I have to be, I mean frankly, if there is anyone who can say and explain to all of you and to myself how complicated it is any progress in a conflict

which has been lasting now six years and which has produced terrible suffering and impacting the region, it is us, me if you want, today. Therefore, I think you should not be disappointed. We are not, we of course, we realized that there were more expectations on this Astana meeting but we also realize that every step in this discussion even in Astana, like we have in Geneva, are small steps but are important ones it would have been bad if we went back and we didn't have de-escalation zones. We do have them we did have, I was present, a signature of a document. What is required now is the implementation and as you know as usual, the devil is in the details. So let's not downgrade what we have seen today which is some progress but I understand there was more expectations. Is this going to help or impact Geneva? Yes, and I believe that it would have not helped if you had made no progress or things would have gone backwards. You can imagine having a Geneva meeting in the middle of escalation instead of de-escalation. That would've not helped. I don't see that happening I hope and therefore I believe this meeting is, as we always thought, an opportunity of mutually supporting Geneva and Geneva supporting Astana because as I said, without a political process even de-escalation is not sustainable.

....

If you have covered other conflicts as we have done — I've done it now I have worked in 19 conflicts and this is by far the most complicated one — you would agree with me that four rounds [in Astana] is not worrisome. There has been conflicts which have taken 10, 15 rounds of discussion and then suddenly, one day, you and I will discover that there are news, that the actual solution is in the progress. That's what I have experienced that's why I would not count how many rounds and then based on that saying after four rounds or five rounds we should be disappointed or pessimistic [with Astana].

Staffan de Mistura, "Note to Correspondents: Transcript of the press conference by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), 5 July 2017.

My comment is that de Mistura has lost sight of the fact that people are *dying* in Syria at the rate of more than 2000/month. If it takes the guarantors four months to do what they promised to do by 4 June, then there will be an unnecessary more than 6000 deaths in Syria. In my opinion, the guarantors should be meeting more frequently to create a real ceasefire sooner.

Notice also that de Mistura ignores that he postponed meetings in Geneva, to wait for real results from Astana. But then the guarantors *failed* to produce results in Astana. While negotiations in Astana proceed at a glacial pace, people are dying in Syria at the rate of more than 2000/month.

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## Negotiations in Geneva

More than one year ago, de Mistura was calling for "concrete results" from negotiations in Geneva.

For example, in March 2016 de Mistura said:



Next week will be the last week of the second round [of negotiations in Geneva]. The first one was a mini-round as you know but the mini-round was very productive. It produced Munich, and Munich produced the two task forces: one on humanitarian and one on ceasefire, not a small thing after five years. But this time next week will be important because we will be aiming at building a minimum common platform of not only principles but points that could lead to a better understanding in what direction we will be going for the political transition, which in my opinion will be the main focus of the next meeting, which will be in April, and we are already aiming very clearly for that. Remember there will be three additional ones, **after which we need to see concrete results**. When you compare it to five years of horrible war I think it is quite a short term ambition, but doable at this stage and certainly where we intend to get.

Staffan de Mistura, "Note to Correspondents: Transcript of press encounter by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), 18 March 2016. [Boldface added by Standler.]

For example, in April 2016 de Mistura said:

But frankly the next round of the talks need to be quite concrete in the direction of a political process leading to a real beginning of a political transition — political process leading to a concrete or real beginning of a political transition. Now since this is real stuff, I need to verify the international and regional stakeholders' position in order to see how is the level of critical positive mass leading to **concrete results in the next round of talks**.

Staffan de Mistura, "Note to Correspondents: Transcript of press conference by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), 7 April 2016. [Boldface added by Standler.]

In July 2017, there have been *no* concrete results from any of the negotiations in Geneva. But de Mistura was correct in 2016 to call for concrete results.

### 10 July 2017: Day Nr. 49

On the first day of the seventh round of negotiations in Geneva, de Mistura held a press conference. His remarks were mostly vague and indefinite, so I am quoting only a few sentences here.

... we have been saying that there are lots of things happening on the ground and in the political environment. So things are evolving quite rapidly in this context, not only on the ground, you can see it and on the political, regional and geopolitical environment. We all perhaps — and this is a personal consideration, but I think that I can be allowed to actually make some personal analysis — I think perhaps we are witnessing a phase of simplifying the most complex conflict of our time.

....

This de-escalation process needs, however, to be considered as interim. Let me underline the word interim, and with a clear understanding that is not going to undermine ultimately the Syrian national unity, territorial integrity. Otherwise this means partition, and I know this is something that no one, at least people we talk with,

would like to see. It also means progress on the humanitarian access — that is the de-escalation — detainees, abductees and missing people and progress on the issue of humanitarian demining.

....

So back to where we are on the current talks, we are not expecting therefore breakthroughs, because we are part of all this, and we want to be supporting all this.

....

QUESTION: You are an optimist and if you look at the big picture would you say that we are now seeing the end of this war?

SdM: You are as usual asking a very difficult question, because you prefaced it by the fact that I am an optimist, otherwise I would not have been able to continue working on the UN missions in war conflict for 47 years now. So you have to read it through that light. Therefore, I have to be very careful. We have been together disappointed many times during these last four years and Syrians have been disappointed during the last six years. What I can tell you is that we are seeing several stars coinciding in a way, in a certain direction, both on the ground, regionally and internationally, we all knew it, there is a higher potential than we have seen in the past for progress, I will stop there. The next step is to see how the de-escalation works, how the phase one, the one we just mention and how that becomes conducive to phase three. By the way all those phases that I've been just analyzing myself, can be quite compressed, like in history, sometimes things happen very fast, sometimes very slow.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of press conference by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 10 July 2017.

### **11 July 2017: Day Nr. 50**

De Mistura told [RIA-Novosti](#) that the Syria Kurds ought to participate in the drafting of a new constitution for Syria. [Reuters](#). My comment is that it should be obvious that *all* ethnic groups in Syria should be allowed to participate, but the HNC is apparently unwilling to include the Kurds.

### **12 July 2017: Day Nr. 51**

On 12 July, there was *no* news articles about the negotiations in Geneva.

### **13 July 2017: Day Nr. 52**

The so-called opposition at the Geneva negotiations is mostly the HNC, an ad hoc group formed in Saudi Arabia in December 2015. However, the opposition also includes two small groups that were formed in Moscow and Cairo. Assad's delegation arbitrarily refuses to meet face-to-face with the opposition, until the opposition unifies into one group. This is one of many little irritants that increases de Mistura's work, as he needs to meet separately with

(1) Assad's delegation and (2) the three opposition delegations.

On Thursday, 13 July 2017, de Mistura gave a press conference in which he said that the opposition might unify "soon" and then there would be direct negotiations with everyone in the same room. The United Nations did *not* post a transcript of de Mistura's remarks to journalists. Reuters reported:

Syria's government and opposition negotiators could soon hold face-to-face talks for the first time, U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura said on Thursday [13 July], the penultimate day of a round of peace talks in Geneva.

....

The glacial pace of the Geneva talks, which some observers see as simply a way of keeping an avenue for peace talks open in case of an unexpected breakthrough, owes much to the fact that de Mistura has to meet each delegation separately.

Some diplomats suspect the Moscow and Cairo platforms, which are much less opposed to President Bashar al-Assad than the HNC is, are little more than a mechanism created by Assad's ally Russia to prevent direct negotiations and force the HNC to dilute its stance.

"It's always been a trap for the opposition laid by the Russians, through their continual needling of the HNC about there being more than one opposition, which is mostly nonsense with the relative weight of these groups," a Western diplomat said. "If the HNC succeed in defusing this trap, and coming together with the Moscow and Cairo groups in some way, then it puts Ja'afari under quite a lot of pressure."

Another Western diplomat said it was a "Russian narrative" that the various groups needed to unite.

Tom Miles & Stephanie Nebehay, "U.N. sees direct Syria talks soon but not pushing for it," [Reuters](#), 10:30 GMT, 13 July 2017.

Reuters may have explained why de Mistura is scheduling Geneva meetings infrequently (i.e., once every two months) and for short durations (i.e., only 4 or 5 days): "simply a way of keeping an avenue for peace talks open in case of an unexpected breakthrough". The infrequent, short meetings allow de Mistura to assess the willingness of the parties to genuinely negotiate.

### 14 July 2017: Day Nr. 53

14 July was the final day of the seventh round of negotiations in Geneva. Of course, *nothing* was achieved during the seventh round. De Mistura held a press conference on 14 July and the U.N. Office in Geneva posted a transcript:

SdM: Good evening and again, sorry for this hour, but I just ended a few minutes ago a very, for me, an important Security Council meeting. It was a meeting in which I detected, first of all, with great gratitude a complete, total and unanimous support to what we are trying to do here — and second, a clear indication of the importance of

one single negotiating process in Geneva. Three, something that I had not seen for a long time in the Security Council: quite a change in the tone among them, between them, while addressing this. It is clear that what has been happening in the Astana, the Amman de-escalation initiative, the meeting in Hamburg between the US President and the President of the Russian Federation, yesterday the meeting between President Macron and President Trump and the focus that they all are trying now to have together about some priorities, and the idea of having some type of the common urgency, is certainly helping the atmosphere but also helping our job.

So as I told you we are not working in a vacuum, luckily, and all what I have been seeing recently is just the opposite. They seem to be all interested in making sure that what we are doing, which is a preparatory work, we've said it, is going to be fruitful soon when all stars getting closer to each other. So let me talk about the current seventh round. We have just concluded it, and we have made, as we were expecting and hoping, **incremental progress — no breakthrough, no breakdown, no one walking out, incremental progress.**

You remember that in the previous round we had established a technical consultative mechanism, which is one way to actually get deeper into issues — why did we do it, why are we doing it?

First, because we don't need to go technically in detail on many subjects that are not necessarily the most contentious ones, so that when we are ready with the real negotiation or a substantive negotiation, which may be not that far, we have taken care of a lot.

We also needed some way to assist the opposition to start working closer together, and we have, I believe, advanced on both goals, and I think the technical and consultative mechanism is actually proven to be quite effective in preparing the ground for the negotiations.

With the opposition, I think we have built on the good technical sessions that we have been having last week in Lausanne, and we had here as well in Geneva. Experts from HNC, Cairo platform and Moscow platform with the help of our experts have continued technical work by focusing on the basket three issues related to elections for instance, which had not been touched in the past. They have been identified quite a lot of broad areas of possible common approach, in addition to this technical agreement or on the progress, I would say, there have been a genuine effort among them to build something they didn't have before, trust, mutual trust.

I would have not have imagined two months ago that they would be sitting in such an intensive and constructive way together, in confidence. I was pleased in fact, and I told you already, that there are leaders actually attended with me at the beginning, the leaders of the three opposition delegations, the invitation for a constructive working lunch, which already gave me the feeling that they intended to go further.

It is positive also that the three delegations now have asked us and wish to meet again shortly in July to continue together this type of joint work, in order to be back to ready

for when — and I tell you now — **we intend to have the next round in September, early September.**

For the Government I have been continuing working with them on trying to have some discussion regarding what had already been discussed during round six, especially regarding the so-called living 12 points, that had been discussed also here with them at the technical level. They gave us their own views, and we have been able to identify some matters which are of importance for addressing the constitutional issue.

Regarding the political talks, the government also conveyed to us the readiness to engage the UN in the next round on all four baskets, we have been asking them then to get prepared for that, of course.

One good interesting thing that I noticed during this round was that none of the invitees have had any problem in addressing an issue that everybody outside has been discussing. Look at Paris yesterday, or in Hamburg, or elsewhere, or by the way, in Paris there was a remembering also of the fact it is one year after Nice attack by terrorists. Both government and the opposition, therefore, have been quite willing to outline how they are combatting UN-designated terrorist entities in Syria.

And when we closed today since I felt that there was an expectation for the UN to also indicate where we are on the fight against terrorism, which is becoming the main issue being discussed at the highest possible level elsewhere, and since I feel it should not be the ownership of any of the parties — as you know the government has been often saying we are looking at this as the main focus — no one else is doing it, I think I found the opportunity this time to actually clarify some thoughts about it.

1. One, the fight against terrorists is fight against those defined by the Security Council — okay?, we're not going to select who is a terrorist here — it is those which have been identified by the Security Council, and the fight against those terrorists identify by the Security Council in Syria, on the Syria issue, is very clear. There has been a clear Security Council resolution on that, and it is a priority.
2. Two, we want to see the full implementation — and there I think there has been a slow, very slow reaction so far and we need to see it now -, full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions including the ones about arming and financing terrorism, terrorists as indicated by the Security Council, those including the movement of foreign terrorist fighters.
3. Three, we expect to see increasing and accelerating efforts against Security Council-listed terrorists in Syria and whenever feasible some type of coordination of those efforts. We have seen in fact some of this happening in fighting against ISIS by the international coalition and their own allies in Raqqa, and we have seen the government and its allies doing it in areas around Aleppo, Homs and Hama, where terrorists identified by the Security Council are present — not wherever any [kind of] fighter is [present].

- But the fight against terrorism must be accompanied,
4. point number four, by concrete efforts to protect civilians, it must not be at any moment a possibility, or an opportunity for using any type of prohibited weapons or weapons causing mass civilian casualties, and it must be done in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law.
  5. It must never serve as a pretext to deny humanitarian access to any civilian population.
  6. Civilian people who happen to be unfortunate, unlucky enough to be under the control of any of those terrorist organizations listed by the UN, should not be punished twice by also not having any type of humanitarian access.
  7. And seven, last but not least — and that is a lesson we should have learned from the experience in Iraq —, the best guarantee against terrorism in Syria is an agreed political solution through an inclusive UN-led transitional political process guided by the Security Council resolution 2254 — otherwise in three month-time after Raqqa, there would be a new entity coming up and they would be calling themselves differently and we will be back to that. Instead, an inclusive political process means that those who feel disenfranchised will not be tempted by supporting or tolerating those who believe in the terrorists.

We are engaging Syrian from all walks of life in the context. We are obviously very keen in continuing including, and we did this time, women and civil society. The Women Advisory Board — we have consulted them more than once, and they have been extremely helpful, and they have been advising us also on the technical meetings. And now that we are having a series of meetings with the Civil Society Support Room team, who are travelling both in Beirut and in Gaziantep and in other locations.

Next steps, I told you **I intend to convene intra-Syrian talks again in early September**, and I have asked the parties to be ready to offer clear, substantive positions on issues across all four baskets — and we hope that the we would be at least pushing them to sit in the same room. We will see by that time the international momentum that is benefiting our work and is helping us may be able to actually push all sides to finally sit in the same room and start talking about substance.

Thank you I will be stopping there, and then I will take questions.

....

QUESTION: I recall between the second and third round you made it very clear that, ahead of the third round, you wanted all sides to come to the table with specific proposals on governance and political transition. Here we are after all these months. The regime side said anything in any meeting at any round which gives you the impression that they will, at some point, tackle political transition and governance? What is your level of optimism that they will address that specific topic?

SdM: If I had to base myself on what I've heard during this round I would say no, I

don't have an indication. But what I do believe is that what are going to be the next steps of the international community wanting to see an acceleration of the end of this conflict, may help the government to be ready, and I've been asking them for the next round, to be ready to address the political process. In other words all four baskets.

....

QUESTION: Ambassador Jaafari left saying he didn't recognize the opposition as a legitimate partner in these talks and the HNC is now saying that they see the whole process is in danger because of the refusal of the regime to sit down and talk. Is this not an insurmountable position?

SdM: In every negotiation — and particularly when we are in the so-called pre-negotiating phase —, there is some posturing and there are some pre-established statements that seem to be sometimes coming back. The facts are what count and the facts are that, in Astana, I saw the government sitting across the same table of the opposition. We saw them in this building and we have been having quite an intense discussion with both sides on subjects that both sides are interested in. So I don't find that, as a mediator, an insurmountable problem. I find it quite psychological until you will see perhaps them sitting together and even agreeing. Until then, all sides will continue posturing, positioning publicly that their line is absolutely untouchable. It is actually a negotiating technique.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of press conference by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, at the end of the 7th round of intra-Syrian talks," [U.N. Geneva](#), 14 July 2017. (first posted 16 July 2017). [Boldface and indented list of seven points added by Standler.]

I have four comments:

1. On 27 June 2017, de Mistura told the U.N. Security Council: "I also believe it would be important to aim for a further round towards end August or early September, in advance of the September General Assembly meeting." [U.N.](#)

On 14 July 2017, the date for the next round in Geneva seems to be early September 2017. By not scheduling the next round for the last week of July, or sometime in early August, de Mistura has wasted at least 50 days at a time when people are dying in the Syrian civil war at the rate of more than 2000/month.

2. On 14 July 2017, [Reuters](#) reported "De Mistura said Assad's negotiators had not given any indication that they were willing to discuss transition." Why should they? The "political transition" was included by Kofi Annan in the 30 June 2012 Geneva Communiqué, at a time when the conventional wisdom amongst Assad-haters was that Assad would soon be defeated in the civil war. But since October 2015, Assad has been winning the Syrian civil war. Moreover, Assad is the least worst leader for Syria, given the fragmented and disorganized opposition with a glaringly conspicuous lack of leadership. Further, Assad was re-elected to a 7-year term in June 2014, while the members of the opposition delegation(s) are unelected by anyone in Syria.

The United Nations Security Council continues to follow (e.g., Resolution 2254) the same dogma since the 30 June 2012 Geneva Communiqué, without recognizing the reality that the situation in Syria has changed and made those Resolutions obsolete. Apparently, de Mistura believes he must follow Resolution 2254 and other flawed Resolutions. But, as I said in my essay for [February 2017](#), Resolution 2254 contains the wrong agenda for Syria.

3. Whatever de Mistura decides to do, it does *not* matter. The opposition is intransigently demanding what they could not win during a six-year civil war, as well as futilely pursuing a military victory. Until de Mistura excludes the obstructionist HNC from negotiations, nothing will be accomplished in the negotiations.
4. In response to the last question quoted above, de Mistura says that "we are in the so-called pre-negotiating phase". It is strange that 18 months after meetings began at the end of January 2016, negotiations have not really begun.

On 15 July 2017, Reuters reported comments by the Russian ambassador to the United Nations:

U.N.-led Syria talks have a chance of making progress because demands for the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad have receded, Russia's ambassador in Geneva, Alexei Borodavkin, told reporters on Saturday [15 July].

....

The HNC and its backers in Western and Gulf capitals had realised that peace needed to come first, and then political reforms could be negotiated, he said.

"Assad must go" was long the mantra of the HNC and its international backers, a call flatly rejected by Russia, which is widely seen as holding the balance of power in Syria because of its military involvement and alliance with Assad.

But over the past year the opposition suffered military defeats at the hands of forces loyal to Assad, and neither U.S. President Donald Trump nor French President Emmanuel Macron is calling for his immediate ouster.

....

In the seven rounds so far, U.N. mediator Staffan de Mistura has met each side separately, a laboriously choreographed negotiation that has succeeded only in deciding what to discuss: a new constitution, reformed governance, fresh elections and fighting terrorism.

Tom Miles, "Russia sees growing acceptance of Assad as key to Syria talks," [Reuters](#), 15 July 2017.

But on 16 July, the HNC declared it was continuing to insist that Assad resign, and that the Russian ambassador was *wrong*. [Al-Arabiya](#).

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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.

My essay for [May 2017](#) reported the first month of safe zones inside Syria, and evacuations of insurgents from several towns.

My essay for [June 2017](#) mentions the continuing civil war, including the beginning of the liberation of Raqqa from ISIL, deeper involvement of the U.S. Military in Syria, and an outbreak of polio in Syria.

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### Continuing War in Syria

On 7 July 2017, the U.S., Russia, Jordan, and Israel agreed on a ceasefire in southwestern Syria, to begin at noon local time on 9 July. The [Associated Press](#) reports that Lavrov "said Russian military police will monitor the new truce." The Associated Press says this new ceasefire is *not* part of the Astana agreement. [Reuters](#) quotes former U.S. Ambassador Ford as saying neither Obama nor Trump have "no national objective for the future of Syria nor any strategy for how to secure an objective were one identified."

The new ceasefire in southwestern Syria is partly in response to concerns by Jordan and Israel that Iran (including the Iranian-sponsored Hezbollah militia from Lebanon) were planning permanent bases inside Syria. [Associated Press](#).

On 15 July, I searched Google for the full-text of this agreement, to add to my document that collects all of the public ceasefire agreements for Syria, but I could not find the text of the U.S.-Russia-Jordan agreement.

On 19 July 2017, the [Washington Post](#) reported that in June, Trump decided to end the CIA's clandestine shipment of weapons to rebels in Syria. The CIA program was begun in 2013 by Obama. The rebels were too weak and too disorganized to win the civil war. However, the U.S. shipment of weapons to rebels did prolong the Syrian civil war. *The Post* reported: "With the end of the CIA program, U.S. involvement in Syria now consists of a vigorous air campaign against the Islamic State and a Pentagon-run train-and-equip program in support of the largely Kurdish rebel force that is advancing on Islamic State strongholds in Raqqa and along the Euphrates River valley." Why did Trump end the CIA program? [Reuters](#) suggested Trump may want to improve relations with Russia. But *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* suggested that Trump may also recognize the futility of continuing to fight against Assad. The U.S. Government is now focusing on defeating ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

On 24 July 2017, Trump [tweeted](#) "The Amazon Washington Post fabricated the facts on my ending massive, dangerous, and wasteful payments to Syrian rebels fighting Assad....." My comments are that I trust *The Post* much more than I trust Trump to be accurate and truthful. If the U.S. Government would stop hiding billion-dollar military aid programs behind a wall of secrecy, then we could have an open discussion of reasons to begin and end the programs. Further, Trump admits that the military aid to the Syrian rebels was "massive, dangerous, and wasteful".

On 19 July, there was infighting amongst insurgents in Idlib province. Ahrar al-Sham seized control of the town of Sarmada from Levant Liberation Committee, also known as Tahrir al-Sham, which includes the former Nusra Front. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 20 July, infighting in Idlib province continued. [Reuters](#) reported: "around 150 fighters from the Turkey-backed Euphrates Shield operation had entered Syria at the Bab al-Hawa crossing from Turkey to support Ahrar al-Sham in its fight against the Nusra Front." [Reuters](#) observed: "Infighting has weakened the Syrian opposition since the start of the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad in 2011."

On 21 July, the U.S. Special Operations Commander, General Tony Thomas, confirmed that

the CIA had ended support for anti-Assad rebels in Syria. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [Politico](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On the morning of 24 July 2017, Ahrar al-Sham withdrew from the city of Idlib, and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (including the former Nusra Front) took control of the city of Idlib. A ceasefire between the two groups was agreed on Friday, 21 July. [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Reuters](#).

On 23 July, Assad's warplanes continued to bomb the Eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus, despite the ceasefire declared in Astana on 4 May. [Reuters](#).

On 24 July, Russia deployed military police in Eastern Ghouta, to enforce the ceasefire that was declared in Astana on 4 May. The Astana memorandum — nearly three months ago — promised monitors on the ground. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

On 25 July, the [Associated Press](#) reported Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (which includes the former Nusra Front) "is on the verge of snuffing out what remains of the country's uprising in northwestern Syria [Idlib province]".

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### July 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, 11 May, and 15 June at which a dismal and worsening situation for delivery of humanitarian aid was described.

There was *no* briefing on humanitarian aid delivery during July 2017.

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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).

At a press conference on 10 October 2016, Ban Ki-moon said he was again urging that the Security Council refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

**QUESTION:** If I could ask you, Secretary-General, you have mentioned violations of international law in Yemen. In the past, you have mentioned possible war crimes in Syria. And yet on both subjects, both wars, the Security Council has no agreement at all. They can't even come up with a statement on Yemen. They can't even agree the words of a statement. What is your message to the Security Council about their duty?

**Secretary General:** I have raised and urged the Security Council already on several times that the situation in Syria should be referred to the International Criminal Court. I am urging this message again. As far as the Yemen situation is concerned, ....

....

**QUESTION:** My question is about the ICC, about referring the question of Syria to the ICC. Are you willing to use your Article 99 authority and bring this issue to the International Criminal Court?

**Secretary General:** I already answered. I asked and urged the Security Council to bring this matter to the ICC. I am urging again.

"Secretary-General's press encounter," [U.N.](#), 10 Oct 2016.

Again, in his 18 October 2016 report, Ban called for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Recent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including on a United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy in Urum al-Kubra on 19 September, are absolutely and utterly unacceptable. There simply can be no explanation or excuse, no reason or rationale for waging war on civilians, on doctors, on children, on teachers, on humanitarian workers trying to reach those in desperate need of assistance. For the world not to pursue the perpetrators of such brutality would be a grave abdication of duty. It would deny Syrians justice and healing. It would shred the credibility of an international community that claims to be concerned about upholding our common humanity. As I have made clear in recent statements, I am gravely concerned that some of these acts of brutality are war crimes. I am therefore, once again, urging the Security Council to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/873 at ¶36 (18 Oct 2016).

In his cover letter for the October 2016 report on the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria, Ban said:

The use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic is a matter of grave concern. I am alarmed by the weakening taboo against the use of such weapons and by the possibility of their use becoming normalized in this or any conflict, present or future. In order to avoid this intolerable outcome and to ensure that there is no impunity, it is imperative that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable. I look forward to the deliberations by the Security Council on this report.

Ban Ki-moon, "Letter dated 2 November 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council," S/2016/928, 2 Nov 2016.

In his 15 November 2016 report on Syria to the U.N. Security Council, Ban said:

[¶36] The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. Horrific attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure continue unabated. Schools, hospitals and basic services have been mercilessly pummelled. Violations of the most basic tenets of international human rights and humanitarian law are rife. The senseless killing on 26 October of scores of children in a school complex in Has, Idlib governorate, is just one of the many tragic reminders that Syrians are being robbed of their future by this conflict and those fuelling it. If such horrific acts and tactics persist despite global outrage, it is largely because their authors, whether in the corridors of power or in insurgent redoubts, do not fear accountability and justice. They must be proved wrong.

....

[¶38] .... I have repeatedly called for accountability and effective investigations into allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law, including through a referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court.

[¶39] In many of my reports to the Security Council I have made the point that what is most needed in the Syrian Arab Republic is an end to the violence, in Aleppo and elsewhere, and the restoration of a nationwide cessation of hostilities. I have urged those with influence to ensure full and unimpeded humanitarian access to all civilians throughout the country. I regret that in October the Council again failed to discharge its responsibilities to uphold peace and security for the Syrian Arab Republic. ....

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/962 (15 Nov 2016).

On 15 November 2016, Assad began a new series of airstrikes on eastern Aleppo city. On 20 November, the Spokesman for the United Nations Secretary General issued the following statement about Aleppo city:

The Secretary-General condemns the reported intense air assault over the last several days that has killed and maimed scores of Syrian civilians, including children, and left eastern Aleppo without functioning hospitals. He also condemns the indiscriminate shelling that has been reported in areas of Aleppo governorate and the western parts of Aleppo city, including strikes on schools said to have killed a number of children.

The Secretary-General reminds all parties to the conflict that targeting civilians and

civilian infrastructure is a war crime. He calls on all sides to immediately cease any such attacks. Those responsible for these and other atrocities in Syria, whoever and wherever they are, must one day be brought to account.

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

"Statement attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Syria," U.N., 20 Nov 2016.

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

On 14 December 2016, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon issued his final monthly report on Syria before the end of his term as Secretary General. In S/2016/1057, he did *not* call for prosecution of war crimes and he did *not* mention referral to the International Criminal Court.

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

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

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

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

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.

In his 23 June 2017 monthly report, S/2017/541, 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." See ¶44 of his report.

My essay for [May 2016](#) collected quotations from United Nations Secretary General during 2013-14 that called for nations to *stop* sending weapons and munitions to Syria. Obama's response was to spend approximately one billion dollars a year on a secret CIA program to supply weapons to rebels in Syria. In June 2017, Trump ended this secret CIA program, as mentioned [above](#).

In his 21 July 2017 monthly report, S/2017/623, 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." See ¶41 of his report. The Secretary General sounds like a gramophone record with a defective groove that repeats itself.

### **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 June 2017.

Then on 3 July 2017, Guterres appointed Catherine Marchi-Uhel to head the Mechanism. She is a former judge in France, and was later a judge in war crimes trials in Kosovo and Cambodia. [U.N.](#); [Associated Press](#). The United Nations offered *no* explanation for the four-month delay in appointing a head of the Mechanism.

Notice that there is still *no* forum in which to try suspected Syrian war criminals.

In his 23 June 2017 monthly report, S/2017/541 at ¶44, the United Nations Secretary General said: "I continue to reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court. I also call on all Member States to support 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." The Mechanism was established in General Assembly Resolution 71/248 on 21 Dec 2016.

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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 241 Iraqi civilians killed in "terrorism, violence, and armed conflict" during July 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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### July 2017: Islamic Terrorism in Iraq

On 3 July 2017, [Reuters](#) reported: "A suicide bomber dressed as a veiled woman killed 14 people and wounded 13 others in a displacement camp west of the Iraqi capital Baghdad on Sunday [2 July], security sources said."

[UNAMI](#) reported 38 civilians killed in Baghdad province by "terrorism, violence, and armed conflict" during July 2017. Journalists seemed to ignore most of these deaths.

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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.

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 that frustrates chronicling the dysfunctional Iraqi parliament.

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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## 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).
13. On 22 June 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that the Iraqi prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, said: "It's a matter of a few days and we will announce the total liberation of Mosul." Notice he did *not* say that Mosul would actually be totally liberated, but only that he would announce the liberation.

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

**July 2017: Mosul**



My previous monthly essays have the history of the liberation of Mosul, which actually began in October 2016.

On 4 July 2017, the advance of the Iraqi army into the Old City of Mosul was hampered by large number of civilians in that location. [Reuters](#) reported: "The Iraqi military has pushed insurgents into a shrinking rectangle no more than 300 by 500 metres beside the Tigris river in Mosul; but the resistance has been fierce."

On 5 July, the United Nations estimated it would cost *more than* US\$ 1 billion to repair the basic infrastructure (e.g., "water, sewage, and electricity infrastructure and reopening schools and hospitals") in Mosul. [Reuters](#);

On 6 July, the [Associated Press](#) reported that in the Old City of Mosul wives of ISIL fighters are now shooting at the Iraqi army and using their children as human shields. Also the AP reported: "Three female suicide bombers hiding among fleeing civilians killed at least three soldiers over the past week." [Reuters](#) reported: "Iraqi forces have reduced the territory under Islamic State control to 250 square metres, a senior official in the international coalition supporting Iraqi forces told Reuters."

On 7 July, an ISIL counterattack in the Old City of Mosul pushed the Iraqi army back 75 meters. [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#).

On 9 July 2017, the Iraqi prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, arrived in Mosul and prematurely declared victory. I say "prematurely" because journalists reported continued fierce fighting in West Mosul. The [Associated Press](#) reported: "But airstrikes and sniper fire continued amid the revelry, and the extremists stubbornly held small patches of ground west of the Tigris River." [Reuters](#) reported: "Air strikes and exchanges of gunfire could still be heard in the narrow streets of Mosul's Old City,.... [ISIL] however, still controls territory in Iraq and is expected to revert to more conventional insurgent tactics such as bombings...."

On 10 July 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported the Iraqi government declared "total victory" over ISIL in Mosul. [CENTCOM](#); [Reuters](#).

On the morning of 11 July 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported "sporadic clashes" in Mosul as ISIL continued to fire mortars at the Iraqi army. The fighting continued on the night of 11 July. [Associated Press](#).

On 12 July 2017 — two days after "total victory" was declared in Mosul — the Iraqi army is continuing to attack groups of ISIL fighters in West Mosul. [Reuters](#) reports that "pockets of Mosul remain insecure".

On 13 July, neither Reuters nor the Associated Press reported on the presumed continuing battles in West Mosul. But [CENTCOM](#) reported that on 13 July: "Near Mosul, two [air]strikes engaged two ISIS tactical units, destroyed 22 fighting positions and a tunnel, and damaged three fighting positions." Note that CENTCOM never specifies the precise location of an airstrike, so "near Mosul" could mean "in the Old City of Mosul".

On 14 July, four days after "total victory" in Mosul was proclaimed, [Reuters](#) reported "Iraqi forces hit further pockets of resistance from Islamic State militants in Mosul's Old City on Friday [14 July]". The [Associated Press](#) reported on buildings reduced to rubble and the stench of rotting corpses in Mosul's Old City. [CENTCOM](#) reported: "Near Mosul, three strikes destroyed two ISIS vehicles and a VBIED facility."

On 15 July, [CENTCOM](#): "Near Mosul, two strikes engaged two ISIS tactical units and destroyed three fighting positions."

On 16 July, [CENTCOM](#): "Near Mosul, three strikes engaged two ISIS tactical units, destroyed two fighting positions and two tunnel entrances, and damaged a fighting position."

Later, [CENTCOM](#) added: "On July 16, near Mosul, Iraq, one strike engaged a tactical unit and destroyed a fighting position."

On 17 July, [CENTCOM](#): "Near Mosul, two strikes engaged two ISIS tactical units and destroyed a weapons cache and a staging area." This was one week after Iraq declared "total victory" in Mosul.

During 18-20 July, CENTCOM reported *no* airstrikes near Mosul.

On 20 July, [Reuters](#) reported the conventional wisdom that ISIL will now engage in guerrilla warfare. Reuters said: "What comes next may be a more complex and daunting challenge for Iraqi security forces once they finish celebrating a hard-won victory in Mosul, ...."

On 20 July, the [Washington Post](#) published an article that described the destruction in Mosul: "in more than a dozen of the city's districts, the majority of the buildings are uninhabitable. Mosul's main airport, train station and university lie in rubble. Repairing the city's basic infrastructure will cost more than \$1 billion."

On 21 July 2017, there was one airstrike near Mosul that "suppressed an ISIS tactical unit." [CENTCOM](#).

During 22-30 July, CENTCOM reported *no* airstrikes near Mosul.

On 26 July 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that ISIL had booby-trapped houses, schools, mosques, and streets in West Mosul.

On 28 July 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported the Iraqi military believes there are 4000 ISIL fighters remaining in Iraq.

On 31 July 2017, there was one airstrike near Mosul that "suppressed a mortar team". [CENTCOM](#). Clearly, fighting continues 11 days after Mosul was "liberated".

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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 Homsî, 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 2017, 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](#).



- Between 25-27 May 2017, a U.S.-led Coalition airstrike killed Rayan Meshaal, the founder of ISIL's Amaq news agency. [Reuters](#); [CENTCOM](#).
- On 16 June 2017, Russia announced that one of its airstrikes on 28 May near Raqqa, Syria *might* have killed the head of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The U.S. Government was unable to confirm his death. [Reuters](#). On 11 July 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed that al-Baghdadi had died at an unknown place and date. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#). On 11 July, [PressTV](#) in Iran reported ISIL's media outlet in Tal Afar, Iraq said al-Baghdadi was dead. On 12 July, [Iraqi News](#) reported that Syria's state television channel claimed al-Baghdadi had died in Syria. *If* Baghdadi's lifetime warranty expired, then [Reuters](#) suggests the next ISIL leader will be a former Iraqi military officer from Saddam Hussein's army.
- On 11 July 2017, an airstrike from a U.S. drone in Afghanistan killed Abu Sayed, the head of ISIL in Khorasan Province. Sayed was the third head of ISIL in Afghanistan to be killed by the U.S. since his predecessors were splatted in July 2016 and April 2017. [Pentagon](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is the continuing success of ISIL in Afghanistan after the U.S. killed three of its leaders in one year hints that we should be fighting the ideology of Islamic terrorism, as well as military operations.
- On 27 July 2017, [CENTCOM](#) announced that the U.S.-led Coalition had killed 4 leaders of ISIL in Iraq or Syria:
  1. Abu Sulayman al-Iraqi, a senior ISIS propaganda official, was killed by a Coalition airstrike near Mosul, Iraq in early July. Al-Iraqi provided strategic guidance and production oversight for ISIS propaganda that recruited, indoctrinated and directed terrorists around the world.
  2. Bassam al-Jayfus, who handled ISIS funds for terror attacks, was killed by a Coalition airstrike in Mayadin, Syria, July 18, 2017. His death causes a disruption to ISIS's multi-national money laundering network, which is used to pay for foreign terrorist fighters as well as terror plotting and attacks throughout the world.
  3. Abu-Sayf al-'Isawi, an ISIS media emir, was killed by a Coalition airstrike in al-Qa'im, Iraq, April 27, 2017.
  4. Abu Ali al-Janubi, ISIS's senior media director, was killed by a Coalition airstrike in Mayadin, Syria, April 16, 2017.

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 2017, 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](#).

On 22 March, 22 May, and 3 June 2017 there were a series of three Islamic terrorist attacks in England. My essay for [June 2017](#) quotes MP Sajid Javid as saying the Muslim community must do more to oppose Islamic terrorism. But Javid was ignored, just as calls by Lord Tariq Ahmad in January 2015 and U.K. Prime Minister Cameron in June 2015 were rejected by mainstream Muslims. However, in June 2017 Muslim clerics in the U.K. did refuse to conduct funerals for Islamic terrorists.

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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. [Ahrum](#) 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 86 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. On 7 June 2017, ISIL gunmen and ISIL suicide bombers attacked Iran's Parliament and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran, killing at least 12 people. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#).
45. In June 2017, ISIL began an active insurgency in the city of Marawi, in the southern Philippines. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Navy Times](#).

46. On 7 July 2017, ISIL attacked an Egyptian army outpost in the Sinai with a suicide car bomb and a heavy machine gun, killing 23 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

47.

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 April 30, 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIL since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$13.1 billion and the average daily cost is \$13.2 million for 997 days of operations. A further breakdown of cost associated with the operations is [here](#).

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 21 June 2017.

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). Trump ended this CIA program in June 2017, as explained [above](#).

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, including the attack on the office of *Charlie Hebdo* satirical newspaper.
- My essay for [Feb 2015](#) describes the Islamic terror attack in Copenhagen on 14 Feb.
- My essay for [July 2015](#) describes an Islamic terror attack in Chattanooga, Tennessee (USA) that killed 5 people.
- 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. Two minor Islamic terrorist attacks in France are mentioned.
- 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: 86 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) a minor 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 4 people on Westminster Bridge and then killed a policeman at 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.
- My essay for [May 2017](#) described an Islamic suicide bomber who killed 22 people at a music concert in Manchester England.
- My essay for [June 2017](#) described three Islamic terrorists who killed 8 people on London Bridge and Borough Market. Then there were a series of Islamic terrorist attacks with few casualties: on 6 June an Algerian graduate student ran amok outside the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, on 19 June there was an Islamic car bomb in Paris, on 20 June 2017 an Islamic suicide bomber was killed in Brussels Central railroad station, and on 21 June 2017 an Islamic terrorist from Tunisia stabbed a policeman in the neck at the airport in Flint, Michigan.

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 Syria 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](#).

In the second round of the French presidential election on 7 May 2017, Macron won with 66% of the vote. The anti-immigrant candidate, Marine Le Pen, joins the defeated anti-immigrant presidential candidates in Austria (Dec 2016) and the Netherlands (Mar 2017).

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## 28 July 2017: Islamic terrorist in Hamburg, Germany

On Friday, 28 July 2017 at 15:10 local time, a 26 year old Arab attacked people in and near a supermarket in Barmbek, a northeastern suburb of Hamburg Germany. He stole a kitchen knife from the supermarket, then stabbed three people in the supermarket, of whom one died in the supermarket. The Islamic terrorist stabbed two Germans as he fled from the supermarket. A sixth German was injured when Germans overwhelmed the Islamic terrorist and held him for police.



The Hamburg Police reported:

time of crime: 28.07.2017, 15:10

scene of crime: Hamburg, Barmbek-Nord, Fuhlsbüttler Straße

Police officers have arrested a person who is suspected to have injured several persons with a knife. The suspect is yet to be identified.

Findings so far say that the person entered a supermarket and suddenly started stabbing customers. The suspect, who was arrested in the meantime, fled from the store.

Witnesses pursued the suspect and called the police. Police officers arrived shortly after that and were able to arrest the suspect on a street close to the scene of crime.

"Suspect arrested after injuring several people with a knife," [Hamburg Police](#), 19:42 (17:42 GMT), 28 July 2017. [Three typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

Meanwhile it is clear that the suspect attacked one of the victims in the supermarket. This person died at the scene of crime. While trying to escape the suspect injured additional four people with his knife.

Passers-by were able to overpower the fleeing suspect. The suspect was lightly injured. Arriving plainclothes policemen arrested the suspect.

[Hamburg Police](#), 19:44 (17:44 GMT), 28 July 2017.

The Associated Press reported:

The suspect is a 26-year-old who was born in the United Arab Emirates, police said, though they were still working to establish his nationality. Hamburg's mayor said that the man had apparently sought shelter in Germany and that authorities had been unable to deport him because he had no papers.

....

The news agency dpa quoted two witnesses at a nearby bakery as saying they heard the assailant shout "Allahu akbar!" as he held up the knife, but police did not confirm the report. "Allahu akbar" means "God is great" in Arabic and has been used by Islamic extremists when carrying out violent acts.

Geir Moulson, "1 dead, 6 injured after knife attack at German supermarket," [Associated Press](#), 20:56 GMT, 28 July 2017.

Reuters reported:

Police said the man, who was born in the United Arab Emirates, suddenly began attacking customers in a supermarket in the northern city on Friday [28 July] afternoon.

Hamburg Mayor Olaf Scholz said in a statement that the assailant was "apparently a foreigner who was supposed to leave the country," but could not be deported because he did not have the necessary identification papers. Police said they were still trying to determine his citizenship.

....

A police spokeswoman said she could not confirm that the attacker shouted "Allahu Akbar", Arabic for "God is Greatest", as he ran out of the supermarket, as one witness told German broadcaster n-tv.

"Migrant kills man in Hamburg supermarket stabbing, six hurt," [Reuters](#), 23:18 GMT, 28 July 2017.

The German-language newsmagazine, [Der Spiegel](#) identified the Islamic attacker as "Ahmad A." and said he was psychologically unstable.

On 29 July 2017, the Associated Press reported:

A Palestinian man who allegedly stabbed one person to death and wounded six others in Hamburg was known to authorities as a suspected Islamic radical but also was psychologically unstable, German officials said Saturday [29 July].

....

Police said the suspect grabbed a kitchen knife with a 20-centimeter (nearly eight-inch) blade from a supermarket shelf on Friday [28 July] afternoon and stabbed three men, one of them fatally. He then left the supermarket and hurt another three people outside, not all of them with the knife. Passers-by then pursued and overwhelmed the suspect, who was arrested by police.

....

A friend had tipped authorities off to changes in the man, telling them that he stopped drinking alcohol and started talking about the Quran, Torsten Voss, head of the Hamburg branch of the domestic intelligence agency, said. Officials interviewed the man and came away with the impression that he was a "destabilized personality" but not someone who posed an immediate danger, Voss said. "We evaluated him rather as someone who was psychologically unstable than had clear Islamic extremist motivations," Voss said at a news conference. Authorities don't know of any connections to Hamburg's Islamic extremist scene.

Geir Moulson, "Hamburg stabbing suspect known as radical, mentally unstable," [Associated Press](#), 13:30 GMT, 29 July 2017.

On the night of 29 July, Deutsche Presse-Agentur again reported:

An eyewitness told dpa that the attacker repeatedly shouted "Allahu akbar" (Arabic for "God is greatest") as he held up the knife during the attack.

"Hamburg knife attack suspect was known radical Islamist," [dpa](#), 19:00 GMT, 29 July 2017.

On 30 July, this story disappeared from the news in Germany. At last report, police are unable to decide whether his motive was Islamic terrorism or whether he was mentally ill.

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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](#), Resolution 2254 has 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, water infrastructure, and hospitals.
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.

There have been *no* results during 18 months of negotiations in Geneva since January 2016. That is an appalling track record by the Syrians. Amongst other things, it shows the opposition leaders are unfit to lead Syria.

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 333,000 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 its two capital cities — Mosul Iraq and Raqqa Syria. Some people in the U.S. Government apparently expect ISIL to disappear after ISIL is defeated on the battlefield. But ISIL will remain alive as a brand of Islamic terrorism, which will inspire attacks worldwide. My essays chronicle years of suicide bombings and car bombings in Baghdad, as well as ISIL taking credit for inspiring terrorist attacks in Russia and Europe.

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begun 3 July 2017, revised 1 Aug 2017.

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