

Syria: August-September 2017

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Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 45 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 That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.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,
- and the webpage for the [Spokesman](#) of the United Nations Secretary General

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.

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](#).

Chemical Weapons

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

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

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

On 21 August 2017, [Reuters](#) disclosed a confidential OPCW report that says twice in the past six months North Korea has been caught sending chemical weapons to Syria.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has an Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. On 6 September 2017, the Commission concluded that Assad's military was responsible for the chemical weapons release at Khan Sheikhoun on 4 April. [OHCHR](#)(report); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

September 2017

On 7 September 2017 at 02:42 Syrian time, Israel warplanes launched air-to-ground missiles that attacked Assad's chemical weapons manufacturing plant at Masyaf in Syria. A nearby warehouse that stores ground-to-ground missiles was also hit by Israel. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [BBC](#); [Haaretz](#); [Washington Post](#); [New York Times](#).

Assad concealing chemical weapons

In October 2013, Assad's government joined the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons. Assad was legally

obligated to provide a written declaration of *all* of his chemical weapons.

Long forgotten by everyone outside of OPCW, in the monthly report for February 2016 on chemical weapons in Syria, S/2016/196 at ¶9, there appears the following cryptic sentence: "... efforts to resolve the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies with the declaration have been expedited, as the DAT [Declaration Assessment Team] has conducted four visits to the Syrian Arab Republic since that session [on 11 July 2014 (?)]."

In the OPCW monthly report for April 2016 on chemical weapons in Syria, S/2016/391 at ¶9, there appears the following sentence: "... the Director-General, together with the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), has begun preparations to engage senior Syrian officials in order to address the unresolved issues, including gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration and related submissions, which were identified in the Note by the Director-General, EC-81/HP/DG.1 (dated 22 February 2016)." Enclosure II of this Security Council document gives the history of attempting to resolve these "gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies".

In the OPCW monthly report for October 2016 on chemical weapons in Syria, S/2016/928 at ¶8, OPCW mentions that on 30 August 2016 a ~~despicable vermin~~ gentleman in Assad's government sent a reply to a request for more information. OPCW politely replied that "... the new information did not substantively contribute to resolving the identified issues and, once again, called upon the Syrian Arab Republic to provide scientifically and technically plausible explanations on all outstanding issues, and to substantiate recently given information by providing original documentation and by making its senior officials involved in its chemical weapons programme available for meetings with the DAT."

In the OPCW monthly report for December 2016 on chemical weapons in Syria, S/2016/1131 at ¶9, OPCW said the Syrian declaration of chemical weapons was "incomplete".

In the OPCW monthly report for August 2017 on chemical weapons in Syria, S/2017/756 at ¶8, the Syrian declaration was still *not* resolved.

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."

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.

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. On 3 Sep 2017, North Korea detonated a sixth nuclear weapon. 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.

On 26 April 2017, the U.S. Government declared that North Korea was the "top foreign-policy priority". On 5 September 2017, the United Nations Secretary General said North Korea is "the most dangerous crisis we face today". (See my essay on [North Korea](#).)

Deaths in Syria

On 1 Sep 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) published a death toll for the month of August 2017.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2707 [people] in August 2017 and the death toll is as follows:

1. Civilian casualties: 790 people including 203 children below the age of 18, and 130 women over the age of 18 who are as follows:
 - 162 people including 38 children and 28 women who were killed in airstrikes of Syrian and Russian warplanes and the helicopters of the regime forces on several areas,
 - 35 people including 11 children and 5 women who were killed in missile, artillery shelling of the regime forces as well as shelling by missiles believed to be ground to ground and targeting and sniper fire,
 - 5 citizens were killed under tortures in Syrian security detentions,
 - 25 people including 9 children and 4 women in targeting and fall of shelling launched by Islamic and rebel factions,
 - 10 people including 2 children and a woman who were killed in fire shooting by Turkish border guards,
 - 11 citizens including a child who was executed by ISIS,
 - 19 people including 6 children due to shelling and shooting by heavy machine guns by ISIS
 - 397 people including 114 children and 81 women who were killed in airstrikes of the international coalition,
 - 7 women including 4 children in car and vehicle bombs,
 - 9 people including 3 children and women who were killed by the SDF,
 - 48 people including 6 children and 7 women who were killed in mines explosions,
 - 16 people including 3 children who were killed in unknown circumstances
 - [one] person was killed in shelling between the Islamic factions,
 - 5 persons were killed by Hayaat Tahrir al-Sham,
 - 12 persons were killed in unknown shelling in Yarmouk Basin,
 - 10 civilians were killed including 6 children and 3 women drowned in

Euphrates River.

2. [Military casualties: 1917 people, as follows:]
 - Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 598
 - The regime forces: 232
 - Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 306
 - Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 11
 - Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 42
 - Unknown people: 15
 - Fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and ISIS and Nusra Front (Qaeda organization of the Levant), and Mujahreen and al-Ansar Army and Islamic Turkestan Party of non-Syrian nationalities: 713

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reiterates its calls for the international parties to do their utmost efforts to stop the bloodshed of the Syrian people, who faced tyranny and injustice to reach a state of justice, democracy, freedom and equality, as we the Syrian Observatory pledge to continue to monitor and document the massacres, violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against the Syrian people, in addition to the publication of statistics about them in order to stop the perpetration of these crimes, violations and atrocities against the Syrian people, and to refer the perpetrators of these violations to the concerned courts of the state, so as not to escape their punishment for the crimes they committed against the people who was and still dream of having a democracy, freedom, justice and equality for all the people of Syria.

"790 civilian casualties among more than 2700 people were killed in August 2017," [SOHR](#), 1 September 2017. [Formatting of military casualties as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

When I add the civilian casualties in the first doubly indented list, I obtain 772, *not* 790.

On 1 October 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) published a death toll for the month of September 2017.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 3055 [people] in September 2017 which is the highest monthly death toll in 2017, and the death toll is as follows:

1. Civilian casualties: 955 people including 207 children under the age of eighteen, and 148 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
 - 395 including 92 children and 71 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria.
 - 91 including 22 children and 10 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.

- 6 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
- 17 including 4 children and 3 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
- 11 including 5 children and a woman were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
- 10 were executed by the “Islamic State” organization.
- 26 including 3 children and 5 citizen women were killed in the fall of shells launched by the “Islamic State” organization and by the fire of its machineguns.
- 282 including 68 children and 45 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the international coalition.
- 5 citizens including a child were killed in the detonating of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
- 7 including 1 child were killed by Syria Democratic Forces.
- 47 including 5 children and 5 citizen women were killed in landmine explosions.
- 14 including 2 children and 2 citizen women were killed in unknown circumstances.
- 1 person was killed during clashes between the Islamic Factions.
- 4 persons were killed by Hayyaat Tahrir al-Sham.
- 10 citizens including a child and a woman were killed due to bad healthy conditions and the absence of necessary treatment.
- 29 including 3 children and 5 women were executed by the regime forces.

2. [Military casualties: 2100 people, as follows:]

- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 550
- The regime forces: 322
- Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 368
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 22
- Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 78
- Unknown people: 14
- Fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and ISIS and Nusra Front (Qaeda organization of the Levant), and Mujahedeen and al-Ansar Army and Islamic Turkestan Party of non-Syrian nationalities: 738
- Russian Forces: 8

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reiterates its calls for the international parties to do their utmost efforts to stop the bloodshed of the Syrian people, who faced tyranny and injustice to reach a state of justice, democracy, freedom and equality, as we the Syrian Observatory pledge to continue to monitor and document the massacres, violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against the Syrian people, in addition to the publication of statistics about them in order to stop the perpetration of these crimes, violations and atrocities against the Syrian people, and to refer the perpetrators of these violations to the concerned courts of the state, so as not

to escape their punishment for the crimes they committed against the people who was and still dream of having a democracy, freedom, justice and equality for all the people of Syria.

"The highest monthly death toll in 2017, more than 3050 people were killed in September," [SOHR](#), 1 October 2017. [Formatting of military casualties as indented list by Standler. One typographical error corrected by Standler.]

The total number of dead per 30 days is essentially the same for February 2017 and September 2017. SOHR was wrong to claim that September's death toll "is the highest monthly death toll in 2017". During September there were fierce battles to liberate Deir Ezzor and Raqqa, which increased the death toll.

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 2707 during August 2017, and 3055 during September 2017 — during the ceasefire that began at the end of December 2016. The imperfect ceasefire has reduced fatalities during Aug/Sep 2017 by approximately 30% 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* 339,000.

Turkey is an ally from Hell

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My essay for [August 2016](#) chronicles the beginning of the Turkish invasion of Syria during 24-31 August, and tersely mentions Erdogan's purge after the failed coup.

My essays for [September 2016](#), [October 2016](#), and [November 2016](#) tersely chronicle the continuing Turkish invasion of Syria, as well as Erdogan's continuing purge of alleged coup supporters. My essay for September also mentions slow progress on constructing a wall along the Turkish-Syrian border, which wall has been needed since mid-2013.

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

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.

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](#).

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 may be an indication that it is now futile to try to depose Assad. See my essay for [July 2017](#).

On 24 August 2017, the Associated Press reported that a turning point in the Syrian civil war and peace negotiations had arrived: Assad would remain as leader of Syria.

As Damascus reverses military losses in much of the country's strategically important west, and foreign states cut support for rebel forces, diplomats from Washington to Riyadh are asking representatives of Syria's opposition to come to terms with President Bashar Assad's political survival.

The country's civil war has crossed the halfway point of its sixth year and Assad and his allies are now in control of Syria's four largest cities and its Mediterranean coast. With the help of Russian air power and Iranian-sponsored militias, pro-government forces are marching steadily across the energy-rich Homs province to reach the Euphrates River valley.

Western and regional rebel patrons, currently more focused on advancing their own interests rather than accomplishing regime change in Damascus, are shifting their alliances and have ceased calls on Assad to step down.

"There is no conceivable military alignment that's going to be able to remove him," said former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford, now a fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C. "Everyone including the U.S. has recognized that Assad is staying."

....

With another round of U.N. mediated peace talks on the horizon in Geneva, the opposition's chief representative group, the High Negotiations Committee, is being told by even its closest patrons it risks irrelevance if it does not adapt to the new realities. Philip Issa, "Syria opposition told to come to terms with Assad's survival," [Associated Press](#), 13:05 GMT, 24 August 2017.

On 31 August 2017, [The Guardian](#) reported that the world has lost interest in Syria, making it increasingly likely that Assad will continue as leader of Syria.

On 6 September 2017, Staffan de Mistura said that the insurgents must recognize the reality that Assad would *not* be defeated in the civil war. See [below](#).

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 Communique ... which called for the establishment of a transitional government with members of the regime and the opposition." [Al-Arabiya](#) noticed this report.

On 19 September 2017, Trump gave a horrible speech at the United Nations General Assembly, at which he said the following about Syria:

We seek the de-escalation of the Syrian conflict, and a political solution that honors the will of the Syrian people. The actions of the criminal regime of Bashar al-Assad, including the use of chemical weapons against his own citizens — even innocent children — shock the conscience of every decent person. No society can be safe if banned chemical weapons are allowed to spread. That is why the United States carried out a missile strike on the airbase that launched the attack.

Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly," [White House](#), 19 Sep 2017.

It seems that Trump is saying that the Syrian people will choose their leader (i.e., "honors the will of the Syrian people"). But Trump also says Assad is a "criminal", which hints that Assad is *not* acceptable to the USA. At a "Friends of Syria" meeting on 18 Sep 2017, it was agreed that Europe and the USA would *not* pay for the reconstruction of Syria until after Assad is removed as leader of Syria. See [below](#).

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 Nth 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.

My essay for [July 2017](#) mentions negotiations in Astana and Geneva during July. Both meetings failed to accomplish anything. Reuters suggested that 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.

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. A fifth round occurred on 4-5 July 2017.

Full-text of all publicly disclosed ceasefire agreements for Syria, including the Astana agreements, is available at rbs0.com

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.

On 22 August 2017, [Reuters](#) reported the three guarantor nations would hold a "technical meeting" before the end of August 2017 to decide when there will be the next meeting of Syrians in Astana.

On 30 August 2017, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council via videolink from Geneva, where he said the next meeting of Syrians in Astana would be on 14-15 September 2017. [U.N.](#)

On 1 September 2017, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry said the next meeting of Syrians in Astana would be on 14-15 September 2017. The three guarantor nations “plan to review several documents covering the work of de-escalation control forces, and continue work on agreeing the make-up of control forces in Idlib”. They also plan to work on maps of de-escalation zones in Idlib, Homs, and Eastern Ghouta. [Reuters](#).

On 15 September 2017, the three guarantors (i.e., Russia, Turkey, Iran) finally agreed on the borders of the safe zone in Idlib province. [Reuters](#). The three guarantors also agreed to deploy a total of 1500 observers to Idlib province. [Reuters](#). Reuters did *not* mention the attendance of Syrians at the Astana meeting. The Associated Press did *not* report on the 14-15 September meeting in Astana. Nusra Front (now called Tahrir al-Sham), which controls most of Idlib province, denounced the Astana agreement and Nusra promised to fight the guarantors. [Reuters](#).

In December 2016, the so-called negotiations in Astana were originally negotiations amongst Syrians, but now the Astana talks appear to be amongst the three guarantors, who are foreign meddlers in Syria. As much as I detest foreign meddlers in any civil war, the three guarantors

appear to have accomplished a partial ceasefire that significantly reduced the monthly death tolls in Syria. The Syrians themselves were unable to achieve a ceasefire, despite intermittent negotiations in Geneva that began in January 2014.

On 15 September, de Mistura held a press conference in Astana. The transcript was first posted at the U.N. Geneva website on 18 September.

Good evening. You heard many valid comments so I will try to be short and to address nine, but specific points.

[1] The first one is definitely our gratitude, and I think everyone has said it, to his Excellency the President of Kazakhstan for arranging, supporting and making sure that this Astana process goes on. We are quite impressed, frankly.

[2] Second, we want to put on record our appreciation for the persistence of the guarantors, there has been a lot of very intense, long discussions, but they have been producing outcomes.

[3] So here comes the next point, we really welcome this agreement today — because we have always been pushing for de-escalation, that's what the people of Syria have been asking and the fact of adding new areas to the de-escalation is crucial. This has already produced a reduction in the fighting in many areas.

[4] Next point, however, we heard it and we reiterate it, these arrangements need to be considered temporary in nature because of the sovereignty in national and territorial integrity of the country, Syria, is fundamental. So good news, effective, we hope, and we want to see results of it — but temporary.

[5] Next point, the UN will continue, and indeed intensify its efforts to provide assistance to every Syrian, everywhere in the country, particularly now that we have seen de-escalation areas taking place and therefore entirely — and we hope in practice — this will mean, easier access of humanitarian assistance, based on needs of the Syrians, wherever they are. And you must have heard, the first convoy of SARC [Syrian Arab Red Crescent] with UN aid has reached Deir ez-Zor. In this connection let me reiterate some points that are close to our attention and heart:

[6] Protection of civilians: whatever the arrangements are, whatever is the implementation of it, the protection of civilians is very important, particularly now in the Idlib area, where we do have, as you know, more than 2 million civilians.

[7] Demining: it has been advancing and is crucially important and we are doing our part.

[8] On the detainees, we still do not see sufficient progress, that's why we have been hearing it and we will insist that there will be a discussion with concrete outcomes, not only in Astana but also at the UN in New York and Geneva and anywhere else because there are thousands of families of detainees, of abducted people, of missing people, who are asking us and everyone — can we know where are our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and can we find a solution for this tragic situation?

[9] You must have heard me saying it in the past, I want to repeat it — I think we have seen it also today — there is no military solution. No one has won this war, and no one can claim to win this war militarily. Therefore we need now to bring the momentum of Astana to Geneva, in order to have a political process moving on the basis of de-escalation. No de-escalation can be sustained without a comprehensive political process, and that is based in Geneva.

I will, in New York, consult the Secretary-General and the Security Council on the next steps and therefore also announce when the next Geneva talks will be taking place. And we hope that all sides, based also on, very much, the Astana process, i.e. the de-escalation, will be addressing the next talks on the political process, in a serious way, we look forward to that. Thank you.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of Press Conference by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura — Astana, 15 September 2017," [U.N. Geneva](#), 15 Sep 2017.

Negotiations in Geneva

Need Concrete Results

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 and August 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.

17 Aug 2017

From 15 July 2017 to 16 August 2017, there were *no* transcripts or press releases posted on the Syria negotiations by the United Nations Geneva office. That absence of information shows a lack of progress by the Syrians. Then on 17 August, de Mistura held a press conference, at which he said:

So, let me start with some general comments. August and early September should be considered preparations for, in my opinion, a very significant October/November. I will try to hint to you why.

Meanwhile what we are seeing is more agreements local agreements, as we call them, or coordinated ceasefires, which would probably be a better word. And you may be seeing or hearing about more of them, in the next days.

As you know the UN is in favor of anything that reduces violence, and we try to facilitate and support any of such initiatives, because that is what the people want. No more shooting, no more fighting.

Details regarding one in particular in the South are still being discussed, but we have already seen a reduction of violence in spite of the fact that it has not been totally concluded. And we are hoping to see, and actually today we saw, already, the first result while we were attending the meeting, with a convoy of 50 trucks led actually by our own humanitarian Coordinator, Ali Al-Za'tari, which reached Douma, reaching 45,000 people. So we are starting seeing some of the operational results of a letter, that you are familiar with probably, which I received in August from the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Mr. Shoigu, in which he was indicating that there was going to be an impact on the speed of allowing convoys to get through to areas which have been reaching a de-escalation agreement. This in order to make sure that it would be less complicated than in the past, by having military Russian observation points making the movement of aid quicker and facilitated than in the past. We have seen just today one of those examples and I am expecting and hoping that this will become a pattern.

Regarding new facts on the ground, well you are going to watch between now and October certainly an increase in the fight for the liberation of Raqqa and the areas around Deir ez-Zor and that is linked also to some concerns that we will be referring to regarding the civilian population in both locations, which need not to be suffering or to be stopped from leaving those places.

Now regarding aid, and you will hear many more details from Jan, there has been a trend up from six million, more or less, in January, there is now nine million people

inside Syria who are been reached by aid. We believe and hope that the new Russian Federation approach, the one I have just referred to you, and the creation which we are strongly supporting of a problem solving cell in Damascus with the presence of our humanitarian coordinating team and Russian Federation military and government to make sure that this may would produce a much faster outreach of humanitarian convoys, the trend of which, we have seen today, but of course the “proof is in the pudding” and therefore we need to see more of that.

There is also the hope and it has a political implication that we have, in view of this new trend, the preparation of many trucks already loaded and ready to go to Yarmouk and to Kefraya and Foua. Kefraya and Foua in particular but also Yarmouk had become iconic, symbolic. In Kefraya and Foua, for instance, there are 8000 people, civilians who happen to be a minority of Shi’a community in the area, who have been waiting endlessly now, for some type of relief. We hope this will be moving. If this moves it is a good sign and we should in that case appreciate both Russian for contributing quite a lot in ensuring that this happens.

Now some political and general comments and a little bit on the possible scenario between now and October. The so-called Astana process, from our understanding, did produce some potentially significant progress. While Idlib is still a subject of internal and intensive discussions. Astana therefore, has been postponed several times, nothing wrong as long as we produce outcomes. And I think that the most likely, but it is up to them to announce it, opportunity for a next Astana meeting to consolidate what we believe is being some significant improvement or progress is likely, to take place just after the Holy Eid, in other worlds, early September. The date is up to those who organize it, to announce it of course.

Now this brings me to the technical talks. You might have heard, that we have been originally planning to have some of those technical talks next week, but like Astana, we too have the capacity of and the willingness to adjust to the environment and to make sure that whatever we do has a constructive impact. And you are probably aware of the fact that there are intensive internal discussions within the opposition, at the very time we are talking, in order to develop their own, perhaps new, or re-visited approach to negotiations, hopefully with a more inclusive and perhaps unified approach. We have come to the conclusion that the opposition, different identities, does require more time in order to come up with a more inclusive and perhaps even more pragmatic approach, and need more time to do so. And therefore we have postponed those technical talks. A little bit like Astana has been doing it too, we are adjusting to when is the right time.

Around the end of August the Security Council will be requiring a briefing from myself on behalf of the Secretary-General and I will be asking of course their guidance for the next steps including technical talks and the official talks. The official talks in Geneva are still being planned if possible just before the General Assembly because we believe it could be helpful, but we will be getting back on that, they are likely to be very short, because the timing before the General Assembly and the end of Astana talks and the Eid will make everything a little bit more dense. And we may be eventually focusing on the agenda for the real talks that we hope will take place in October.

So you will have Astana, probably, end of August. You will have early September the Holy Eid then you will have possibly the Geneva talks, if we feel the timing and the appropriate moment is there, then you will have the General Assembly High Level, which is a period which is taking place between the 18th onwards of September, where very likely there will be a discussion at quite a high level, regarding the next steps about Syria.

So, October is going to be crucial and early November. By then, we may have developments taking place in Raqqa, where the liberation of Raqqa hopefully will be proceeding, around Deir ez-Zor and then the big issue about the future of Idlib. All three of them have a strong implication on what can happen on the humanitarian side. By that time probably we will see in October also a conference, which has been rumored to take place, regarding the future organization of the opposition possibly with a format that will be very inclusive and pragmatic and by that time hopefully also the government will be helped by those who have influence to be ready finally to start discussing and negotiating based on an inclusive credible political process.

Bottom line, a lot of moving parts between now and October-November and a lot which has been moving during this year, in terms of front lines, in terms of frozen front lines, becoming now much more fluid, and in terms of also a potential for serious negotiations.

....

Question: Sir could you please clarify a little bit more about the conference of opposition that is going to take place, I don't know where, is it in Geneva? And could you please be more precise about the time frame, if you have one, and also about the government would it also let us guess, that there will be a conference later on this year where we will see government representatives and the opposition at the same table in Geneva?

SdeM: First of all, regarding the first question, we are not organizing this conference for the relaunching of a pragmatic, inclusive negotiating team of the opposition. It is up to those who have been helping that taking place in the past. So, you must have heard, there have been rumors, I have no confirmation on the date, they can confirm it, that in October there is a potential likelihood that in Riyadh or somewhere else, there will be a major opportunity for the opposition to take stock of the realities on the ground, take stock of their own need to be unified and take stock of their own need to have a common platform for negotiations with the government. Regarding the government, we are counting very much on Russia, on Iran on anyone who has got a major influence and on the government of Syria to be ready finally to initiate, when they are invited to Geneva, a genuine, direct negotiation with whatever platform comes out. And therefore moving from what you have been witnessing so far, preparatory meetings, and believe me you will see one day that they were all very useful because many issues would have been addressed, but then getting into the beginning of a real negotiation. Of course, things can go wrong, they have gone wrong in the past, but that is a little more than wishful thinking, it is actually an aim.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura and UN Senior Adviser Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 17 August 2017.

The press briefing by Egeland on humanitarian aid is quoted [below](#).

Summarizing de Mistura, there are:

- more delays in the Astana process, next meeting probably at the "end of August" or early September;
- postponement of "technical talks" with the opposition, while the opposition reorganizes into one unified delegation and also "takes stock of the realities on the ground";
- "very short" negotiations in Geneva in mid-September, before the United Nations General Assembly meeting;
- promise of "real talks that we hope will take place in October."

Notice that de Mistura mentions influence and actions by Russia, but de Mistura does *not* mention the USA. The USA effectively abandoned both the Syrian political situation and Geneva peace negotiations in December 2016.

HNC squabbles

On 21 August the HNC, and both the Moscow and Cairo delegations, began meeting in Riyadh. [Al-Arabiya](#). At the end of the second day, there was *no* agreement on any topic, because the Moscow delegation wants Assad to continue as leader of Syria and wants no changes in the Syrian constitution. [Al-Arabiya](#). [Arab News](#) published an Agence France-Press article that called the second day a "stalemate".

My comment is that the opposition knew that they had serious disagreements, but they scheduled only two days for negotiations to resolve those disagreements. That suggests to me that they were *not* serious about resolving those disagreements. And de Mistura's dream of a unified opposition in October is crumbling, because the opposition continues to be disorganized, fragmented, and intransigent.

On 24 August 2017, the Associated Press reported that a turning point in the Syrian civil war and peace negotiations had arrived: Assad would remain as leader of Syria. See [above](#), at the end of the section. The Associated Press also reported the opposition's negotiations in Riyadh:

At a two-day meeting in Riyadh this week meant to try and bridge differences between the three main political opposition groups and come up with a unified vision based on the new political and military reality, divisions were however once again on full display.

The opposition's chief representative group, the Saudi-based High Negotiations Committee (HNC), publicly held on to its position that Assad must step down before any political transition. In a statement, it said the opposition group known as the "Moscow Platform" insisted Assad's departure must not be a precondition for talks.

"We refuse any role for Assad during a transitional period," insisted spokesman Ahmad Ramadan of the National Syrian Coalition, the leading bloc in the HNC, which has always staked out a maximalist position against Assad.

But internally, there is talk of restructuring the HNC to give weight to the more conciliatory voices among the opposition - representatives based in Cairo and Moscow that groups within the HNC have long derided as the "internal opposition" for their perceived cozy relations with Damascus.

It comes at the urging of the U.N.'s top Syria envoy, Staffan De Mistura, who spent much of the last Geneva talks trying to reconcile the HNC and the Cairo and Moscow groups.

Philip Issa, "Syria opposition told to come to terms with Assad's survival," [Associated Press](#), 13:05 GMT, 24 August 2017.

30 Aug 2017

On 30 August 2017, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council via videolink from Geneva. At the end of 2 September, the United Nations in neither New York City nor Geneva had posted a transcript of de Mistura's remarks to the Security Council. Eventually, the United Nations Office in Geneva posted a transcript. I have boldfaced the parts that I find important.

I last briefed the Security Council after the 7th round of the Intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, which concluded on the 14th of July. Since then, we have been active in a range of diplomatic efforts and continuing contacts. I have recently held high-level consultations in Tehran and Paris, and my Deputy Special Envoy, Ambassador Ramzy, was earlier in Moscow and is currently in Saudi Arabia. Contacts are continuing with other actors as we seek to lay the ground for further rounds of talks that bring the parties into a genuine negotiation.

Let me now elaborate on how I assess the situation at present, and what we think we can expect in the period ahead — in de-escalating violence, in combatting terrorism, and in advancing the political process.

While undoubtedly there is still violence in Syria, the trend of de-escalation and the operationalization of de-escalation zones is indeed continuing. We are encouraged by the calm in the southwest, and the opening of a trilateral Amman Monitoring Centre by the Russian Federation, the United States of America and Jordan. Meanwhile, following a series of agreements with armed groups, including with the active support of Egypt and the Russian Federation, we have seen a significant reduction of violence in parts of the Ghouta de-escalation zone, although not in all of it. In Homs, we note that the Russian Federation's efforts to reach a ceasefire agreement are continuing. We are worried about reports of shelling and airstrikes north of Homs city, which we believe require the guarantors' urgent attention.

Meantime, the situation in Idlib is complex and complicated and needs close attention. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham — or as we still continue to call it, the former al-Nusra, a

terrorist group identified by this Council — has seized territory from other armed opposition groups in this area. Its stated intention is to set up some kind of new Al-Nursa dominated administration. **It is very important that Astana guarantors, in liaison with the Government and armed opposition groups, come to a speedy agreement to operationalize the de-escalation zone in Idlib.** This will also require a very important element: protecting civilians; but that will be addressed I am sure by my colleague, Steven O'Brien.

As efforts to combat terrorism continue, we are seeing ISIL/Daesh's area of control being constantly shrunk — something I think everybody welcomes in the ongoing fight against terrorism. While the Government of Syria is proceeding towards Deir Ez-Zor, the Lebanese army has advanced against ISIL/Daesh on the Lebanese side of the border. The Syrian Democratic Forces and the US-led coalition continue their efforts to eliminate ISIL from Raqqa, while the Russian Federation is supporting the Government of Syria in proceeding towards Deir Ez-Zor.

And while military operations are underway, rapid, safe, and sustained humanitarian access remains indeed essential, as well as the work for the release of the arbitrarily detained persons, and to shed light on the fate of the thousands of disappeared. All parties must also do their utmost to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure while this is happening. I am sure my colleague and friend, Under-Secretary-General O'Brien — who I would like to thank personally for his immense efforts on Syria — will further address these issues in his briefing on the humanitarian aspects. I also want to thank UNMAS for its continued readiness to support humanitarian demining efforts.

Mr. President,

The developments I have described are the result of a very timely process of prioritization and cooperation among key external players, and a realization among internal players of the need to compromise. The challenge ahead will be to extend this spirit into the political realm. **This requires clear and new thinking from the opposition and the Government,** and enhanced international cooperation.

Let me start with the opposition. **The opposition invitees to the Geneva talks — i.e. the HNC, the Cairo Platform and the Moscow Platform, those specified in SCR 2254 — have important and urgent work to do to develop common negotiating positions and strengthen their unity.** It is high time. I briefed you last time on progress we have made with them in two rounds of UN technical talks in Geneva and nearby — there was important substantive progress, which should now be used as a springboard for further efforts. Given that many developments are taking place elsewhere between the actors of the opposition, we have refrained from holding further UN technical talks to give time for these developments to unfold and progress. But time must not be lost. Elevating common technical commonalities to the political level remains an imperative.

I am grateful to Saudi Arabia for taking the initiative for a new, more inclusive meeting of the opposition — a Riyadh 2 conference as it is called, including with the hosting of a preparatory meeting last week. Our technical work and political support will be

important contributions to these efforts. We will work closely with Saudi Arabia and all who have traditionally supported or engaged with the opposition in this pursuit. I recall in this respect that 2254 does encourage me to be active in any finalization effort in this regard.

Mr. President,

As we counsel fresh thinking and initiative on the part of the opposition, we may also need to do the same with the Government. The Government has indicated that it would be prepared to intensify its engagement with a unified opposition and with clarity on principles that govern the political process. But there are times when strong public signals are sent that indicate an exclusively military approach, and a dismissal of the prospects of any meaningful political negotiation.

However, we have seen too many instances in other conflicts where, despite military advances, a government has not been able to turn those gains into a sustainable post-conflict situation, due to unmet political grievance and lack of genuine inclusion of all in the future of the country. That's why we are convinced that both the Government and the Opposition should have a genuine interest now to engage in a serious discussion.

Ultimately, it will only be Syrians who determine the future of their country. But an internationally supported and inclusive political process will be required to lay the foundation for a sustainable future, and for genuine reconstruction.

It is in the profound interests of the long-suffering people of Syria that the government and the opposition realize that **the time has come to engage in a more serious and concrete negotiation.**

Mr. President,

In this regard, I would like to note that we are not only focused on the government and opposition, but are listening to the full range of Syrian stakeholders.

Immediately after the 7th round, our OSE Civil Society Support Room completed regional consultations in Beirut, Gaziantep and Amman. These discussions involved over 120 actors and networks stemming from the Syrian civil society, establishing the foundations for future consultations in Geneva. It is becoming increasingly clear from these consultations that regardless of their perceived differences, all Syrians are impatient for the conflict to end and the political process to deliver. We will continue to encourage and facilitate their collective work.

Let me also update you on the Women Advisory Board. Following its regular contributions to the work that was done during the 7th round of intra-Syrian talks, the 12-member board is currently undergoing a rotation exercise to ensure continuous diversity of perspectives.

I count on the continued support of the Women Advisory Board to advise me and my

team to ensure the meaningful representation of diverse women's voices and women's rights perspectives in the political process as we move forward. And we hope to see the same, both in the delegation of the opposition and of the Government.

Mr. President,

So, how do we bring all of this activity together into one common effort in the coming months to genuinely advance a political solution? What is the path forward?

First, Russia, Iran and Turkey and others — including the United States of America, Egypt and Jordan — will need to keep actively working, as they have been doing, on de-escalation. The next Astana meeting, now scheduled for 14 and 15 September, should help to address these matters, and I and my team will be there to help.

Second, it will be important that Saudi Arabia and all who have influence with the opposition focus as they are currently doing on one plan to foster the cohesion and realism of the opposition. We shall on our side be actively involved in that too, while, let me reiterate, standing ready for my office to convene further technical talks to support what Saudi Arabia has been trying to do in **unifying the opposition**.

Third, it will be vital for those with influence on the Government of Syria to [urge it to] assess the situation carefully and signal a genuine readiness for dialogue and inclusion on the political future of Syria.

Fourth, I appreciate the continued engagement and support of the European Union, and view the meeting it intends to host during the General Assembly as an opportunity to address future resilience and stabilization efforts and support the humanitarian needs of civilians.

Bearing all this in mind, Mr. President, it is my intention to re-convene the formal intra-Syrian talks in Geneva later in October. This is designed to give time for the dynamics I have just described to reach a further stage of maturity. It is my hope that both the Syrian Government and the opposition will come to Geneva then to engage in formal negotiations.

Mr. President,

This is a time for realism and focus, for shifting from the logic of war to that of negotiation, and for putting the interests of the Syrian people first. If I could identify one thing above all that can make the difference, it will be a sense of unity of purpose internationally with clear priorities and common goals.

We need to find creative ways to proceed along the path of peace that this Council, with SCR 2254, has long sought to advance. With that, and our common encouragement to the Syrians in this regard, we can make a real difference in this tragic conflict. I also look forward to the occasion of the forthcoming General Assembly to see further occasions and initiatives related to an accelerated political process in Syria.

Let me summarize so that we have on our radar screen some points that may be helping us to focus. First, our Security Council meeting and your own deliberations. Second, Astana is due to take place, and we want them to succeed and look at additional de-escalation areas. Then the opportunity that all of us will have at the General Assembly to promote and push for discussions, initiatives, related to an accelerated political process for Syria. Then, in October, we hope to see — and we will be working and pushing for it — that the Riyadh 2 meeting will contribute to produce a common platform among the oppositions, hoping meanwhile that the Government will also be helped to realize that there is now a need for a genuine and concrete political negotiation.

Meanwhile, we hope that Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa will be moving towards liberation. Hence, there will be even more urge for a sustainable political solution so that Daesh will not reappear again like it did in Iraq.

Late October: Geneva talks. This time, we hope, serious ones, concrete ones. We are planning for two weeks in a row. That is basically what we are seeing on our radar screen. Things may happen to support the political process, to stop it, to complicate it or to move it forward, but we need a to have a common vision.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Staffan de Mistura, "Briefing to the Security Council by UN Special Envoy for Syria. Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 30 August 2017. [Boldface added by Standler.]

Summarizing de Mistura:

- next negotiations in Geneva postponed until "late October" 2017;
- the next negotiations in Geneva have been postponed so that the Opposition can "unify" and "develop common negotiating positions" — once again, the HNC is delaying progress in Geneva;
- promise of "concrete talks" in October, scheduling "two weeks in a row";
- next meeting in Astana on 14-15 September.

My comment is that I am skeptical of the promise of concrete results from the Geneva negotiations in October 2017. Assad has been trying to crush the Opposition since the civil war began in March 2011. The only thing that unites the HNC is their demand that Assad resign, a demand that is unrealistic given that Assad is winning the civil war. I would be surprised if the Opposition unites into one delegation *and* abandons their demand that Assad resign.

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I am including this blank heading as a reminder of what could have been the next day of negotiations in Geneva.

On 1 September, de Mistura gave an interview to BBC radio in which he predicted the defeat

of ISIL in Raqqa and Deir al-Zor by the end of October 2017, and the defeat of Nusra in Idlib province soon after. De Mistura predicts credible elections in Syria "within a year". [Reuters](#).

6 Sep 2017

On 6 September 2017, de Mistura held a press conference in Geneva. I have boldfaced the parts I find important. The beginning of his remarks is quoted [below](#), in the section on the Humanitarian Task Force.

Regarding Idlib, there are concerns and, they were discussed at the HTF, regarding the fact that al-Nusra has been increasing its own holding and influence inside Idlib, which makes it more dangerous and complicated for a proper humanitarian access. I believe this may be discussed also in Astana because Idlib is a subject of Astana.

Now let's look at the global political assessment regarding Syria. First of all, chronology: the next rendez-vous or step is the Astana meeting. This seems to be now definitely confirmed, as you know for next week, and I plan to be there with a UN delegation. The expectation there, I leave it to those who are organizing it, but is to address the issue of Idlib, and we hope it will also touch the issue of humanitarian demining, and the detainees', that is why I will bring a team of experts.

Then we are all going to be at the General Assembly, when I say all, all countries and all Foreign Ministers and above. And what I do know, I cannot go into much of the details, there are different countries who are planning various initiatives which may lead to an opportunity for discussing Syria and above all how to stabilize the political situation in Syria, and in order to accelerate the political process along 2254. So the GA may become quite an opportunity for at least addressing this aspect.

We are in the meantime intensifying political contacts and testing ideas in order to assist the attempt by the opposition to actually unify and be ready for the Riyadh 2 Conference, which is expected in October, and also to discuss with those countries who have an influence on how to facilitate that. And then we do plan, and I confirm it, to actually move forward with the plan to have **serious negotiations in October between the government and the opposition, hopefully by that time they would have recalibrated in a unified way and with a pragmatic approach.**

You must have heard that I have been making recently some general comments on future steps. I think I can elaborate a little bit further here. There are some facts, and then there are visions, that's what a mediator is supposed to propose or work on. And the facts are: that Deir ez-Zor is almost liberated, in fact is, as far as we are concerned liberated, in a matter of few hours, and the next one is going to be Raqqa, in a matter of days, or few weeks. Deir ez-Zor was surrounded, as you know, by Daesh and therefore there was no need of street by street fighting. Raqqa is more complicated, but it is also likely nevertheless to be liberated very soon.

When that will take place that becomes the moment of truth. Why? Because many countries who got involved, who are involved in the Syrian conflict, based on their own

intention, public intention, to fight Daesh. Well, once Daesh is being almost militarily defeated then there is a very big question that they should be helped to ask themselves, do we want to have another Mosul? Do we want to give a chance to Daesh, in another form, in three months' time, God forbid, and with a different name, to actually start again in Syria, like it was done in Iraq? Or do we want to actually really defeat Daesh and actually answer the question that the Syrian people have been asking, "we want peace finally, we want a political stability, we do not want violence".

So the priority is, what we call the de-escalation, which Astana is doing and frankly once the de-escalation will be over, Astana's useful role could be almost over, and therefore we may not be that far from that moment. Look at how many areas have been now de-escalated, and I must say, quite successfully. Second, we need then a national ceasefire, that's what the Syrian people want. And then do we want to make it sustainable? The only answer is a political process. Now I know you heard the word "political process" many times, but the issue is: is the government after the liberation of Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa, ready and prepared to genuinely negotiate and not simply announce victory, which we know, and they know too, cannot be announced, because it won't be sustainable without a political process? **Will the opposition be able to be unified and realistic enough and realize that they did not win the war?** There is a need for a political negotiation based on 2254, perhaps in an accelerated way and perhaps also with some adjustments due to the pragmatic environment in which we are living.

If that moment of truth will be missed, the forecast then could be very bad. We may have a new Daesh coming up, we may have a low intensity guerrilla [war], we may not have countries interested in reconstruction. That's not what we all want. That's why when I say that we are now at a moment of truth very soon and where we hope that those countries who can influence the government to say now is the time to negotiate, of course the militarily situation has been improving but it is time to negotiate. **And for the opposition, to do the same in a realistic, unified way**, all this is going to be very soon after Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

The agenda is clear, I have been mentioning it and I can mention it again, and it is agreed, it is 2254. The constitutional reform, some form of political power-sharing which can lead to credible, credible, UN-led, UN monitored elections. So when people say "what will be the future of Syria?", the answer is: "what the Syrians will decide". But they will be deciding based on what 2254 has been indicating, not just simply by a diktat, by any foreign country, or anyone else.

So that's the plan, it may change, spoilers may take place, as usual has been in the past, but if they do that, it means that we would have given them the time after Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor to actually do so, and that's what I hope will not be the case. It is the moment of truth. I am ready to take questions of course.

....

QUESTION: You say in October there will be serious negotiations...

SdeM: There must be serious negotiations, I didn't say there will be serious

negotiations, I said there must be serious negotiations, and we will be pushing for that if the government will become serious and want to negotiate because Russia and others will tell them now is time, and if the opposition will be told by those who support it: get your acts together, be ready to negotiate.

....

SdeM: On the opposition, the message is very clear, if they were planning to win the war, facts are proving that's not the case, so that is the time to win peace by negotiating and by making concessions on both sides.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), copy at [U.N. Geneva](#), 6 September 2017. [Boldface added by Standler.]

In my opinion, the really critical part of de Mistura's remarks is when he asks: "Will the opposition be able to be unified and realistic enough and realize that they did not win the war?" In the past, the opposition has used the Geneva negotiations as an opportunity to demand what they were unable to win in the war. When de Mistura speaks of "realistic" or "pragmatic", he means recognizing that the insurgents lost the civil war and that Assad will remain the leader of Syria, at least until the next election.

On 8 September, the head of the HNC delegation — the group that scuttled negotiations in Geneva in April 2016 and did not return until February 2017 — described de Mistura's remarks as “ ‘shocking and disappointing’, stressing that de Mistura’s speech was in line with the Russian agenda.” The HNC asserted: “any international deal for a solution will not succeed unless the demands of the Syrian people for a political transition away from Assad are implemented.” The HNC also called for the referral of Assad and other war criminals to the International Criminal Court, a referral that Russia has prevented since 2014. [SNC](#).

My comment on the HNC is that it is propaganda that the Syrian people are demanding the resignation of Assad. Notice the HNC's intransigent position that Assad be removed from power. The HNC's position will frustrate negotiations in Geneva with Assad's government. Further, the HNC's inability to recognize the reality that the insurgents have been defeated shows the HNC is unfit to participate in the Syrian political process, including Geneva negotiations. Back in February 2016 — 18 months ago — I [wrote](#): “I suggest that Hijab's Supreme Commission [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.” I continue to believe that.

27 Sep 2017

On 27 September 2017, de Mistura attended a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, where he said:

Mr. President,

1. Let me update you first on the latest developments, and then turn to the way ahead on the political track and the implementation of Security Council resolution 2254.

2. First, what's happening on the ground. The Amman discussions and the meetings which have taken place very effectively in Astana have created four zones of de-escalation — in the south, in Eastern Ghouta, north of Homs, and in Idlib province. We also now have two other so-called de-confliction zones which have been brokered by the Russian Federation in Ifreen and Eastern Qalamoun.

3. However, the situation, you know it, we know it, remains still fragile. We are concerned by the al Nusra offensive in Idlib and Hama provinces following the Astana meeting, and the heavy fighting that has been taking place there. This includes some of the first airstrikes in the area since April, some allegedly hitting civilians and civilian infrastructure including health facilities, as well as heavy opposition shelling on civilian towns under government control in Hama and Latakia. We are also concerned at heavy fighting in other places. So the situation is far from perfect. Nevertheless, we have to admit, and we want to reaffirm it here, the creation of the de-escalation zones is a very important step in the effort to de-escalate the violence in the whole country and we are seeing the results of it.

4. ISIL is being beaten back. Government forces have advanced in the eastern countryside of Hama and Homs and broken the three-year of the so-called siege of, which is taking place de facto in Deir Ez Zor city. The Government and allies recently crossed the Euphrates River. Meanwhile, the Syrian Democratic Forces with the backing of the International Coalition made further advances against ISIL, taking control of most of the city of Raqqa, while the SDF-led Deir Ez Zor military council has made advances against ISIL on the eastern banks of the Euphrates. The Government and its allies have reportedly increased their strikes on SDF positions. Armed opposition groups are also involved in battle against ISIL in Daraa. I wish to recall the United Nations' calls for the protection of civilians — and this is the right place to do it — in Idlib, in Deir ez Zor, in Raqqa and elsewhere where fighting is still going on.

5. In the midst of this intensive military activity, while we all recognize that the fighting against ISIL is important, we need to remember that the civilians cannot be punished twice: already because they have been under the rule of ISIL and then because they happen to be unlucky enough to be there when the fighting goes on. I would like to urge that more needs to be done in the field of protection of civilians: more needs to be done to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure from military assault, and to ensure safe, sustained and unimpeded access to all civilians in need in Syria, wherever they are. You will hear more from my colleague Mark Lowcock on the latest humanitarian developments.

6. Allow me nevertheless to specifically underline the issue of detainees, abductees and missing persons. Thousands of them according to their families are still missing, abducted or detained. We have not seen any progress on this issue — neither in Astana, despite several attempts and hopes; nor in Geneva. A very large number of Syrian families are suffering from the absence of their all detained or missing relatives, and lack above all information on their fate. They don't even know if they are alive or not. The time has come to address this issue now as a major priority, particularly in this period when we see de-escalation taking place.

7. I also hope that concrete results can be achieved in the near future on the issue of humanitarian mine action — I hate mines, I had three of my colleagues killed by mines both in Afghanistan and in Iraq. I've seen them in action — as this would constitute another important confidence-building measure. I note with interest the ongoing dialogue between UNMAS and the Government of Syria in this regard.

Mr. President,

8. There is wide consensus that de-escalation arrangements must not lead to a soft partition of Syria, must not lead to a soft partition of Syria, and that Syria's unity and territorial integrity must be fully upheld. I found many common perspectives through the hundreds of Syrians we are meeting regularly; Syrians of all backgrounds have voiced their strong rejection of any partitioning of Syria — its territory and its people.

9. That is why de-escalation should be a pre-cursor to a truly nation-wide ceasefire, and to action on the humanitarian and confidence-building fronts — the issues identified in paragraphs 12-14 of 2254. The Astana effort — and the Amman one too — should be seen as laying the basis for a renewed Geneva process — one that moves from preparatory talks into genuine negotiations on the political future of Syria as envisaged in resolution 2254, tackling all four baskets of the agenda, and as welcomed by this Council.

Mr. President,

10. I have engaged both sides, as well as all those who have an influence over them, during the General Assembly, which has been as usual very useful. I attended a number of multilateral meetings in its margins, including one convened by the European Union — and I want to thank the European Union for that initiative — with a wide cross-section of international actors. I also had the opportunity to visit Washington on Monday [25 Sep], while my Deputy, Ambassador Ramzy, visited Moscow yesterday and today. I intend to maintain a high level of engagement with all concerned countries and Syrian parties in the weeks ahead.

11. We will continue to engage with all participants in the Civil Society Support Room and to draw on the insights of the Women's Advisory Board. Participants from both have strongly underscored to me the expectations of a broad cross section of Syrians for an inclusive political solution reflecting the interests of all Syrians and grounded in human rights, equality, and justice. They continue to call attention to the voices missing from the political process, including women who are half the population if not more. They should have an equal voice in the decisions shaping the future of their country.

12. I wish to confirm today my intention to convene the 8th round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva — I discussed it with the Secretary-General yesterday — in about a month from now — the precise date is to be determined. It should be no later than end October or very early in November. I am reaffirming that timeframe so that all concerned can use the crucial month from now until then to create conditions for those

talks to be particularly meaningful. And I am calling on both sides — I repeat, both sides — to assess the situation with realism and responsibility to the people of Syria and to prepare seriously to participate in the Geneva talks without preconditions — without preconditions. Let me explain exactly what we mean by that.

13. We believe the Government has an interest and indeed a duty to genuinely negotiate with the opposition that this Council has identified by name in 2254. Until now, the Government has conditioned its readiness to move from talks to real negotiations on the issue of opposition unity, and a commitment to certain essential principles. I also know how important the terrorism and counter-terrorism issue has been to the Government. But it is precisely at this time, as terrorism is starting to be defeated in Syria, — and we are watching it with our own eyes — that we need to preserve those gains on the ground and sustain them through a real and inclusive political process — guided by resolution 2254.

14. The Government therefore should be urged to show by word and action that it genuinely wants to have a negotiation about credible, inclusive governance locally and centrally; about a schedule and process for a new constitution; about UN supervised elections — all while the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria are preserved — all while terrorism is combatted and defeated. It is important that those states who are friends of the Syrian Government encourage it to show its readiness to move forward, including on the substance of 2254, the agenda of the baskets, not just in broad terms, but in specifics, with details, sequencing and implementation modalities. This will not be easy, but it has to start, and the United Nations will be more than willing to be an honest broker in enabling real negotiations with the opposition.

15. For its part, we also believe that the opposition has an interest and indeed a duty now to signal that it does want to speak with one voice and with a common platform in genuine negotiations with the Government on those 4 baskets and on the implementation of resolution 2254. No one is asking the opposition to suddenly stop being the opposition — but we are urging the opposition to realize that it is at its most credible and effective when it stands together, and shows readiness to negotiate, which means to give and take.

16. In this regard, there has been a lot of hard work done by my office frankly. There is much to build from. My office facilitated valuable technical work of the three opposition platforms from May to July. The opposition should be urged now to take the opportunity presented by the effort of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to convene what they call an inclusive Riyadh 2 conference — which we hope and trust will take place in October before the Geneva talks and before Astana. That conference should be the time and place for the opposition, with the encouragement of those who have influence over it — and some of them are in this room — to ensure that it comes together, and presents a strategic approach to the negotiation process to realize the vision which remains always the same of 2254. The United Nations is ready to support this in any way we can.

17. Let me caution all sides against illusions of victory or dreams of shortcuts. There is

no substitute for a UN, internationally supported process based in Geneva on a comprehensive and inclusive approach that also helps Syrians to re-discover a modicum of trust and social cohesion after this bitter conflict.

18. We need to remember: hundreds of thousands are dead, and millions carry the physical or psychological wounds of a brutal conflict. Millions are displaced, either within Syria or beyond, even as some are trying to return home. Thousands are detained, thousands have disappeared — many without a trace, and with no progress on revealing their fate. Infrastructure — particularly civilian infrastructure — has been destroyed on a scale that is not imaginable. Internationally proscribed terrorist groups, even if they are on the back foot today and they have shown their resilience in other places of the world in surviving battlefield reverses and thriving again — which they will or they could if there is no new political compact that enables the society to transition to a shared, inclusive, democratic future. The need to address the unmet grievances that exist in Syria is apparent to me from the range of Syrian voices who are not aligned neither with the Government nor the opposition.

19. That is why, Mr. President, the time has come for the focus to return to Geneva, and the intra-Syrian talks under the auspices of the United Nations — yourselves. That is the only forum in which the transitional political process envisaged by this Council in resolution 2254 can be developed with the Syrian parties themselves, with the full legitimacy that the UN provides and the backing of the international community. We have a month until those talks — that is why we want to all work in this month. Let us use it to prepare them well.

"Briefing to the Security Council by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 27 Sep 2017. (posted in Geneva on 29 Sep)

I have three comments:

1. De Mistura wants the opposition to "speak with one voice". (§15) The Syrian opposition has been fragmented and disorganized for at least the past four years, and I do not see any realistic hope of unity now.
2. De Mistura will schedule negotiations in Geneva "no later than end October or very early in November." (§12) The Geneva negotiations are moving with glacial slowness.
3. De Mistura wants "genuine negotiations on the political future of Syria" (§9) and "participate in the Geneva talks without preconditions" (§12). I think these are unlikely to occur. In his 30 August 2017 briefing to the U.N. Security Council, de Mistura spoke of "concrete" negotiations for "two weeks in a row", but he omitted those words on 27 September.

___ Sep 2017: Day Nr. 54

I am including this blank heading as a reminder of what could have been the next day of negotiations in Geneva.

18 Sep 2017: Friends of Syria meeting

On 18 September 2017, the Friends of Syria group — a group of anti-Assad foreign meddlers who supported the now defeated Free Syrian Army and other moderate rebels — held a meeting in New York City on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting. [Reuters](#) quoted British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson as saying the Friends of Syria governments will *not* financially support the reconstruction of Syria “until there is a political transition ‘away from Assad’.”

A U.S. diplomat, David M. Satterfield, said:

Only a credible political process that reflects the will of the majority of Syrians can achieve that goal, and we talked quite a bit — the Secretary [Tillerson] led and his remarks were absolutely agreed to by everyone present. There’s got to be a political process if there is to be any international participation in the reconstruction of Syria.

To put this another way, the [Assad] regime and the regime’s supporters cannot declare a victory solely based on a map and colors of positions on the ground. Without a political process, the international community — all of those states represented in the room today — are not going to contribute to a legitimization or authenticization or to the reconstruction of Syria. We are all committed to humanitarian aid, and that will continue to flow, of course. But the reconstruction of Syria depends very much on that credible political process.

....

We have made — the U.S. and many of the parties in the room, who can speak for themselves, have made clear their view that at the end of the day we do not believe that the majority of the Syrian people wish to see Bashar al-Assad continue in power. The U.S. view is he has lost his legitimacy, has lost his right to be in power. But that is the product, the end state, of a political process. And it’s the launch of the political process that has to begin now that takes you, takes Syrians, to that end state.

David M. Satterfield, "Briefing on Syria," [U.S. State](#) 18 Sep 2017.

"Political process" means the transition away from Assad, as negotiated in Geneva. It may also mean the Transitional Governing Body that was mentioned in Kofi Annan's Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 and enshrined in United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2118 and 2254.

On 21 Sep, the U.S. State Department posted a [Joint Statement](#). Paragraph two tersely says: "Recovery and reconstruction support for Syria hinges on a credible political process leading to a genuine political transition that can be supported by a majority of the Syrian people."

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.

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. The fourth agreement, creation of four safe zones, occurred in Astana on 4 May 2017.

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.

My essay for [July 2017](#) mentions a new ceasefire in southwestern Syria, Trump ended the clandestine shipment of weapons by the CIA to moderate rebels in Syria, and Nusra Front seized control of Idlib province.

Continuing War in Syria

On 3 August 2017, Russia announced the creation of a new safe zone, this one north of the city of Homs in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 4 August, Russian military police deployed into the new safe zone. The Russians established checkpoints and observation posts. [Associated Press](#).

Russia declared a truce and a safe zone in Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus, but that has not prevented a military assault by Assad's army and Iranian allies. [Reuters](#). On 8 August, the last group of rebels in Eastern Ghouta was waiting for a final assault by Assad's army. [Reuters](#).

The Syrian National Coalition (SNC) represented the opposition during the U.N. Negotiations in Geneva in February 2014. The SNC promised to appoint a Supreme Military Command for the Free Syrian Army in June 2015, but failed to appoint anyone by August 2016. My essays for August 2015 through Jan 2016 suggested that the SNC was "fading". But on 10 August 2017, the government of Saudi Arabia affirmed the "crucial role" that the SNC plays. [Al-Arabiya](#). My comment is that, given the weakness and lack of accomplishments of the SNC, the opposition is truly weak in Syria, if Saudi Arabia thinks the SNC is praiseworthy.

On 12 August 2017, [Reuters](#) and the [Associated Press](#) reported that gunmen in Idlib province killed 7 "White Helmet" rescuers. Following the murders, the gunmen stole two vehicles and some equipment from the office of the White Helmets.

On 19 August 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's army artillery and airstrikes hit the Jobar suburb of Damascus, where a Russian-brokered truce is supposedly in effect. At least five civilians died from chlorine gas in Assad's rockets. [Al-Arabiya](#) also reported the chlorine gas attack.

During September 2017, I spent most of my spare time researching and writing my essay on [North Korea](#).

August-September 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 the first half of 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.

On Thursday, 17 August 2017, Jan Egeland gave his first press briefing in Geneva in two months:

A few points. The convoy that is now unloading in Douma is a hugely symbolic

convoy, it is the first interagency convoy with UN, SARC, Red Cross, of this size to Douma, eastern Ghouta since the beginning of May. Took a lot of effort, a lot of negotiations and a lot of help from Russia and others to make it happen. To go to Douma, you have to go in a big circle from behind, which is actually next door to Damascus centre. And it shows how the conflict has affected rural Damascus, where most of the remaining besieged areas lay, of the 11 besieged regions still, 8 are next to Damascus.

Now we have been doing stock taking today in the humanitarian task force, we are in the second half of the sixth war year. How has it been really? Well, it has been a year of extraordinary upheavals for the civilians of Syria, they suffered under a trench warfare, for years, front-lines sometimes were frozen. This year has seen enormous shifts. Aleppo is now a place where people can return to, Homs [city] is generally quiet, there has been, however, intensive fighting in Dara'a in the south, and has been in eastern Ghouta next to Damascus.

The worst place probably today in Syria is the part of Raqqa city that is still held by the so-called Islamic State. We reckon there will be 20,000 or 25,000 civilians there, they are encircled by the SDF fighters and they are used, assumingly, as human shields by the Islamic State. There are constant air raids by the Coalition. We have been in contact with many humanitarian partners who say that the situation couldn't be worse for these women and children civilians who are now in this crossfire. We are therefore urging the Coalition, the SDF who we can deal with, to allow as much as they can, people to escape, to come out and to avoid civilian casualties, of which there have been many.

MSF told me that in their medical facilities people are not reaching anymore, because apparently they cannot escape Raqqa.

Generally, we do have this then contradictory trends. In terms of displacement, I thought it will be better than the previous years, it has not. 7,000 Syrians have been displaced every single day on average in the first half of 2017. Accumulated, this will be 1.3 million times a Syrian has been displaced. And this is the contradictory trends, never before has in this war, so many internally displaced have been able to return to their homes, and to the ruins of their homes. Some 500,000 internally displaced have been able to return, and Aleppo is the number one place where they return to look after their property, to seek safety from unsafe place elsewhere in Syria, to rebuild, and we are now helping to rebuild there.

In terms of access, indeed the trend is that we are reaching more people in more places. So from 6 million in January to 9 million in June, which was a very good month, 7.6 billion on average during 2017 of Syrians reached. There are reached in regular programmes within Syria, from and within government controlled areas, cross-border from neighboring countries, and many into the opposition held areas, and in disputed areas.

We are now able to go, for the first time by road from Aleppo in the north west all the way to Qamishli in the north east. A truck would reach all of that distance and we have

had 167 trucks by the end of July doing that road, can reach this destination for \$50 per ton by road. When we had to go by air, it costs \$1,200 for one ton, air lifting. When we had to use air lifting for Deir ez-Zor, it was more costly. So us being able to reach many more people by road is a good sign of effective humanitarian relief to more places.

Perhaps then two final points. We are still not able to reach the majority of these 11 besieged areas, but we have more facilitation letters as they call permits in the last few days than I can remember in recent months. So it can change, we have intensive diplomacy, negotiations with the Syrian government, with armed opposition groups and we have been helped by Russia, Iran, the United States, and the other members of our humanitarian task force. We are hopeful it could now change, the second half of the year, I am now more confident than ever before it will be better.

However, that's the final point, we celebrate World Humanitarian Day this week, the toll has been enormous for us humanitarian workers, 21 UN Staff had been killed in this war, 65 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, 8 staff member and volunteers of the Palestinian Red Crescent societies, many more from Non-Governmental Organisations, 7 White Helmet killed/executed last week. 28 UN Staff members are detained or missing. These will be remembered, they are not a target, and the protection of humanitarian workers have to become better, as we now go into the seventh war year. Thank you.

Jan Egeland, "Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura and UN Senior Adviser Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 17 August 2017.

One week later, on 24 August 2017, Egeland said:

There are still 11 besieged areas in Syria. 11. Still 540,000 people live under sustained besiegement, many more are militarily encircled. By besiegement we mean: no humanitarian relief, no freedom of movement for civilians, and encirclement for more than three months.

Of these 11 areas, 8 are besieged by Government of Syria forces, the two Foua and Kefraya in Idlib are now effectively besieged by Hayaat Tahrir al-Sham, formerly known as al-Nusra. And still the ISIL forces are besieging Deir ez-Zor that we are still reaching only through high-altitude air drops, now more than 160 of them.

8 of the areas had been reached, once or more so far this year, three areas have not been reached at all. Most of those people besieged and most of those people not reached are within, I would say an hour, 90 minutes' drive from downtown Damascus. They are in the rural Damascus area, many of them are in the Ghouta area.

We were able to go cross-front-line with one large convoy to two places on Saturday, Talbiseh in Homs and also to rural Hama. 80,000 people were reached, since a long time ago that we were there the last time, regrettably surgical materials, select medicines and some medical equipment were reduced in quantity or not allowed to be loaded at all. That convoy again experienced something that we have seen repeatedly that is, fighting when our convoys go, because these are areas of cross fire to start with. The Talbiseh convoy was having a very close call, we were very afraid of them, it was

late evening and effective, however, humanitarian diplomacy and intervention by Turkey, Russia, the US and Qatar on either side of the front lines, helped us to get the convoy in and out safely.

We hope to go to two of the areas not reached so far, to Barzeh and Qaboun. We had just received facilitation letters from the government, we are ready to go. We will also go to another three places in the coming days, if we have security, and if none of the parties do anything to prevent us.

It was heart-breaking however, that we were not able to go in the last week to the people in Foua and Kefraya. There are many thousands there, maybe 12,000 altogether in Foua and Kefraya, who are besieged in Idlib. We were informed that there was an agreement reached by the parties besieging Foua and Kefraya and by Yarmouk, which is a Palestinian Camp close to Damascus, that we could go simultaneously to the places and we got the facilitation letters to go last weekend. We had the trucks loaded from the 17th of August until yesterday, the 23rd of August, then we were informed that there was not anymore agreement between the armed men besieging this area of how many people we could reach, go to, in Foua and Kefraya and in Yarmouk, and these refrigerated trucks with medicines and everything, had to be off-loaded.

We will do new attempts to go to the estimated 12,000 people in Foua and Kefraya and the 1,000 people in this part of Yarmouk, but then we need really to appeal to the humanity of those besieging these areas — let us come in, we are delivering to women, children, civilians.

In Raqqa, the five neighborhoods now held by the Islamic State, of the city of Raqqa, is an area where the needs are beyond belief and the protection concerns are acute. These people seem to be concentrated in this area, civilians, maybe 20,000, maybe more, by the so-called the Islamic State fighters. There is heavy shelling from the surrounding and encircling SDF forces and there are constant air raids from the Coalition. So the civilian casualties are large and there seem to be no real escape for these civilians. So now is the time to think of possibilities, pauses or otherwise that might facilitate the escape of civilians, knowing that Islamic State fighters are doing their absolute best to use them as human shields. I cannot think of a worse place on earth now than in these five neighborhoods and for these 20,000 people.

We are able to reach those escaping Raqqa city, I was impressed to see that more than 260,000 people were reached in July alone, of people who have been displaced within and from Raqqa. We give now assistance to some 50 concentration points for internally displaced, whereas inside Raqqa city, on both sides, conditions are very bleak and it is very hard to assist in all areas.

Of course, Deir ez-Zor is also a town where forces are now closing in from outside, they are closing in and reducing the area held by the so-called Islamic State fighters. We are concerned for the civilians in the areas controlled by ISIL and we are also concerned for our life-line to the people inside Deir ez-Zor, some 90,000 people and they only have our air drops. So extreme caution now also there has to be exercised, not to make it in anyway worse, for the civilian population.

A word at the end also on Idlib. There are 2 million people living in Idlib, controlled by non-governmental armed opposition groups of various kinds, including, to a large extent, by the HTS [Hayat Tahrir AlSham]. The cross-border assistance from Turkey is continuing and we are making enormous efforts to ensure that the assistance is to be given according to humanitarian principles. This life-line across the border is what they have in many areas in Idlib.

Jan Egeland, "Transcript of Press Stakeout by UN's Deputy Special Envoy for Syria, Ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, and Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 24 August 2017.

On 6 September 2017, de Mistura made some remarks on the humanitarian situation in Syria:

I would like to offer some comments because I was chairing today the HTF [Humanitarian Task Force] since Jan Egeland was not present, and then of course I will make some comments on the political forecast, analysis, ideas.

Regarding the HTF today, the main point which has come up and I must say has come up in a very clear way, has been the Deir ez-Zor issue. Deir ez-Zor is on its way to be completely liberated from a siege of three years, and the discussion at the HTF was: now, how can we actually improve the humanitarian access to it?

As you know the World Food Programme of the United Nations, has been keeping 95,000 people alive via high altitude, quite complicated and risky air drops. 300 of them have taken place, 6,000 tons of aid since 10 April of 2016. This was done thanks to unique operation through the UN, with many countries, I think it is a good time to actually remember that because sometimes we just take for granted the fact that the UN and many countries can work together in saving people. The countries who were involved in this Deir ez-Zor air drop operation, high altitude were: the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, the Russian Federation, who even provided a crew, and quite a courageous crew for the airplane, Australia, Italy, Federal Republic of Germany and Jordan. Now Deir ez-Zor is almost liberated, we hope this will become confirmed in the next few hours, and as soon as the road access will be clarified and cleared, I think that the people of Deir ez-Zor will be able to be reached via road, which means in a much cheaper and effective way. The UN is currently discussing with SARC, which is very actively preparing for the first convoys, how we can plan to do that by road.

The convoy which have been waiting for going to Kefraya and Foua, has once again been prepared and I hope, this would be working. Both to Kefraya and Foua, which as you know have been waiting for a long time and Yarmouk. We are talking about 7000 people and 2000 people respectively. This had been postponed several times, I know it, and we have been very unhappy about it, but this is being prepared once again. Same applies to the convoys to eastern Harasta, which have been postponed probably due to the logistical developments that had produced the liberation of Deir ez-Zor.

Regarding Raqqa there have been discussions at the HTF regarding the concern, humanitarian concern, for 25,000 civilians which have been trapped inside the center

of the city and are prevented by Daesh to actually leave it. And the need to avoid civilian casualties, due to the air bombing which is linked to the liberation of Raqqa.

There was also some discussion about the concerns on how to improve and increase the humanitarian assistance to the 263,000 IDPs which came from Raqqa, and are now based in 49 different locations.

Staffan de Mistura, "Transcript of Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), copy at [U.N. Geneva](#), 6 September 2017.

On 28 September 2017, Egeland gave a press conference:

At the Humanitarian Task Force today, we reported on two uniquely contradictory trends: On the one hand, we are making progress in reaching more Syrians with more assistance; on the other hand, we are not able to protect civilians. It has gotten worse in terms of protection of civilians and protection of medical and humanitarian workers of late.

The good news is that we are now reaching 7 to 9 million Syrians each month, in one of the largest humanitarian operations of this generation.

The people living in the besieged areas and in the hard-to-reach areas are fewer than before. They were more than 900,000 living in besieged areas in December, now our number is 420,000. The people living in so-called hard-to-reach areas [including besieged], who only got sporadic assistance, were more than 4 million at the end of last year — it is now around 3 million.

But we are incredibly and intolerably not making much progress in reaching the remaining 420,000 in besieged areas. We need to have around four cross front-line convoys per week to serve the 1.3 million people that we need to reach with cross front-line convoys. We have at best one convoy per week now and we only reach 280,000 of the 1.3 million in need of this assistance, over these last two months. That is 22 per cent of those we aimed to reach.

Where do the besieged now live? Well, 95 per cent of them live in Government of Syria-besieged areas, 2 per cent of them live in Foah and Kafraya, besieged by armed opposition groups, and 3 per cent in Yarmouk which has a double besiegement of armed opposition groups inside and Government-allied forces outside.

It is possible to reach all of these areas, of course, and we did importantly last week reach 25,000 civilians in the region that is having most besieged areas now: eastern Ghouta next to Damascus, in rural Damascus, east of the city. But most of the people in eastern Ghouta, hundreds of thousands there, besieged, we have not reached for many months. There is a need for a massive medical evacuation from these areas that we are working on and that we have not yet been able to realize.

I am hopeful that a tripartite trouble-shooting mechanism that has been recently established between the Government of Syria, the Russian Federation and the UN can help us get more access to more places that are besieged or in hard-to-reach areas needing front cross-lines assistance.

Perhaps the most worrying development in recent days and weeks is that there is an escalating series of attacks against civilians and against humanitarian colleagues and humanitarian lifelines, including hospitals, ambulances and health workers in Idleb.

But we have equally worrying reports from Raqqa and the areas of Deir ez Zour still under the so-called Islamic State control. In rural Hama, I reported to the Humanitarian Task Force a week ago that a group of people fleeing from ISIL control, stuck on the highway in rural Hama, was extremely vulnerable, well, the day before yesterday, on Tuesday, 80 of these civilians were hit by a reported air raid.

Of course we cannot in any way tolerate the heavy toll on civilians and on medical and humanitarian workers just because they live under or next to designated terrorist groups. These groups have violated every humanitarian and human rights standard there is, but fighting them cannot end up hurting these people twice through indiscriminate attacks. Millions still live under areas that are not regulated by the de-escalation zones because they live under groups that are designated as terrorist groups.

In Idleb, a minimum of five hospitals and two humanitarian warehouses and offices were attacked over the last week alone serving half a million people.

In the Humanitarian Task Force today, we documented that in these areas that have now been designated as areas [under control of] the HTS, formerly called al Nusra, these areas are full of internally displaced people camps, of medical and humanitarian installations and full of civilian concentrations that now are getting or in need of continuous humanitarian supplies and humanitarian workers' presence. These [areas] are of course as much protected under international law as anyone living anywhere else in Syria or anywhere else in the world. We urgently need a workable and respected system of notification for these protected localities that armed actors will respect.

We are equally concerned with what has happened and is happening to the civilians in Raqqa and Deir ez Zour regions still under the cruel control of Islamic State fighters and under coalition attacks. The relentless ground attacks and air raids have taken an enormous civilian toll, there is no doubt about it. I think the question asked by a BBC reporter who has come to Raqqa and seen the devastation is one that the anti-IS coalition need to ponder — "is there really no alternative to destroying a city when you are to save it"?

Jan Egeland, "Transcript of media stakeout on Syria with Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 28 Sep 2017.

U.N. Reports

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

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

Prosecution for War Crimes ?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

transitional justice and reconciliation are elements necessary for durable peace and for the Syrian Arab Republic to overcome the horrors of war.

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

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

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

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

Antonio Guterres, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016)," S/2017/244 (22 March 2017).

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

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

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

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

He said the same thing in his monthly reports for July, August, and September 2017: S/2017/623 at ¶41, S/2017/733 at ¶42, and S/2017/794 at ¶44. The Secretary General sounds like a gramophone record with a defective groove that repeats itself.

On 30 August 2017, Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, gave his final briefing to the United Nations Security Council. He used the occasion to again call for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. The United Nations meeting record said:

The Council had heard "in minute detail" about the destruction of Syria and its people since his appointment in June 2015, he said. It had seen harrowing images of bombs and mortars raining down on schools, of emaciated children in besieged towns, and of a drowned child washed up on a beach. Session after session had outlined that carnage, he said, "and yet failed to see accountability for any of the countless war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on the ground".

At least 500,000 Syrians had been killed and millions injured or displaced over the course of the conflict, he said, calling — for a final time as Emergency Relief Coordinator — on the Council to urgently refer the situation and those responsible for it to the International Criminal Court, as well as to support to the Internal, Impartial and Independent Mechanism [created in U.N. General Assembly Resolution 71/248] and ask Syrian authorities to finally grant access to the Independent Commission of Inquiry [created by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights].

"Emergency Relief Coordinator Decries Failure on Syria, Calls for Referral to International Criminal Court, in Final Security Council Briefing," [U.N.](#), 30 August 2017.

Carla Del Ponte resigned

On 22 August 2011, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) formed an Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. For 6 years, this was the only official organization that documented war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria. The chairman is Paulo Pinheiro of Brazil and there are two other commissioners: Carla del Ponte of Switzerland and Karen Koning AbuZayd of the USA. On 6 August 2017, Carla del Ponte completed her five-year term and resigned rather than be re-appointed. The official statement from the OHCHR says:

In mid-June, Ms. Carla Del Ponte informed her colleagues, Mr. Paulo Pinheiro and Ms. Karen AbuZayd, of her intention to resign from the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at some point in the near future.

Mr. Pinheiro and Ms. AbuZayd thank Ms. Del Ponte for all of her contributions to the work of the Commission over more than five years of service and for her personal efforts and interventions to support the cause of justice.

As the Syrian conflict grinds on, the Commission's work must continue in order to fulfill its mandate investigating all human rights violations committed in the armed conflict and, wherever possible, to identify alleged perpetrators in order to support efforts to bring those responsible to justice. It is our obligation to persist in its work on behalf of the countless number of Syrian victims of the worst human rights violations and international crimes known to humanity. Such efforts are needed now more than ever.

The Commission wishes Ms. Del Ponte well in all her future endeavors, particularly as a tireless advocate for the cause of accountability and bringing perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice.

"Statement of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria Regarding the Announcement of the Resignation of Ms. Carla Del Ponte," [UNOHCHR](#), 6 Aug 2017.

There is more to her resignation. On 6 August, the German-language newsmagazine [Blick](#) in Switzerland published an interview with Del Ponte, in which she expressed her frustration at the failure of the United Nations Security Council. The Associated Press reported:

In comments published Sunday [6 Aug] by the Swiss magazine [Blick](#), Del Ponte expressed frustration about the commission and criticized President Bashar Assad's government, the Syrian opposition and the international community overall.

"We have had absolutely no success," she told [Blick](#) on the sidelines of the Locarno film festival Sunday. "For five years we've been running up against walls."

Del Ponte, who gained fame as the prosecutor for the international war crimes tribunals that investigated atrocities in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, has repeatedly decried the Security Council's refusal to appoint a similar court for Syria's 6½-year-old civil war. Permanent member Russia, which can veto council actions, is a key backer of Assad's government.

"I give up. The states in the Security Council don't want justice," Del Ponte said, adding that she planned to take part in the last meeting in September. "I can't any longer be part of this commission which simply doesn't do anything."

Appointed in September 2012, Del Ponte was quoted by [Blick](#) as saying she now thinks she was put into the role "as an alibi."

....

At first in Syria, "the opposition (members) were the good ones; the government were the bad ones," she was quoted as saying. But after six years, Del Ponte concluded: "In Syria, everyone is bad. The Assad government is committing terrible crimes against humanity and using chemical weapons. And the opposition, that is made up only of extremists and terrorists anymore."

Jamey Keaten, "Ex-war crimes prosecutor quits panel probing Syria abuses," [Associated Press](#), 6 Aug 2017.

Reuters reported:

Del Ponte, a former Swiss attorney general, joined the three-member Syria inquiry in September 2012, chronicling incidents such as chemical weapons attacks, a genocide against Iraq's Yazidi population, siege tactics, and the bombing of aid convoys.

....

Earlier this year, when the commission reported on Syrian government aircraft deliberately bombing and strafing a humanitarian convoy, del Ponte hinted at her frustration with the inability to bring the perpetrators to justice. "What we have seen here in Syria, I never saw that in Rwanda, or in former Yugoslavia, in the Balkans. It is really a big tragedy," she added. "Unfortunately we have no tribunal."

Tom Miles, "Syria investigator del Ponte quits, blaming U.N. Security Council," [Reuters](#), 19:13 GMT, 6 Aug 2017.

At the Daily Press Briefing at United Nations Headquarters in New York City on Monday, 7 August, the following was said about the resignation of Carla del Ponte:

I was also asked about the decision by Carla del Ponte to resign from the Syria Commission of Inquiry. The Secretary-General notes with regret her decision to resign from the Syria Commission of Inquiry. He is grateful for her service and her contribution to the important work of the Commission as a tireless advocate for the cause of accountability throughout her career. As the international community continues to search for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, the Secretary-General reiterates the importance of accountability for crimes against civilians during the conflict. In that regard, he supports the continued work of the Commission as an important and integral part of the accountability process.

....

My understanding is the commission will continue its work. The Secretary-General continues to support its work, but the questions as to replacement of Ms. del Ponte and the mechanics should be addressed in Geneva to the Human Rights Council or to the remaining commissioners, Karen AbuZayd and Mr. [Paolo Sergio] Pinheiro.

....

Question: I wanted to follow up on the del Ponte resignation. Her criticism is that the Security Council is not willing to refer these cases inside Syria to the ICJ [sic] and that she says that the process has fallen victim to politics, not to the interest of achieving justice for the Syrian people. Does the Secretary-General agree with Ms. del Ponte's assessment? Does he have any out-of-the-box ideas on how to speed up the process of accountability even as the civil war continues?

Spokesman: ... a couple of things. The process of accountability is a critical one. It is an important one. It is one that takes time. Information needs to be gathered in a way that will stand up wherever and whatever circumstances people will have to face justice. It's something that we can understand is deeply frustrating to the victims, first

and foremost. There is also the Syria accountability mechanism that was voted on by the General Assembly [Resolution 71/248]. The person that was named to head that mechanism starts her work there officially tomorrow, so they will start to work. It is no secret to anyone that the deadlock in the Security Council, I think, has been a source of frustration, not only for the Secretary-General, but for others inside the UN. There's no getting around the Security Council, and I think we have repeatedly called for greater unity of purpose from Security Council members on the issue of Syria.

Stéphane Dujarric, "Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General," [U.N.](#), 7 Aug 2017.

My comment is that the resignation of Carla Del Ponte is a serious loss to efforts to enforce international law during the Syrian civil war. But Del Ponte is correct — prosecution for war crimes has been *threatened* for six years, but we are no closer to beginning trials in 2017 than in 2011. Russia has consistently vetoed attempts by the United Nations Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court, where prosecution belongs. Because of Russia's veto, Carla Del Ponte probably wasted the past five years of her life investigating serious crimes that may never be prosecuted.

For six years, United Nations officials have threatened to prosecute war crimes committed in Syria. These threats have exposed the United Nations as powerless and ineffectual, unable to enforce long-standing international law. The current U.N. Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, continues to futilely call for the Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court. His futile calls remind everyone that the United Nations is toothless.

Carla del Ponte's resignation will have an insignificant effect on history. I remember in 2012 and 2014 when the U.N. Secretary General's first two Envoys for Syria (i.e., Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi) resigned in frustration. New envoys were appointed and futile diplomacy continued. It will be the same with the resignation of Carla del Ponte: the United Nations bureaucracy will appoint a new commissioner to replace Ms. del Ponte, instead of fix the problem that caused her to resign. Russia, a rogue nation that protects Assad, certainly will *not* be inconvenienced by the resignation of Carla del Ponte.

On 13 August 2017, Carla del Ponte was again in the news:

The U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Syria has gathered enough evidence for President Bashar al-Assad to be convicted of war crimes, a prominent member of the commission, Carla del Ponte, said in remarks published on Sunday [13 Aug].

....

Asked in an interview with Swiss newspaper *SonntagsZeitung* whether there was enough evidence for Assad to be convicted of war crimes, she said: "Yes, I am convinced that is the case. That is why the situation is so frustrating. The preparatory work has been done. Despite that, there is no prosecutor and no court."

....

Although the United Nations is setting up a new body to prepare prosecutions, there is no sign of any court being established to try war crimes committed in the six-and-a-

half year-old war. Nor is there any intention by the U.N. Security Council to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

"For six years, the commission has investigated. Now a prosecutor should continue our work and bring the war criminals before a special court. But that is exactly what Russia is blocking with its veto in the U.N. Security Council," del Ponte was quoted as saying. "Syria investigator del Ponte says enough evidence to convict Assad of war crimes — *SonntagsZeitung*," [Reuters](#), 13 Aug 2017.

On 18 September 2017, del Ponte quit the U.N. Human Rights Council "out of frustration". [Reuters](#).

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.

Debate 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 only 125 Iraqi civilians killed in "terrorism, violence, and armed conflict" during August 2017. [UNAMI](#). There were 203 Iraqi civilians killed during September 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.

ISIL attacks in Iraq Iraqi military progress

On 10 August 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that an Iraqi military spokesman said: "West Mosul is still a military zone as the search operations are ongoing for suspects, mines and explosive devices."

On 20 August 2017, Iraqi prime minister Abadi announced the beginning of the military operation to liberate the town of Tal Afar from ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 26 August 2017, Iraqi troops had captured 90% of Tal Afar. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 27 August 2017, the Iraqi military captured the city center of Tal Afar. Reuters reported that the Iraqi military said "all 29 neighbourhoods in Tal Afar city had been taken back from" ISIL. Fighting continued in the village of al-'Ayadiya, about 11 km from Tal Afar. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

Remember the protracted battles to liberate Iraqi cities from ISIL:

1. Tikrit (1 March 2015 to 1 April 2015)
2. Ramadi (December 2015 to February 2016)

3. Fallujah (January 2016 to June 2016)
4. Mosul (17 October 2016 to 10 July 2017)

In contrast, it took only 8 days to liberate Tal Afar. One wonders if ISIL has exhausted their ability to capture and defend cities. Perhaps, ISIL will now concentrate on terrorist attacks, including encouraging Islamic terrorism worldwide via ISIL's websites on the Internet.

On 28 August, an ISIL car bomb exploded in a market in Baghdad, killing at least 12 people. The bomb was in the Shiite district of Sadr City, which has been the location of many Islamic terror attacks. [Associated Press](#); .

On 28 August, [Reuters](#) reported "tough resistance" in the village of al-'Ayadiya, near Tal Afar. ISIL used mortar shells, snipers, booby-traps, and roadside bombs.

On 30 August, [Reuters](#) reported house-to-house fighting in the village of al-'Ayadiya, near Tal Afar.

On 31 August, the Iraqi government declared that Tal Afar, including the village of al-'Ayadiya, had been liberated from ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

At dawn on 2 September, at least three ISIL fighters entered an electric power station in Samarra, Iraq. Four policemen and three employees of the power station were killed. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 14 September 2017, ISIL terrorists attacked a checkpoint and restaurant in Nasiriyah, Iraq. At least 84 people died. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 25 September 2017, a referendum was held in Kurdistan on whether to become independent from Iraq. A whopping 92.7% voted for independence. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#). The Iraqi government told foreign airlines to stop flying to/from Erbil, Kurdistan. Erdogan, dictator of Turkey, threatened to cut off all trade between Kurdistan and Turkey. [Reuters](#).

On 27 September 2017, a group of ISIL terrorists used suicide car bombs, mortars, and machine guns to kill at least 7 Iraqi soldiers near Ramadi. [Reuters](#).

Islamic Public Relations Problem

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My Proposal

There are genuine cultural differences between mainstream Islam and Christianity. For

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Need to Kill *Ideology* of Islamic Terrorism

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

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).
- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.
- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).
- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.
- On 15 October 2015, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December 2015, U.S. airstrikes killed al-Qaida leaders in Libya and Somalia. [Pentagon](#).
- In "late November" 2015, a U.S. airstrike in Iraq killed Abu Salah, the financial minister of ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 29 December 2015, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes had killed 10 senior ISIL leaders during 7-27 December. Some of the dead leaders were involved in the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 Nov. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 29 Dec; [Reuters](#) on 30 Dec.

- On 25 March 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military had killed Haji Imam, "who was an ISIL senior leader, serving as a finance minister and who is also responsible for some external affairs and plots." Imam is also known as Abdul-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) spells the dead man's name as "Haji Iman — an alias for Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli".
- On 4 May 2016, Australia announced that a Cambodian immigrant who had joined ISIL had been killed by a U.S. airstrike in Mosul on 29 April. His name was Neil Prakash, also known as Abu Khaled al-Cambodi. Neil had been featured in ISIL recruiting videos. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [ABC](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#).
- On 9 May 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that an airstrike on 6 May had killed "Abu Wahib, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's military emir for Iraq's Anbar province". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 21 May 2016, the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, was killed by an airstrike from a U.S. drone in Pakistan. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). [Reuters](#) reported: "The death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour ... could further fracture the Taliban — an outcome that experts cautioned might make the insurgents even less likely to participate in long-stalled peace efforts." And [Reuters](#) reported the Pakistani government is wailing about the U.S. violation of Pakistani sovereignty. [Obama](#) was pleased that Mansour — also spelled Mansur — was killed by the U.S. military. Four days after Mansour was killed, the Taliban elected a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 4 August 2016, an Egyptian military airstrike killed the leader of ISIL in Egypt, Abu Doaa al-Ansari. [Ahram](#); [Associated Press](#); [Ahram](#)(18 Aug confirmation); [Al-Arabiya](#)(19 Aug).
- On 30 August 2016, a U.S. airstrike near Al Bab, Syria, splatted Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani. He is said to be the head of external operations of ISIL (i.e., in charge of attacks in Europe, etc.), a tactician, and their chief spokesman. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#)(31Aug); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Pentagon](#)(12Sep).
- On 8 September 2016, Abu Hajer al 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. But on 31 August 2017, the commander of the U.S. Military in Iraq said he believed Baghdadi was still alive. [Pentagon](#).

- 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.

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 a Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

16. On 22 October 2015, IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center reported that the number of terrorist attacks by ISIL in the Middle East and Africa increased by 42% from the second quarter of 2015 to the third quarter of 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Voice of America](#).
17. On 31 October 2015, ISIL put a bomb aboard a Russian airplane carrying tourists from Sharm el-Sheikh airport in Egypt to St. Petersburg, killing 224 people. [The Guardian](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (crash); [NY Times](#) (blame ISIL); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#) (bomb in soda can); [Reuters](#) ("Schweppes bomb").
18. On 12 November 2015, ISIL claimed responsibility for a bombing in Beirut that killed at least 43 people. [Telegraph](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#); [NY Times](#).
19. On the night of 13 November 2015, ISIL masterminded multiple attacks in Paris that killed 130 people. See my essay for [November 2015](#).
20. On 19 December 2015, the [Associated Press](#) has a headline: "Islamic State expands Afghan footprint with terror campaign". The previous day [Reuters](#) reported: "U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter warned of the threat from Islamic State in Afghanistan during a surprise visit days after the Pentagon painted a grim picture of worsening security there."
21. On 12 January 2016, a Syrian ISIL suicide bomber exploded in Istanbul, killing 10 tourists. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Anadolu](#); [Hurriyet](#). This was apparently an attack on Turkey's tourist industry. [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).
22. On 29 January 2016, the United Nations Secretary General said there are now 34 terrorist groups who have pledged allegiance to ISIL. Ban Ki-moon said: "it is expected that ISIL affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016." [U.N. Report](#); [Associated Press](#).
23. On 21 February 2016, ISIL detonated two car bombs in Homs, Syria that killed at least 57 people. [Reuters](#). Two ISIL car bombs and two suicide bombers in the Sayeda Zeinab district of Damascus killed at least 87 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). At night on 22 Feb, [SOHR](#) claims a total of 190 dead in Homs and Zeinab.
24. On 22 March 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers killed 32 people at the airport and one subway station in Brussels. See my essay for [March 2016](#).
25. On 12 June 2016, an Islamic terrorist perpetrated the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, killing 49 people at a nightclub in Orlando Florida. The terrorist pledged allegiance to ISIL, although there is *no* evidence that ISIL communicated with him. See my essay for [June 2016](#).
26. On 16 June 2016, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), John Brennan, testified before a committee of the U.S. Senate that "Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not

- reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach.” [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [CNN](#).
27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
 28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) (“... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered diners in a restaurant.”); [Reuters](#) (“... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State.”). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).
 29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
 30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).
 31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 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. On 1 August 2017, an ISIL suicide bomber and an ISIL gunman attacked a Shiite mosque in Herat, Afghanistan, killing at least 29 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#);

[Reuters](#).

48. On 25 August 2017, ISIL attacked a Shiite mosque in Kabul, Afghanistan, killing at least 28 people. [Associated Press](#)(25Aug); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#)(26Aug).
49. On 11 September 2017, ISIL killed 18 Egyptian policemen in the Sinai Peninsula. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
50. On 14 September 2017, ISIL attacked a checkpoint and restaurant in southern Iraq, killing at least 84 people. Citations [above](#).
- 51.

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

As of June 30, 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIS since kinetic operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$14.3 billion and the average daily cost is \$13.6 million for 1058 days of operations.

"Operation Inherent Resolve," [Pentagon](#), 9 Aug 2017.

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 21 Sep 2017, the U.S. Government has spent a total of US\$ 7.4 billion on humanitarian aid for Syria "since the start of the Syria crisis in 2011." [State Dept](#).

Terrorism & Migration in Europe

My previous essays beginning [November 2015](#) and ending [July 2017](#) described a flood of Muslim immigrants to Europe during 2015 and the impossibility of vetting those immigrants to find Islamic terrorists.

Islamic Terrorism in Europe/USA

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.
- My essay for [July 2017](#) described a Palestinian terrorist who attacked people at a

supermarket in Hamburg, Germany.

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.

9 August 2017: Islamic terrorist in Paris

At 07:50 Paris time on 9 August 2017, an Islamic terrorist drove a rented BMW automobile into a group of French soldiers, wounding six. The driver then drove away, toward Calais. Suspicion immediately fell on Muslims. The Associated Press reminds us: "It was the seventh attempted attack on security forces guarding France this year alone." After a long chase, French police stopped the car near Calais and shot the driver five times during the arrest.

A search of Google News on 20 August shows the last news article on this topic was published on 11 August. This topic has quickly faded from the news.

Bibliography:

- "Pictured: Algerian, 36, suspected of mowing down six soldiers outside barracks in Paris terror attack before being shot five times and arrested while 'driving his BMW towards Calais'," [Daily Mail](#), 07:19 GMT, updated 20:04, 9 Aug 2017. ("Suspect identified as Hamou Bachir, 36, an Algerian not known to police. The suspect — who also uses the name Benlatreche — is thought to be an illegal immigrant who was subject to a 'foreigner infraction' notice meaning he faced deportation to Algeria, which used to be French colony.")
- "Vehicle hits soldiers in Paris suburb, injuring 6," [Associated Press](#), 09:58 GMT, updated in evening, 9 Aug 2017. ("One police official said the suspect may be an illegal North African immigrant in his 30s, while another said he was an Algerian with French residency papers. The government and prosecutors would not release information about his identity.")
- "Paris attack: Soldiers hit by car, police search for driver," [CNN](#), 10:23 GMT, updated 14:12 GMT, 9 Aug 2017. ("The man, who was unarmed and hit with five bullets while attempting to evade police on the A16 motorway, is in a serious condition, according to CNN affiliate BFMTV. The broadcaster reported that he was arrested between Boulogne-sur-Mer and Calais.")
- "Car rams into soldiers in Paris suburb in suspected terrorist attack," [Reuters](#), 10:28 GMT, updated 18:54 GMT, 9 Aug 2017. (At 18:54 GMT: "A judicial source said the suspect was an Algerian national who held legitimate papers to be in France. Investigators raided several properties associated with the suspect, identified by the daily newspaper Le Parisien as 37-year-old Hamou B.")
- "Police: French soldier attack suspect not known as radical," [Associated Press](#), 11:34 GMT, 10 Aug 2017. ("The man suspected of ramming a BMW into a group of soldiers near Paris is a 37-year-old Algerian who was known to police as a suspect in

minor crimes but not as someone with radical beliefs, police said Thursday [10 Aug].")

- "Suspect in hit-and-run on French soldiers unknown to spy agencies - source," [Reuters](#), 12:16 GMT, 10 Aug 2017. ("The Algerian national suspected of ploughing a hire car into a group of soldiers in a wealthy Paris suburb is believed to be unknown to French intelligence services and had no criminal record, a police source said on Thursday.")
- "Paris attack: 'Algerian-born' suspect in Lille hospital," [BBC](#), 10 Aug 2017. ("French media say he was injured by five police bullets when his BMW hire car was chased and stopped on the A16 motorway near Boulogne.")
- "Soldier attack suspect brought to Paris, still hospitalized," [Associated Press](#), 11 Aug 2017. ("... 37-year-old Algerian Hamou Benlatreche has been transferred to a Paris hospital but remains too badly injured to face questioning or prosecution. The motive for the attack remains unclear.")

17 August 2017: Islamic terrorists in Barcelona, Spain

At approximately 17:15 local time (15:15 GMT) on Thursday, 17 August 2017, a van in downtown Barcelona, Spain plowed through pedestrians. The Islamic driver was "swerving back and forth" to increase the number of victims. Early reports said that 32 people had been injured, but the final toll was 13 dead and 120 injured. Journalists report 15 dead by including one dead from a related Islamic terrorist attack in Cambrils and the dead owner of a carjacked Ford Focus. On 27 August, one woman died in a hospital from injuries in the van attack in Barcelona, increasing the death toll to 14 in the van attack, and increasing the total death toll to 16.

At 16:30 GMT on 17 August, the Associated Press reported: "Barcelona's TV3 reported ... that the Spanish passport of a person of Moroccan origin was found at the scene of the attack". On 17 August, Driss Oukabir, a 28 year old Moroccan living in Spain, went to police and falsely claimed that his 17 or 18-year-old brother, Moussa Oukabir, had stolen Driss' identity documents and used those documents to rent the van. But on 22 August, Driss told a judge that Driss had rented the van, which was to be used to move to another house.

After the attack in Barcelona, police established checkpoints to find the driver of the van. A Ford Focus drove into police at a checkpoint at 18:30 local time on 18 Aug, wounding two policemen. The Ford contained the body of its owner, who had died of knife wounds. The driver of the stolen Ford Focus escaped on foot.

On 19 August, *The Telegraph* in London reported:

After carrying out the attack [in Barcelona], [Moussa] Oukabir is believed to have fled on foot, before hijacking a Ford Focus car, stabbing the driver, and jumping a checkpoint, in order to make his escape. It is then believed he travelled to the coastal resort of Cambrils, where he met up with four fellow jihadists.

....

The 17-year-old key suspect of the Barcelona van outrage, Moussa Oukabir, was one of five terrorists shot dead by Spanish police during an attack on the coastal resort of Cambrils in the early hours of yesterday [18 Aug], authorities confirmed last night [18 Aug].

"Live — Barcelona attack: ...," [The Telegraph](#), 19 Aug 2017.

Police later believe Younes Abouyaaqoub — *not* Moussa Oukabir — drove the van of death in Barcelona and then hijacked the Ford Focus:

The fugitive in the Barcelona van attack [Younes Abouyaaqoub] carjacked [Pau Perez] and stabbed him to death Thursday night [17 Aug] as he made his getaway, Spanish officials said Monday as they raised the death toll in the country's two vehicle attacks to 15.

....

Perez was parking his car, a Ford Focus, in a lot between 6:10 p.m. and 6:20 p.m. Abouyaaqoub stabbed him before 6:32 p.m., put him in the car's rear seats and drove away, [regional police chief] Trapero said.

Trapero said Perez was already dead when Abouyaaqoub then rammed the car through a police checkpoint minutes later and police opened fire on his car.

The suspect ran over a police officer as the car evaded the checkpoint. About 7 p.m., police found the car and Perez's body 3 kilometers (nearly 2 miles) away from the checkpoint, near Sant Just Desvern, a town west of Barcelona, but Abouyaaqoub was nowhere to be found.

"Spain death toll to 15 as suspect linked to fatal carjacking," [Associated Press](#), 14:07 GMT, 21 Aug 2017.

Police initially identified Moussa Oukabir as the driver of the van in Barcelona. But on 19 August, police believe that Younes Abouyaaqoub, was the driver of the van, and Moussa was his passenger. Younes is a 21 or 22 year old Moroccan citizen who lives in Spain. Younes was shot dead by police on the afternoon of 21 August, in a vineyard near Barcelona. Younes was the last member of the 12-person terror cell to be killed or arrested.

Islamic bomb factory in Alcanar, Spain

On Wednesday night, 16 August, an Islamic bomb factory in a house in Alcanar Spain exploded. One woman died in the explosion and a man was critically injured. On 19 August, it was reported that more than 100 canisters of propane or butane gas were in the house. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Police say the bomb factory is "linked" to the van attack in Barcelona. On the night of 17 August, two people were arrested in connection with the bomb factory: one suspect at Ripoll and one suspect at Alcanar. The arrested suspects are from "Melilla, a Spanish-run Mediterranean seafront enclave in North Africa, and the other a Moroccan", according to the Associated Press.

On 18 August, police realized the terror attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils would have been much worse if the Islamic terrorists had bombs that were being built at the house in Alcanar. The accidental detonation of the bomb material was lucky for the potential victims.

[New York Times](#). On 19 August, police said the Islamic terror cell intended to bomb the Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona.

On 21 August, police said they believed imam Abdelbaki Es Satty — who is suspected of radicalizing the young men in the terrorist cell — died in the explosion in Alcanar, together with the woman whose body was found on the morning of 17 August. Police initially overlooked the fragments of the imam's body, probably because he was blown into tiny pieces.

Islamic terrorism in Cambrils, Spain

At 00:50 local time on Friday, 18 August, Catalan police killed 5 suspects in Cambrils Spain who were linked to both the Alcanar bomb factory and the Barcelona attack. The suspects in Cambrils were easy to find, since they were in one Audi car that plowed through pedestrians and then hit a police vehicle. Five pedestrians and one policeman were injured. One other pedestrian died in a hospital.

This is a significant terror cell: at least 1 in the Barcelona attack, 4 in the Alcanar bomb factory, and 5 in Cambrils, for a total of at least 10 Islamic terrorists. On 19 August, *The Telegraph* in London reported: "Security officials believe the attacks on Barcelona and Cambrils were the work of a terror cell of at least 12 people, who may have been inspired by the London Bridge outrage in June."

Relation to Islamic terrorism

At 19:27 GMT on 17 August, *The Telegraph* in London reported that ISIL's Amaq news agency claimed responsibility for the Barcelona attack.

On 18 August, the *Express* newspaper in London reported:

Two years ago, in the Kiwi Q&A app, Moussa Oukabir assured that if he were the absolute king of the world, the first thing he would do would be "to kill the unfaithful and only leave Muslims follow the religion."

[An image of the actual message says: "Kill the infidels I just let Muslims follow the religion"]

Will Kirby, "EUROPE'S MOST WANTED: Barcelona terror suspect hunted after 'kill infidels' rant," [Express](#), 18 Aug 2017.

On 19 August, *The Telegraph* in London reported:

... social media accounts reputed to be linked to [Moussa Oukabir] contained a series of Islamist comments. In one post, when asked what he would do on his first day as absolute ruler of the world, Moussa replied: "Kill all infidels and only allow Muslims to continue the religion."

"Live — Barcelona attack: ...," [The Telegraph](#), 19 Aug 2017.

The five Islamic terrorists in Cambrils — and also Younes Abouyaaqoub when he was killed in a vineyard — were all wearing fake suicide bomb belt. Both Reuters and the Associated Press report that Younes yelled "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest) when he flashed his bogus suicide bomb belt at police. The three Islamic terrorists in London on 3 June 2017 also wore bogus suicide bomb belts. While the suicide bomb belts might help terrorize civilians, the fake bomb belts also encouraged police to kill the terrorists.

At 17:56 GMT on 17 August, the [Associated Press](#) reminds us that "cars, trucks and vans have been the weapon of choice in multiple extremist attacks in Europe in the last year." But *all* of the examples cited by the Associated Press — 86 dead in Nice France in July 2016, 12 dead in Berlin Germany in December in December 2016, 4 dead on Westminster Bridge in London in March 2017 — are of attacks by *Islamic* terrorists. The Associated Press omitted the one word, *Islamic*, that is necessary to make their report completely accurate and truthful.

Journalists remind us that in March 2004, Al-Qaeda put bombs aboard commuter trains in Madrid Spain, killing 191 people.

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25 August 2017: Islamic terrorist in Brussels

On Friday, 25 August 2017, at 20:15 local time, one Islamic terrorist attacked three soldiers in downtown Brussels with a knife. The Islamic terrorist twice shouted "Allahu akbar" during his attack. The soldiers shot the terrorist dead. The Islamic terrorist emigrated from Somalia to Belgium in 2004 and became a Belgium citizen in 2015. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters\(25Aug\)](#); [Reuters\(26Aug\)](#).

On Saturday night, 26 August, the Amaq news agency claimed "The perpetrator of the stabbing incident in Brussels is one of the Islamic State soldiers. He carried out the attack in response to calls to target coalition countries." [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [CNN](#).

15 September 2017: Islamic terrorist in London Subway

Someone put an explosive in a white plastic bucket that was concealed inside a supermarket freezer bag, and then left the explosive device on a District Line subway train in southwest London, England. The device detonated at the Parsons Green station at 08:20 BST on Friday, 15 September 2017. The explosive device failed to properly detonate, but burned rapidly, seriously injuring 10 commuters, who had severe burns on their faces. Another 8 commuters were injured when they were trampled in the panic to escape from the station. Later, 10 people transported themselves to hospitals for treatment, in addition to the 18 people who were initially transported by ambulance.

On Friday night, ISIL's news agency (Amaq) claimed responsibility for the attack, *before* police identified suspect(s) in the attack. Although it is *possible* that a Christian extremist was the perpetrator, putting a bomb aboard a mass transit vehicle is characteristic of Islamic terrorists.

At 07:50 BST on Saturday, 16 Sep, police arrested an 18 year old man in Dover for this crime. Because more arrests were anticipated, police released *no* details. Later it was reported that this "suspect" was attempting to leave England, via a ferry to France. On 22 September, his name was revealed to be "Ahmed Hassan" when he appeared in court and was charged with attempted murder for putting the bomb aboard the train. Ahmed fled from Iraq after his parents were killed. The then 15 year old Ahmed illegally entered the U.K. in 2015, and Ahmed was put in a foster-care home in Sunbury-on-Thames, a town to the southwest of London.

At 23:50 BST on Saturday, 16 Sep, police arrested a 21 year old man in the west London suburb of Hounslow. After this second arrest, the U.K. lowered the terror threat level, which was interpreted to mean that police had arrested all of the perpetrators of 15 Sep attack and a

new attack was not imminent. Yahyah Farroukh, the man arrested in Hounslow, was released without charge on 21 Sep. Yahyah was formerly a resident of the same foster-care home in Sunbury where Ahmed Hassan made the bomb.

A total of seven suspects were arrested by police, but six were released "with no further action."

Searches of the foster care home began on Saturday, 16 Sep. On Tuesday, 19 Sep, police "anticipate that the searches will take some days to complete". On Tuesday, 26 Sep, the search of the foster care home was completed.

Journalists remind us that on 7 July 2005, four Islamic suicide bombers exploded on three subway cars and a bus in London, killing 48 people. The bomb on the train at Parsons Green was the *fourth* major Islamic terrorist attack in England this year — after attacks on London in March, Manchester in May, and London in June.

Donald Trump promptly tweeted about the terror attack in London. In common with many of his inflammatory tweets, Trump again got his facts wrong and again offended the U.K. government.

Another attack in London by a loser terrorist. These are sick and demented people who were in the sights of Scotland Yard. Must be proactive!

Donald J. Trump, [tweet](#), 06:42 EDT, 15 September 2017.

Trump simply chose a pejorative word, "loser", and applied it to terrorists. But not all terrorists are losers, some terrorists (e.g., the male terrorist in San Bernardino, California) have apparently been successful. Trump is wrong again when he asserts that all terrorists are "sick and demented". Trump has *no* factual basis for asserting that today's terrorist was "in the sights of Scotland Yard."

The U.K. prime minister admonished Trump:

I never think it's helpful for anybody to speculate on what is an ongoing investigation.

The police and security services are working to discover the full circumstances of this cowardly attack and to identify all those responsible.

U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May, quoted by [The Telegraph](#), 16 Sep 2017.

My essay for [May 2017](#) criticizes a statement by Trump immediately following an Islamic terrorist attack in Manchester.

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on-Thames in] Surrey, while a 21-year-old man arrested a few hours later was with the same couple until a few months ago. Yahyah Farroukh, a [21 y old] Syrian who arrived in the UK as a refugee about four years ago. He was arrested on Saturday night after completing his shift at [Aladdin's Fried Chicken] takeaway shop in Hounslow, west London.")

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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, 4 Jan 2016.

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

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

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

By 1 October 2016, the Geneva negotiations about Syria were dead, with the last meeting in April 2016. There was a brief cessation of hostilities in March and April, but then the situation in Syria became worse and worse, with *no* reasonable hope of ending the Syrian civil war. *Why* so little progress? I see five reasons:

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

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

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

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

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

4. February 2017: *No Reasonable Hope* for Geneva Negotiations

The Syrian opposition to Assad is in deep trouble:

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

that Assad resign — but the removal of Assad has been, and continues to be, the principal goal of the opposition.

- The opposition to Assad continues to be fragmented and disorganized, a problem that has persisted at least since mid-2013, perhaps earlier.

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

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

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

As I explained in my essay for [February 2017](#), 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 20 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.

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 339,000 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,

- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than five million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, (see [Reuters](#)); plus a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

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

Conclusion for Iraq

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

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

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

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

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

Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism

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

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

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

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

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

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

U.S. War on Terror

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By May 2016, the U.S. airstrikes on ISIL had significantly limited ISIL's finances. In

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

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

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

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

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

threat.")

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

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

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.

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

[my homepage](#)