

# Syria: October-December 2017

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## Table of Contents

### 1. Chemical Weapons

Russia [vetoes](#) renewal of JIM

### 2. Syria

United Nations [Diverted](#) from Syria

[death toll in Syria](#) now over 342,000 (31 Oct)

[death toll in Syria](#) now over 344,500 (30 Nov)

[death toll in Syria](#) now over 346,500 (31 Dec)

[Turkey](#) is an ally from Hell

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

[Peace Negotiations](#) for Syria

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

[History](#) of Negotiations in Geneva during 2016-2017

Negotiations in [Astana](#) (30-31 Oct, 21-22 Dec)

Planning for [Geneva](#) negotiations on 28 Nov

Negotiations in [Geneva](#) (28 Nov to 14 Dec)

Meeting in [Riyadh](#) (22-24 Nov)

[News Fatigue](#)

Planning for [Syrian People's Congress](#) (29-30 Jan 2018?)

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

Continuing [war](#) in Syria

Press Briefings by Egeland on [humanitarian aid](#)

[U.N. Reports](#)

war crimes [prosecution?](#)

U.N. General Assembly Resolution [71/248](#)

### 3. Iraq

### 4. Islamic public relations [problem](#)

my [proposal](#)

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

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

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

### 6. [Islamic terrorism](#)

Islamic terrorist in [London](#) (15 Sep 2017)  
Islamic terrorists in [Canada & France](#) (30 Sep/1 Oct 2017)  
Islamic terrorist in [New York City](#) (31 Oct 2017)  
Islamic terrorist in [New York City](#) (11 Dec 2017)  
Islamic terrorist in [Harrisburg, Pennsylvania](#) (22 Dec 2017)

## 7. Conclusions

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

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# Foreword

I have posted an [annotated list](#) of my previous 46 essays on Syria. That webpage also includes links to many historical documents on the Syrian civil war, a table of death tolls in Syria since August 2013, and a table of dates of removals of chemical weapons from Syria.

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

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

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

I use Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) for events in Europe and Syria. On 29 October 2017, Europe and the U.K. went on standard time. Perversely, the USA refused to harmonize with Europe, so the USA remained on Daylight Savings Time until 5 November 2017. Eastern Standard Time in Boston is -5 hours from GMT. Beirut and Damascus are +2 hours from GMT. Baghdad and Moscow are each +3 hours from GMT.

Every day, I checked the websites of

- Reuters in the United Kingdom,
- Associated Press international news,
- [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.

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### Terse Summary of Syria Fighters

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

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

On 28 July 2016, Nusra voluntarily ended its affiliation with Al-Qaeda. [Reuters](#) reported Nusra's leader said the change was made: "to remove the excuse used by the international community — spearheaded by America and Russia — to bombard and displace Muslims in the Levant: that they are targeting the Nusra Front which is associated with al Qaeda". From July 2016 to January 2017, Nusra Front called itself "**Jabhat Fatah al-Sham**". See also [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 28 July. Despite the change of name and loss of the Al-Qaeda franchise, Nusra is the same group of terrorists with the same ideology and same goals as before the change. The U.S. State Department spokesman, John Kirby, [said](#) "... we judge any organization, including [Nusra], much more by its actions, its ideology, its goals. Affiliations may be a factor, but ultimately it's their actions, ideology, and goals that matter the most. .... ... we certainly see no reason to believe that their actions or their objectives are any different, and they are still considered a foreign terrorist organization."

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

- B. the **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)** — also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). On 3 Feb 2014, Al-Qaeda repudiated ISIL, but

ISIL remains Al-Qaeda inspired. ISIL's goal since June 2014 is to establish a caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

On 29 June 2014, ISIL changed its name to "Islamic State" (IS), when it declared a caliphate. I continue to use the old name, ISIL, for consistency with my previous essays. Moreover, using the term "Islamic State" appears to give legitimacy to their so-called "State", which is only a few tens of thousands of terrorists. On 3 Dec 2014, John Kerry followed the lead of the French Foreign Minister in calling ISIL "Daesh".

[Stanford Univ.](#) has a website with descriptions of ten terrorist organizations in Syria (e.g., Nusra, ISIL, etc.). The U.S. Government National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has a history of many international terrorist [groups](#).

The USA and Western Europe would prefer that the rebels win, although military aid to the rebels has been withheld because of fears that donated weapons and munitions would eventually be acquired by either the jihadists or Al-Qaeda. The rebels are frequently described by two words: "fragmented" and "disorganized". Beginning in September 2013, the rebels are also frequently characterized as "disillusioned". Since October 2013, many smaller rebel groups have been leaving the Free Syrian Army and joining the jihadists.

While I use the words rebels, jihadists, and Al-Qaeda to indicate three different opposition groups, journalists routinely use the word "rebels" to refer to the entire opposition, or any part of the opposition. Thus, there is different word usage between my text and quotations from journalists. Worse, journalists commonly refer to the opposition as "rebels", "militants", or "extremists", without mentioning the name of the group. With the exception of the Free Syrian Army, *all* of the insurgents in Syria are some kind of radical Islamic extremist, so labels like "extremist" lack precision.

It is critically important to understand that the jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL want to overthrow the existing secular government of Assad and establish a new government based on their interpretation of Islam. These jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL are *not* part of a pro-democracy revolt in Syria. Presumably, these jihadists, Nusra, and ISIL will fight against *any* secular government in Syria, so removal of Assad will *not* end their battle to establish their religious government in Syria.

### Government

The Arab nations, Western Europe, and the USA recognize the Syrian National Coalition, an exile group in Turkey, as the *only* legitimate government of Syria. However, there are hundreds of rebel or jihadist groups operating in Syria, and the Coalition represents only some of the rebel groups and none of the jihadists. As explained in detail in my [second](#) and [third](#) essays on Syria, the Coalition is unable to make decisions, and — in my opinion — has no credibility as a future government of Syria. However, in 2013-2014 the Coalition was the least objectionable alternative government for Syria.

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

Coalition was "fading".

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

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

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## Chemical Weapons

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

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

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

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](#).

On 26 October 2017, the United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) issued its report that concluded that Assad's military had released Sarin gas at Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The conclusion of the JIM is *no* surprise: Trump knew that on the night of 6 April 2017, when he ordered an airstrike on Assad's airbase that launched the attack on Khan Shaykhun. The JIM report is United Nations Security Council document S/2017/904.

### 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 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.

In the OPCW monthly report for October 2017 on chemical weapons in Syria, the Syrian declaration of chemical weapons was still *not* resolved.

... neither the information provided during the consultations nor the latest submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic, dated 30 September and 2 October 2017, have enabled the resolution of all identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic. The continued lack of original historical records, coupled with the ongoing lack of access to and engagement with senior leaders/officials who have an overarching knowledge of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, precludes the Secretariat from verifying the underpinning explanations given by the Syrian Arab Republic regarding most of the outstanding issues. Regarding the SSRC [Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre], the [Technical] Secretariat [of OPCW] maintains its earlier assessment that the declaration of the SSRC remains incomplete.

S/2017/916 at ¶10 (30 Oct 2017).

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## **Russia vetoes renewal of JIM** ***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."

On 18 October 2017, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations wants to renew the JIM before the JIM issues its report on Khan Sheikhoun, which report is due on 26 October. But Russia wants the JIM to end at the end of its one-year term in mid-November 2017, because the JIM repeatedly blames Assad for release of chemical weapons in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 24 October, Russia vetoed the U.S.-drafted resolution that would have renewed the JIM until November 2018. This was Russia's ninth veto on draft resolutions concerning Syria, as Russia continues to protect Assad from criminal responsibility for his war crimes. The United Nations Security Council issued a [press release](#) on this vote. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [New York Times](#).

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations released a blistering attack on Russia:

Russia has once again demonstrated it will do whatever it takes to ensure the barbaric Assad regime never faces consequences for its continued use of chemicals as weapons. By rejecting the renewal of the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) — an independent, purely technical body — Russia has made it clear that it does not care about stopping the use of chemical weapons in the world. This is the ninth time Russia has protected Assad and his team of murderers by blocking the Security Council from acting. In doing so, Russia once again sides with the dictators and terrorists who use these weapons.

Nikki Haley, "Statement by Ambassador Haley on Russia's Veto of the Renewal of the Joint Investigative Mechanism on Chemical Weapons," [U.S. State Dept](#), 24 Oct 2017.

The current JIM expires on 17 Nov 2017, so — on 24 Oct — there are 24 days remaining to renew continuous operation of the JIM.



On 7 November, the United Nations Security Council held another [meeting](#) to discuss the JIM report that Assad's government was responsible for the release of Sarin at Khan Shaykhun, and also to discuss the renewal of the JIM. Here is some of what the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. said:

We must ensure continuity of operations. Last year's delay in renewing the JIM cost it nearly six months of work. We cannot afford such a loss this year, not when there is evidence of ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria.

....

The result of that rare unity is the JIM, the best tool we have to ensure that no individual, no group, or regime is allowed to attack with chemical weapons and get away with it. And the JIM will cease its operations in 10 short days. There can now be no higher priority for the Security Council than to renew the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Anyone who prevents us from achieving this goal is aiding and abetting those who have been using chemical weapons in Syria. They are helping to ensure, not just that more women and children will die, but that those women and children will die in one of the cruelest, most painful ways possible. We are better than this. We must be. Now is the time to show the world.

I call on the Security Council to act immediately to renew the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Nikki Haley, "Remarks at a UN Security Council Meeting on Chemical Weapons Use in Syria," [U.S. State Dept.](#), 7 Nov 2017.

On 13 November 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that Russia was continuing to block the renewal of the JIM.

Finally, on 16 November 2017, Russia cast its *tenth* veto of a draft United Nations Security Council resolution concerning Syria. Russia's vetoes have consistently prevented legal accountability for Assad and his cronies for war crimes in Syria. This tenth veto killed a U.S.-sponsored draft resolution to renew the JIM. The current JIM expires at midnight on 17 November. The future nonexistence of the JIM decreases the probability that there will be legal consequences for the people who released chemical weapons in Syria. [U.N.](#); [Washington Post](#); [New York Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

The U.N. Secretary General, António Guterres, is a weak leader who *calls* for "unity" in the Security Council ("unity" is a diplomatic code word for rogue nations like Russia to stop blocking consensus), but who does nothing to achieve this unity. See my section [below](#) on futile calls by the Secretary General for Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations lambasted Russia for protecting Assad and his cronies in Syria.

Chapter Seven of the UN Charter gives this Council the responsibility to “determine the existence of any threat to peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and ... make recommendations ... to maintain or restore international peace and security.” Among the greatest threats to peace and security is the use of chemical weapons. That’s



why, for more than two decades, the international community has outlawed the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons. And for almost half a decade, this Council has worked tirelessly to put an end to the use of these weapons in Syria.

But for the tenth time on Syria and the fourth time on chemical weapons, Russia has actively obstructed the international community's ability to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks. Russia has issued vetoes before to prevent Council action and accountability in Syria. Russia has invented reasons not to support a mechanism it helped create because it did not like its scientific conclusions. Russia has acted to obstruct these investigations many times. But today, it strikes a deep blow.

Russia has killed the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which has overwhelming support of this Council. And by eliminating our ability to identify the attackers, Russia has undermined our ability to deter future attacks. Assad and ISIS will no longer be on notice for the use of chemical weapons by Russia's actions today. The message to anyone listening is clear: in effect, Russia accepts the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

How, then, can we trust Russia's supposed support for peace in Syria? How can anyone take Russia's proposal of political talks in Sochi seriously? I've lost count of how many times I've stood in this chamber and implored Russia to do the right thing in Syria. But instead, Russia has played games.

Russia wants a mechanism, but not an independent one. They want reporting, but not if it blames Syria. If you pay attention, you will notice that the Russians think the JIM works great when it finds ISIS at fault for chemical weapons. But when it is one of their friends who is the perpetrator, the problem is suddenly the JIM, not their friend who committed the crime. But Russia knows how bad this looks to defend a regime's use of chemical weapons. So they attempt to create a distraction. In this case, the distraction is the resolution that they offered. It would also allow Russia or any other member to micromanage the JIM. It puts this Council in the absurd position of putting the fox in charge of the hen house; having countries like Russia and Syria dictate how, when, and where we investigate the use of chemical weapons.

In recent weeks, the United States has worked with great effort to work with Russia in drafting this resolution. It's a shame that we found out today they had planned to veto it the entire time. We revised our resolution three times to incorporate the concerns of Russia and all Council members. At the same time, Russia refused to hold a single consultation on its own draft, while we held many consultations. It is clear now that the only concern Russia had was that the JIM even existed and that it was capable of finding the truth. Russia had hoped to bury the truth about chemical weapons in Syria, but they have failed. We know who is behind these attacks; the JIM has provided that information time and time again.

The United States will not give up trying to achieve justice for the victims in Syria.

Tragically, these attacks are ongoing. New cases are being alleged.

Russia has destroyed our best tool for attributing these attacks, but it is not our only tool to end this barbaric practice. There is the Commission of Inquiry on Syria. There is the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, which is mandated to generate the evidence to bring fair and independent criminal proceedings against those who commit atrocities in Syria. And, if and when it is necessary, there is the United States of America.

Regardless of what its Russian protectors do here in the Security Council, the Assad regime should be on clear notice: the United States does not accept Syria's use of chemical weapons. As we did in April [2017], we will do it again if we must. We will defend the international standard against chemical weapons use. It would be wise for the Assad regime to heed this warning.

Nikki Haley, "Explanation of Vote on a Draft UN Security Council Resolution to Extend the Mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism," [U.S. State Dept](#), 16 Nov 2017.

Later, Haley told the U.N. Security Council:

And so today, I've heard so many of my friends on this Council talk about how this is all embarrassing. It's embarrassing that the Council's not united. It's embarrassing that we're allowing this to play out. No, what's embarrassing is that we don't have a JIM renewal. What's embarrassing is everyone is worried about who they're going to upset, and they're not thinking about the people that were abused by chemical weapons.

....

I will tell you this, to my Russia friends: the next chemical weapons attack is on your hands. The next pictures I hold up will be because [Russia] let it happen. Because by not having the JIM, you are basically telling the entire world that chemical weapons are okay to use. That's what we should be embarrassed about today.

Nikki Haley, "Explanation of Vote on a Russian Draft of UN Security Council Resolution to Extend the Mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism," [U.S. State Dept](#), 16 Nov 2017.

Neither the "Commission of Inquiry on Syria" nor the "International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria" have formal cooperation with OPCW, unlike the JIM that worked with OPCW.

In the last paragraph quoted above, Haley confuses two separate issues: (1) allowing Assad to *use* chemical weapons and (2) *investigation* of legal responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Russia's refusal to renew the JIM does *not* cause Assad to use chemical weapons. Assad was using chemical weapons during the existence of the JIM.

My comment is that Haley made a good attempt at embarrassing Russia. But rogue nations (e.g., Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Syria) are barbarians who do *not* care what Western Civilization thinks about their government. So it is really difficult to embarrass a rogue nation.

On Friday, 17 November, Japan offered a draft resolution that would continue the JIM for one month, to give more time to negotiate with Russia. But Russia vetoed the Japanese draft — the eleventh veto by Russia to protect war criminals in Assad's government. [U.N.](#);

[New York Times](#); [Associated Press](#).

The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations again lambasted Russia for protecting Assad and his cronies in Syria.

In a world in which the Council's time and attention could be productively devoted to a hundred different things, Russia is wasting our time. Conflicts are raging. Outlaw states are acquiring nuclear weapons. The human dignity of millions is violated every day. Brutal regimes are using chemical weapons on their own people.

All the members of this Council and their staff have worked for months on preserving and strengthening the Joint Investigative Mechanism. We have worked knowing that lives were at stake. We have worked knowing the international chemical weapons nonproliferation regime was also at stake. And all that time — hundreds of hours — has been for nothing.

As we have long suspected, Russia does not now and has never had any intention of making this time productive for this Council and the international community. Russia's veto — its second in 24 hours — shows us that Russia has no interest in finding common ground with the rest of this Council to save the JIM. Russia will not agree to any mechanism that might shine a spotlight on the use of chemical weapons by its ally, the Syrian regime. It's as simple and shameful as that.

....

Russia's actions — today and in recent weeks — have been designed to delay, to distract, and ultimately to defeat the effort to secure accountability for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Russia never invited Council members to provide input on its own draft resolution — a resolution that yesterday received only four votes in favor. And Russia declined to propose any textual edits to the U.S. draft. We even incorporated elements of the Russian draft into our own in the hope that they would engage with us.

Indeed, from the very beginning, Russia has not negotiated with any of us. Russia has just dictated and demanded. That's not how the Security Council is supposed to work. That's not how the Security Council can work.

Nikki Haley, "Explanation of Vote on a Japanese Draft of UN Security Council Resolution to Extend the Mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism," [U.S. State Dept](#), 17 Nov 2017.

In recent years, Russia has behaved atrociously:

- Russia illegally annexed Crimea in February 2014
- Russian interference in elections in the USA and Europe during 2016-2017
- Russia's 11 vetoes in U.N. Security Council to protect war criminals in Syria
- probable Russian government sponsorship of computer criminals who release malicious programs.

But on 21 November, Russian president Putin and Trump had an hour-long friendly telephone call about Islamic terrorism, Syria, and North Korea. [White House](#); [CNN](#).

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## Syria

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

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

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### Diversions

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

1. Beginning in mid-February 2014, there has been a crisis in the **Ukraine**, including the annexation of the Crimea by Russia. By 30 May 2014, the crisis in the Ukraine appeared to be winding down, as Russia had withdrawn most of their troops from the border. But on 28 June 2014, the Ukraine government and pro-Russian separatists were again fighting a civil war. On 17 July 2014, someone in eastern Ukraine shot down a civilian airliner. On 28 Aug 2014, Russia sent troops into eastern Ukraine to aid rebels. On 5 Sep 2014, another ceasefire began. On 24 Jan 2015, Russian rebels violated agreements and began an offensive against Mariupol. From the end of April 2014 to 2 Feb 2015, the United Nations says 5358 people died in the war in the Ukraine. During the first two weeks of Feb 2015, the war in the Ukraine seemed to dominate the attention of diplomats in Europe, as another ceasefire was negotiated.
2. a continuing civil war in the **Central African Republic**
3. more violence in **South Sudan**, as ceasefires are violated
4. On 14 April 2014, the Boko Haram Islamic terrorists in **Nigeria**, kidnapped more than 230 girls from a boarding school. On 20 May 2014, an Islamic bomb in Jos, Nigeria killed at least 130 people. Approximately ninety people were kidnapped by Islamic terrorists on 21 June in Nigeria. On 10 Nov 2014, a suicide bomber killed at least 48 pupils at a high school in Nigeria. On 28 Nov 2014, Boko Haram attacked a mosque in Kano, killing more than 102 people. On 3-7 Jan 2015, Boko Haram attacked 17 towns and slaughtered approximately 2000 people, "too many to count". [Guardian](#).
5. On 18 May 2014, a former Libyan general led an assault against the Libyan Parliament building, causing another crisis in **Libya**. Various parts of the government and military supported the general's anti-Islamist campaign. On 16 July, Islamic rebels attacked the airport at Tripoli, destroying airplanes and damaging the terminal building. On 31 July,

Islamic extremist rebels seized control of Benghazi. On 23 Aug 2014, Islamic extremists captured the airport at Tripoli.

6. On 10 June 2014, ISIL — an Al-Qaeda inspired group that operates in both Iraq and Syria — captured Mosul, the second-largest city in **Iraq**. On 11 June, ISIL captured Tikrit. (See my essays for [June](#), [July](#), and [August](#) 2014.) The crisis in Iraq pushed Syria out of the news in Western newsmedia. Moreover, the capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — [changed](#) the Western view of the insurgency in Syria.
7. On 12 June 2014, palestinians kidnapped three boys in **Israel** and killed them. Their dead bodies were found in a field on 30 June. After terrorists in Gaza fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells into Israel, the Israeli military began a military campaign in Gaza on 8 July. Despite the blatant provocations by the palestinians, the Arab newsmedia pushed Syria and Iraq out of the news in order to hysterically report the so-called "Israeli aggression" in Gaza. On 14 July 2014, Egypt proposed a ceasefire in Gaza, which Israel accepted but Hamas in Gaza rejected. After more than 1300 rockets and mortar shells were fired from Gaza into Israel since 8 July 2014, the Israeli Army invaded Gaza on the evening of 17 July. On 26 August 2014, a ceasefire of indefinite duration was arranged in Gaza.
8. Ebola hemorrhagic fever in western Africa (e.g., Liberia and Sierra Leone), which had killed approximately 2800 people by 23 Sep 2014. On 23 Sep 2014, the U.S. Government forecasts between 0.5 and 1.4 million people infected by 20 Jan 2015, killing perhaps half of those infected. After massive intervention by the USA and other nations, the death toll on 14 Jan 2016 was only 11,300.
9. For many years, **Yemen** has been an impoverished, failed nation, infested by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In 2012, longtime president Saleh was deposed. On 19 Jan 2015, Houthi (Shiite) rebels surrounded the home of the president (a Sunni) who is supported by the U.S.-government. On 22 Jan 2015, the president and cabinet resigned, plunging Yemen deeper into anarchy. On 10 Feb 2015, the U.S. [State Department](#) closed the U.S. Embassy in Yemen, because of rapidly deteriorating security. On 20 March, ISIL attacked two Shiite mosques in Yemen during Friday prayers, killing at least 137 people. [AP](#). On 26 March 2015, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes in Yemen, with the intent to defeat Iranian-sponsored Houthi Shiite rebels. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#). On 4 November 2017, Hezbollah launched a rocket from Yemen into Saudi Arabia. The Saudis responded by removing the prime minister of Lebanon (where Hezbollah is based), intensifying its blockade of Yemen, and criticizing Iran (which supplied the rocket to Hezbollah). On 4 Dec 2017, Houthi rebels murdered Saleh, the former president, after he switched loyalty from Iran to Saudi Arabia.
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](#).)

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## Deaths in Syria

### October 2017

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

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 3369 [people] in October 2017 which is the highest monthly death toll within 11 months, and the death toll is as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 848 people including 140 children under the age of eighteen, and 135 women over the age of eighteen. They were killed as follows:
  - 389 including 81 children and 78 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria.
  - 99 including 25 children and 16 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.
  - 8 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
  - 18 including a child and 2 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
  - 10 including a child were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
  - 122 including 2 women were executed by the "Islamic State" organization.
  - 7 including a citizen woman were killed in the fall of shells launched by the "Islamic State" organization and by the fire of its machine guns.
  - 84 including 11 children and 12 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the international coalition.
  - 24 citizens including 4 children and 5 women were killed in the detonating of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
  - 3 citizens were killed by the Syria Democratic Forces.
  - 24 including 4 children and 5 citizen women were killed in landmine explosions.
  - 49 including 10 children and 11 citizen women were killed in unknown circumstances.
  - 5 citizens including 3 children and 2 women were killed due to bad health

conditions and the absence of necessary treatment.

- 6 citizens were executed by the regime forces.

B. [Military casualties: 2521 people, as follows:]

- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 518
- The regime forces: 329
- Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 403
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 26
- Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 164
- Unknown people: 19
- 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: 759
- The Syrian Observatory documented the death of more than 303 Syrian members and fighters, who were killed during the clashes between both parties in the northeastern countryside, where 214 members of ISIS at least were killed including several leaders, and 89 members of Hayaat Tahrir Al-Sham including leaders were also killed during the clashes and the exchange of shelling and bombings in the northeastern countryside of Hama.

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.

"Despite De-escalation Areas, October Witnesses Highest Monthly Death Toll in 11 Months," [SOHR](#), 1 November 2017. [Formatting of military deaths as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

SOHR is correct that this is the highest monthly number of deaths during the past 11 months of the Syrian civil war. The high number *may* be the result of the liberation of the cities of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor from ISIL. Or the ceasefires arranged in Astana *may* be unraveling.

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### November 2017

On 1 December 2017, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) published a death



toll for the month of November 2017.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 2462 [people] in November 2017, and the death toll is as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 885 people including 194 children under the age of eighteen, and 111 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
- 393 including 83 children and 56 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime's helicopters on several areas of Syria.
  - 101 including 22 children and 14 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.
  - 66 including 2 children and 5 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
  - 9 including 2 children and a citizen woman were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
  - 2 citizens were executed by the "Islamic State" organization.
  - 57 including 4 children and 4 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the International Coalition.
  - 112 citizens including 35 children and 18 women were killed in the detonating of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
  - 3 citizens were killed by the Syria Democratic Forces.
  - 54 including 8 children and 2 citizen women were killed in landmine explosions.
  - 26 including 15 children and 5 citizen women were killed by shelling by the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces
  - 46 including 18 children and 4 citizen women were killed in unknown circumstances.
  - 4 citizens including 3 children died due to bad health conditions and the absence of necessary treatment.
  - 6 including 2 children and a citizen woman were killed by the factions and during fighting among each others.
- B. [Military casualties: 1577 people, as follows:]
- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 421
  - The regime forces: 258
  - Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 276
  - Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 32
  - Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 131
  - 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: 445

In November 2017, 32 massacres were carried out in Syria against Syrian citizens, killing 489 citizens including 122 children and 70 citizen women, and they were carried out by warplanes and helicopters affiliated to the regime and Russia, the regime forces, the Popular Mobilization, the International Coalition, the “Islamic State” organization, and the factions’ shells, all of these massacres were documented by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and they are as follows:

- 19 massacres were carried out by warplanes affiliated to the regime and Russia which killed 285 citizens including 60 children and 42 citizen women
- 5 massacres were carried out by the regime forces which killed 28 citizens including 13 children and 3 citizen women
- A massacre was carried out by the Iraqi Popular Mobilization which killed 25 citizens including 15 children and 4 citizen women
- 2 massacres were carried out by the factions which killed 18 citizens including a citizen women
- 3 massacres were carried out by the International Coalition which killed 28 citizens including 2 children and 2 citizen women
- 2 massacres were carried out by the “Islamic State” organization which killed 105 citizens including 32 children and 18 citizen women

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, reiterates our 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.

"November witnesses 32 massacres killed 500 citizens of 885 citizen who were killed this month," [SOHR](#), 1 December 2017. [Formatting of military deaths as indented list by Standler. Some typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

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### **December 2017**

On 1 January 2018, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) published a death toll for the month of December 2017.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 1939 persons in December 2017, and the death toll is as follows:

- A. Civilian casualties: 700 people including 178 children under the age of eighteen, and 130 women over the age of eighteen, and they were killed as follows:
  - 456 including 132 children and 92 citizen women were killed in raids by Syrian and Russian warplanes and by regime’s helicopters on several areas

of Syria.

- 66 including 13 children and 8 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.
- 3 citizens were killed under torture in Syrian security prisons.
- 13 including 2 children and 3 citizen woman were killed in targeting and the fall of mortar shells launched by the rebel and Islamic factions.
- 2 citizens were killed by the fire of the Turkish border guards.
- 5 citizens were executed by the “Islamic State” organization.
- 47 including 12 children and 10 citizen women were killed in airstrikes by the warplanes of the International Coalition.
- 22 citizens including 4 children and 8 women were killed in the detonating of cars and booby trapped vehicles.
- 1 citizen was killed by the factions.
- 55 including 3 children and 6 citizen women were killed in landmine explosions.
- 25 including 10 children and a citizen woman were killed in unknown circumstances.
- 5 citizens including 2 children and 2 citizen women died due to bad health conditions and the absence of necessary treatment.

B. [Military casualties: 1239 people, as follows:]

- Syrian fighters of Islamic and rebel factions and the SDF and other movements and organizations: 406
- The regime forces: 191
- Members of the Popular Committees, and the National Defense Forces, and militiamen loyal to the regime forces of Syrian nationalities: 235
- Fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah: 13
- Fighters of militiamen loyal to the regime of non-Syrian nationalities mostly of Shiite people: 79
- Unknown people: 8
- 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: 307

We in the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, reiterate our 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 state of democracy, freedom, justice and equality for all the people of Syria.

"With 1939 casualties...December ends with the least monthly death toll during 2017," [SOHR](#), 1 January 2018. [Formatting of military deaths as indented list by Standler. Some

typographical errors corrected by Standler.]

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SOHR [reported](#) a total of 49,742 people killed during the year 2016, which is an average of 4145/month. My [accounting](#) of SOHR monthly totals shows 33,865 people killed during the year 2017, which is an average of 2822/month. The imperfect ceasefire during 2017 reduced fatalities by approximately 32% 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* 347,000.

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## Turkey is an ally from Hell

### Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My essays since November 2016 continued to tersely chronicle the Turkish invasion of Syria, which ended on 29 March 2017.

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

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

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

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### October 2017: Turkey and Syria

On 13 October 2017, soldiers from Turkey entered Idlib province of Syria and established "observation posts". The move is part of the Astana agreement to enforce a ceasefire in Idlib, but the Turks are also interested in suppressing Kurdish militias in the area. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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### U.S. troops in Syria

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

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

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

On 28 April 2016, Syria claimed that 150 U.S. soldiers entered Syria on 27 April. The Syrian Foreign Ministry called the U.S. troops a "blatant act of aggression that constitutes a

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

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

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

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

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

On 6 December 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military has 2000 troops in Syria, but the number is decreasing now that all of the towns in Syria have been liberated from ISIL. The [Associated Press](#) mentions that the Pentagon had been misleading Americans by saying there were only 500 U.S. troops in Syria.

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## Recognition that Assad is Winning the Civil War

### Introduction

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

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

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

My essay for [Dec 2014](#) cites a *Washington Post* article on 28 Dec that Assad's army has been depleted by recent "soaring casualties" and desertions. Replacements are not arriving because of "evasions of compulsory military service". Further, in a rare speech on 26 July 2015, Assad admitted a shortage of soldiers in the Syrian army. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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

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

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

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

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

On 27 March 2016, Assad liberated Palmyra from ISIL, as described in my essay for [March 2016](#). On 29-30 March, Assad seems confident after his victory in Palmyra. [Associated Press](#). But in December 2016, ISIL recaptured Palmyra in a surprise attack. On 2 March 2017, Assad again took control of Palmyra. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 3 April 2016, it was announced that Assad had liberated the town of Qaryatain from ISIL. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [RIA-Novosti](#). Qaryatain is known to Westerners as the place where ISIL kidnapped approximately 230 hostages — including dozens of Christians — in August 2015 and where ISIL destroyed the ancient Saint Eliane Monastery.

On 8 April 2016, Reuters reported:

As the Syria peace talks resume next week, President Bashar al-Assad, backed militarily by Iran and Russia, shows no willingness to compromise, much less step aside to allow a transition Western powers claim is the solution to the conflict.



Threatened by rebel advances last year, Assad is now pumped up with confidence after Russian air strikes reversed the tide and enabled his army to recover lost ground from Sunni insurgents as well as the jihadis of Islamic State.

While Syria experts doubt he can recapture the whole country without an unlikely full-scale ground intervention by Russia and Iran, they also doubt President Vladimir Putin will force him out — unless there is a clear path to stability, which could take years. "Syria's Assad shows no willingness to compromise," [Reuters](#), 20:52 GMT, 8 April 2016.

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

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

Let us recognize reality. Assad is firmly in command of the Syrian government. The rebels and jihadists have attempted for more six years to depose Assad, but the rebels and jihadists have failed. It is time to end the Syrian civil war, by having the rebels and jihadists surrender and be re-integrated into Syria. Despite what commentators say about Assad not compromising, Assad is willing to have a national unity government that includes the former rebels and jihadists. (See my essay for [March 2016](#), in the section titled "Assad rejects transitional governing body".)

Despite all of the predictions in 2011 and 2012 about Assad relinquishing power, Assad outlasted U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, U.K. prime minister David Cameron, 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 my essay for [Aug/Sep 2017](#).

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## Peace Negotiations for Syria

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On 10 October 2016, U.N. Secretary General again said: "The future of one person, like

President Assad, should not block this process." [Deutsche Welle](#).

On 26 January 2017, there was a significant change in the United Kingdom's foreign policy, when the U.K. foreign minister said Assad could be a candidate in Syrian elections. [The Guardian](#); [The Times](#); [BBC](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Syria will never be stable and secure as long as Assad is in power. The Assad regime has sunk to a new level of depravity, and it has done so with seemingly unconditional support from Russia and Iran. For these reasons, we continue to support the political transition process contained in U.N. security resolution 2254, and support the political process taking place under U.N. oversight in Geneva.

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

15 May 2017.

My comment is that Syrians will have a choice between (1) Assad, (2) someone from the opposition who has *no* experience in government and who has difficulty making decisions, or (3) a leader from Nusra or ISIL. Assad is clearly the least worst leader for Syria. UN Security Council Resolution 2254 is seriously flawed and the "political process" in Geneva has accomplished nothing in 17 months.

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

On 3 July 2017, a report in [Foreign Policy](#) said the U.S. Government is now focused on defeating ISIL in Syria. *Foreign Policy* said: "Tillerson's position reflects a recognition that Syria's government, backed by Russia and Iran, is emerging as the likely political victor in the country's six year long civil war. It also marks a further retreat from the 2012 U.N.-brokered Geneva 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 reconstruction of Syria until after Assad is removed as leader of Syria. [Reuters](#); my essay for [Aug/Sep 2017](#).

On 26 October 2017, the U.S. Secretary of State held a press briefing in Geneva at the end of his trip to various nations:

As we've said many times before, the United States wants a whole and unified Syria with no role for Bashar al-Assad in the government.

....

QUESTION: The statement on Assad seems to differ but — from what you had said in Turkey this summer, I mean, a clear call for him to leave. Does that reflect a change in position that we've been — you had indicated it was really up to Syrians to decide themselves.

SECRETARY TILLERSON: Well, it's our view that — and I've said this many times as well — that we do not believe there is a future for the Assad regime, the Assad family. I think I've said it on a number of occasions. The reign of the Assad family is coming to an end, and the only issue is how should that be brought about. And we believe it can be brought about and will be brought about as part of the UN Security Council — implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which, as you know, has a very specific prescribed procedure for elections and the development of a new constitution.

I think what — the only thing that changed is when this administration came into office, we took a view that it is not a prerequisite that Assad go before that process starts, rather the mechanism by which Assad departs will likely emerge from that process.

Rex Tillerson, "Press Availability in Geneva, Switzerland," [U.S. State Dept](#), 26 Oct 2017.

See [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post\(AP\)](#); [Reuters](#).

**My comments:** Under some past presidents, the USA was a champion of freedom and democracy. A democratic process would *require* that the people of Syria choose their leader in free and fair elections, without interference by foreign meddlers. And if the people of Syria re-elected Assad, at least Syria would avoid a leader from ISIL, Al-Qaeda, the incompetent and defeated Free Syrian Army, the disorganized expatriates in the Syrian National Coalition, or the High Negotiations Committee that frustrated and delayed negotiations in Geneva during 2016-2017.

But under Obama and Trump, the U.S. Government is willing to demand that the Syrian people choose a leader who is different from Assad. This is not only undemocratic, but also looks like colonialism where foreign nation(s) determine what is best for the inferior Syrians. Obama actually gave military aid to the rebels in Syria who were attempting to depose Assad. At the 18 Sep 2017 Friends of Syria meeting, the U.S. and European governments agreed *not* to finance the reconstruction of Syria until after Assad had been removed from power.

Finally, Tillerson says the removal of Assad will come from the process described in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254. That Resolution is the basis for negotiations in Geneva between Assad's government and a disorganized, incompetent opposition. There is *no* way that Assad will send a delegation to Geneva to negotiate his departure as president. That Resolution (§4) calls for "free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution". Assad *might* be defeated in that election.

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## History of Negotiations in Geneva during 2016-2017

My essays for [December 2015](#) and [January 2016](#) chronicled the creation and history of High Negotiations Committee (HNC), the opposition delegation that was supposed to negotiate in Geneva. (The HNC is also translated as the "Supreme Commission", which translation I used



in my essays prior to April 2016.) But the HNC refused to negotiate until all of the following pre-conditions (i.e., demands) had been satisfied:

- release of Assad's political prisoners,
- stopping bombardment of towns by Russian airplanes and by Assad's airplanes, also by Assad's artillery, and
- lifting sieges on rebel-held towns.

The HNC arrived in Geneva on 30 Jan 2016, the day *after* the negotiations were scheduled to begin. There was *only one* meeting with the opposition during the first three days of the Geneva negotiations, and that was a "short informal meeting" when de Mistura went to the opposition's hotel for a "courtesy visit". I concluded that the opposition was obstructing and delaying the peace negotiations.

My essay for [February 2016](#) chronicled the suspension of negotiations in Geneva, and the attempts by de Mistura and ISSG to arrange both a ceasefire in Syria and delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria. I also gave my opinion for who was to blame for the suspension of negotiations.

My essay for [March 2016](#) chronicled the second round of negotiations in Geneva.

My essay for [April 2016](#) chronicled the departure of the HNC on 18 April, leaving the negotiations limping along with alternative Syrian opposition delegations.

My essay for [May 2016](#) chronicled the ISSG meeting on 17 May, the resignation of the chief negotiator of the HNC (Mohammad Alloush) on 29 May, and explains why there were *no* negotiations during May.

My essay for [June 2016](#) explains why there were *no* negotiations during June, and mentions the failure of the HNC to select a new negotiating team.

My essay for [July 2016](#) explains why there were *no* negotiations during July, and again mentions the failure of the HNC to select a new negotiating team.

My essay for [August 2016](#) chronicled the continuation of efforts to restore the cessation of hostilities and to begin routine deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria. I concluded that the Syrian peace negotiations in Geneva during 2016 have *failed*.

My essay for [September 2016](#) chronicled the creation of new agreements by Russia and the USA on 9 Sep, the hundreds of violations during the first week of the new ceasefire, the collapse of the new ceasefire on 18 Sep, and the failure of diplomats to resuscitate the new ceasefire. The situation on the ground in Syria actually worsened after the new ceasefire became effective, as Assad and Russia began a ferocious new assault on the city of Aleppo on the night of 21 Sep. I characterized the ISSG as a "complete failure". I concluded that the Syrian peace negotiations in Geneva were dead for the foreseeable future.

My essay for [October 2016](#) chronicled the failure of the United Nations to do something about Syria: a veto by Russia in the U.N. Security Council on 8 October, a unilateral



Russian/Assad ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-22 October that was *not* reciprocated by insurgents, and on 20 October the U.N. Secretary General requested the U.N. General Assembly pass a resolution on Syria (but the General Assembly apparently ignored the request until 9 December).

My essay for [November 2016](#) chronicled the total failure of the United Nations to do something about the crisis in Syria.

My essay for [December 2016](#) chronicled the end of the Kerry-Lavrov negotiations on Syria (14 Dec), two U.N. General Assembly Resolutions on Syria (9, 21 Dec), two U.N. Security Council Resolutions on Syria (19, 31 Dec), and de Mistura's plan to resume negotiations in Geneva on 8 Feb 2017. Also during December 2016, the U.S. Government and the United Nations suddenly became unimportant in Syria, while Russia and Turkey took the lead in negotiations with Assad and the insurgents.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

My essay for [August-September 2017](#) mentions negotiations in Astana during September. But there were *no* negotiations in Geneva, as de Mistura futilely waited for the opposition to become unified.

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## Negotiations in Astana, Kazakhstan

Previous negotiations in Astana on the Syrian ceasefire during 23-24 January, 15-16 February, 14-15 March 2017 were a complete and total failure. The Syrian delegations accomplished absolutely nothing. In February, the insurgents arrived one day late and then refused to negotiate. In March, the insurgents failed to attend any of the two-day meeting. There was *no* meeting during April. The fourth round of so-called "negotiations" in Astana occurred on 3-4 May 2017, at which the guarantors created four safe zones inside Syria. A fifth round occurred on 4-5 July 2017. A sixth round occurred on 14-15 September.

Full-text of all publicly disclosed ceasefire agreements for Syria, including the Astana agreements, is available at [rbs0.com](http://rbs0.com)

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### 30-31 Oct 2017: Astana

On 19 October 2017, it was announced that the next negotiations in Astana would be on 30-31 October. [TASS](#); [Arab News](#).

On the first day of negotiations in Astana, [Rudaw](#) in Kurdish Iraq reported the diplomats would discuss "demining in Syria along with working on releasing prisoners and hostages, transferring bodies of those who lost their lives along with searching for missing persons."

The three guarantors (Russia, Iran, Turkey) issued a Joint Statement on 31 Oct 2017 at the end of the Astana meeting. I copied the text of that Statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry website into my document at [rbs0.com](http://rbs0.com) Notice that the guarantors — *not* the Syrians — issued the Joint Statement, as if the Syrians were invisible and unimportant. In other words, the Astana so-called negotiations is really the attempt by three foreign meddlers to impose their will on Syria.

The most important event at this Astana meeting may have been the announcement by Russia that they would sponsor a "Syrian People's Congress" that is described [below](#).

On 30-31 October, neither the Associated Press nor Reuters reported on the negotiations in Astana.

I looked at the United Nations Geneva website on the night of 3 November 2017, but there was *no* transcript of remarks by de Mistura about the Astana negotiations.

On 31 Oct 2017, the [Mehr News Agency](#) in Iran said "... the negotiations failed to reach an agreement on the two key points regarding the demining and exchange of detainees...." Mehr included a copy of the Joint Statement issued by the three guarantors.

### 21-22 Dec 2017

On 21 December, another meeting began in Astana. But journalists did *not* report on the meeting, instead they reported that de Mistura would arrive in Astana on 22 December. [Reuters](#). The Associated Press did *not* report on this topic on 21 December.

On 22 December 2017, Russia announced during the Astana meeting that the Syrian Congress of National Dialogue will be held in Sochi during 29-30 Jan 2018. [Reuters](#) reported: "The Astana trio [Russia, Iran, Turkey] has been discussing the issue [of detainees and forcibly disappeared people] since April [2017] but so far failed to reach a final agreement." Of course, de Mistura wants his U.N.-sponsored negotiations in Geneva to be the *only* forum for discussing a new constitution and elections in Syria. De Mistura also pleaded at Astana for the three guarantors to do something to enable deliveries of humanitarian aid in Syria, but he was ignored. [U.N. Geneva](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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## Planning for 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.]

At the end of December 2017, there have been *no* concrete results from any of the negotiations in Geneva during 2016-2017. But de Mistura was correct in 2016 to call for concrete results.

### **Need Negotiations in Geneva**

The previous round of negotiations in Geneva was held on 10-14 July 2017.

On 30 August 2017, de Mistura told the U.N. Security Council that there would be *two weeks* of "a more serious and concrete negotiation" in Geneva in "late October". On 27 September 2017, de Mistura told the U.N. Security Council that the next round of negotiations in Geneva "should be no later than end October or very early in November." The promised negotiations failed to occur because of problems with the opposition delegations.

De Mistura is waiting to convene the next negotiations in Geneva until after the opposition "unifies", probably at a meeting hosted by Saudi Arabia. This meeting in Riyadh occurred on 22-23 November 2017, see [below](#). The disorganization of the Syria opposition is causing delays and lack of concrete results in the Geneva negotiations.

De Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council *four times* (i.e., 30 Aug, 27 Sep, 26 Oct, 27 Nov) while there have been *zero* negotiations in Geneva. The lack of negotiations is solely the fault of the disorganized opposition.

### **26 October 2017**

On 26 October 2017, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council via videolink from Geneva. I have boldfaced the parts I find especially significant and I have added paragraph numbers.

Monsieur le président [François Delattre, France], dear friends, ambassadors,

[¶1] Let me update you on developments and lay out some of the plans that we have for the next round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, and then brief you on some of the other potential initiatives.

[¶2] We are seeing very significant developments in the fight against UN-proscribed terrorists in Syria. Raqqa has been liberated by the US-led coalition; Mayadeen by the Syrian government and its allies; and action continues to eliminate the remaining Daesh pockets in Deir-ez-Zor. By and large, the deconfliction among the parties fighting Daesh has been so far working.

[¶3] But we also see Daesh retreating into the desert and launching brutal asymmetric attacks in and near Damascus. Without an inclusive political process, there is a real threat that Daesh or similar entities could return and exploit the feelings of marginalisation and grievances. That's why we need a political process.

[¶4] On another note, it is also clear that some recent public ceremonies in Raqqa did not send the right signal, indeed the wrong signal, about inclusion.

[¶5] Meanwhile — apart from the southwest, where via the Amman arrangements the overall level of violence remains reduced despite some flashpoints in Beit Jinn — we are witnessing numerous reports of heavy shelling and even airstrikes. In Idlib and Hama, this might be attributed to actions by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham — al Nusra. But in other areas — Eastern Ghouta, southern Damascus and the Rastan triangle — there has been a trend of re-escalation rather than de-escalation, something that many fear might intensify if energies are directed from fighting Daesh somewhere else.

[¶6] Let me also register my concern: we are not seeing an increased humanitarian access, in de-escalation areas and elsewhere as we have wished, but I will leave to my colleague Mark Lowcock to actually refer to it when it will be his own turn. As you know, we have seen some shocking images which we cannot independently verify allegedly emerging indeed from Eastern Ghouta in the last few days, and again I will leave to Mark Lowcock to elaborate on that when it will be his own turn. The desired improvement on humanitarian access therefore continues to elude us, and this is due to many factors: the ongoing fighting in some areas, bureaucratic impediments or interference by parties to the conflict. Those with influence must work to enable the UN and its partners to deliver assistance by whatever modalities are available — cross-line, cross-border and regular programmes.

[¶7] With a genuine sense of civic duty and commitment to support their own fellow Syrians, we are hearing constant messages coming from the civil society organisations were continuing to express alarm at the impact of the conflict on the protection of civilians, which are still being affected, including killing of civilians and the lack of humanitarian access. We all share this concern. That's why I am raising it but again I will leave it to Mark Lowcock to elaborate on that.

[¶8] So, Monsieur le président, it is a very mixed picture. Terrorism is on the defensive — but it will not be defeated by military means alone. De-escalation arrangements are being seriously sometimes challenged, but they are working. So the next Astana meeting should focus on putting the existing arrangements back on track and finalising the establishment of a proper monitoring system. And it is vital to see real action on the humanitarian front.

Monsieur le président,

[¶9] Let me turn to the political process, and let's recall that

1. any de-escalation or any other arrangements must be interim in nature and should not lead to the de facto soft partition of Syria.

2. The UN remains committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Syria like all of you. Our goal is the realisation of a truly nationwide ceasefire and a political process to advance the implementation of the Geneva Communiqué and resolution 2254. And
3. you, the members of this Council, have solely mandated the United Nations, through me as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and of yourselves to convene and advance the intra-Syrian political negotiation process for a political solution to the conflict — and no one else.

[¶10] I have been carefully preparing a new round of talks therefore. Last week I was in Moscow to see the Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defence Minister Shoigu of the Russian Federation; and in Brussels to see the High Representative for the Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini to discuss with her the possibilities and the ways through which the Brussels conference in the Spring could move forward the political process by that time hopefully when it is established.

[¶11] Yesterday I saw US National Security Adviser McMaster in Washington and I have just come to brief you after meeting with the US Secretary of State Tillerson here in Geneva — which is why, and I have to apologise to you, I am not able to be with you in person but I am through a VTC. While in New York I also consulted the Secretary-General earlier this week in New York and received very clear guidance. I am having now a range of other contacts, including with Syrian and regional players.

[¶12] Accordingly, I wish to indicate — to you — in fact announce through this Security Council **my intention to convene round 8 of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva on the 28 of November**. I will continue to consult all concerned in this regard right up to that day. And we intend to have [in Geneva] formal plenary meetings as well as technical discussions over a period of time.

[¶13] The workplan for round 8 in Geneva will be framed by resolution 2254 and the four baskets — which each need to find an expression in a framework agreement to realize a transitional political process implementing 2254. I have asked for focus and realism because we need to get the parties into real negotiation over items where there is some prospect that they could begin to narrow the gaps and really negotiate. Applying this logic, my considered assessment as the mediator is that, for round 8 — and I would like to ask you for your support on this — **we should see if we can move some aspects of the agenda concretely forward — just far beyond exploration, and into negotiation.**

[¶14] Specifically, **we should focus in my opinion in round 8 on two main points:** one, the schedule and process to **draft a new constitution**; and two (and not necessarily in that order), the precise requirements for **UN supervised elections** as per 2254. Negotiations should all be informed by the overall framework of course of resolution 2254 — I said it already — and by the living 12 essential principles. I am ready to put on that occasion some initial thoughts to the parties as a starting point for serious negotiations.

[¶15] I also believe the time has come for a serious step on detainees, abductees and missing persons — and I genuinely hope that this could emerge from the next Astana meeting. Indeed, we have made some suggestions already in advance on how to build on it; and we need to continue to push for progress however we can because that is probably one of the most important confidence-building measures that Syrians, thousands of them, would like to hear.

[¶16] As we focus on negotiations on two key points — UN-supervised elections as per resolution 2254 and the constitution — we must continue discussions and preparations for negotiations on all baskets, including 1 and 4. It is hard to see how in fact this could succeed without looking at it in the context of 2254.

[¶17] We will also do everything possible to ensure that we draw on the best contributions of civil society through the Civil Society Support Room that we have here and utilise women's contributions and a gender perspective including via the Women Advisory Board, especially on the two main issues for negotiation in round 8 which I just mentioned.

[¶18] Now, I need your support to move ahead based on what I said — let me first of all indicate what areas.

[¶19] We hope to see a successful, focused meeting in Astana on 30 and 31 October. Regarding Astana, I flagged already the serious challenges to the de-escalation arrangements, and the importance of advancing the detainee file. We must also be ensuring humanitarian mine action moves forward. We have a common interest in preventing further unravelling of interim de-escalation and ceasefire arrangements that have been put in place. That is what Astana was always meant to be about — and that's what we want and hope that they would be able to, rightly, achieve it completely.

[¶20] Second, those with influence over the Government should now exercise their influence and focus on how to ensure that it comes to Geneva ready to negotiate. I particularly raised these points in detail in my meetings in Moscow quite intentionally.

[¶21] Third, **we need to see a successful Riyadh 2 meeting soon** — ideally before the next Geneva, and we will continue to coordinate on that. Now, we have heard about the fact that this initiative is likely to actually take place. And we sincerely hope that the initiative that was already an initiative by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia when they hosted the key meeting in 2015, and we have now a follow up in hosting Riyadh 2 meeting of the opposition, and we hope that will be proceeding accordingly.

[¶22] **It would be a mistake by all of us if we see the time is on our side.** The best way to proceed requires indeed instead an intensified engagement amongst the key players in support of the Geneva process.

[¶23] Let me note here that Syrian women's rights advocates are calling for a minimum of 30 percent representation in the delegations of both the government and the opposition as negotiators. I urge the Syrian parties and — I do it all the time you know — and international supporters to actually strongly support this call.



[¶24] Fourth, let's remember the regional and international dimensions on Syria. I am doing my best as the mediator to consult widely, to focus international discussions on how concretely to support the Geneva process, and I frankly welcomed any suggestions from among you on how this can be done. In this regard, I welcome initiatives by which the international community could come together in supporting the UN efforts.

[¶25] Finally, I wish to bring to your attention that the Russian Federation, when I was in Moscow, has briefed me regarding of their own initiative, or the initiative, or an initiative, to convene a large gathering of Syrians inside Syria, at the Hmeimim Russian military airbase, in the near future. We may perhaps hear more about this during our closed consultations, including from the Russian Permanent Representative, and I look forward to hearing that and the views of other members of the Council.

[¶26] My focus in looking at this, at Riyadh, at Astana, at anything else is always the same: does it help to advance the UN-led process in Geneva as per resolution 2254 or not?

[¶27] So, here are some bottom lines:

- One, it is time to move on the political track. It's really a plastic special moment. Let's use it. After Raqqa, after Deir ez-Zor, I used to say as you probably remember it is a moment of true now it is the moment of true.
- Astana next week should focus on the key Astana tasks.
- Those with influence on the Government should press it now to be ready finally to negotiate the substance in Geneva.
- The same applies to those with influence on the opposition, and **the meeting in Riyadh for the opposition should take place as soon as possible** and lead to a constructive and proactive outcome.
- We need active international engagement in support of Geneva.
- Round 8 is planned for 28 of November.
- **We will try to move into real negotiations on constitution and UN-supervised elections as per resolution 2254.**
- We should in parallel of course keep exploring the issue of governance and terrorism files.
- And we should view any initiative, any initiative basically, by virtue of whether it contributes to UN-led political process in Geneva that you have mandated me to pursue on behalf of the Secretary-General and of yourselves.

[¶28] This would be my summary of if I could express a bottom line list of wishes. I finish with this.

Merci, Monsieur le président.

Staffan de Mistura, "Briefing to the Security Council by Staffan De Mistura, Special Envoy to the Secretary-General [As delivered]," [U.N.](#), 26 Oct 2017. [Boldface and paragraph numbers added by Standler.]

My comments:

1. If the meeting in Riyadh fails to unify the opposition, then Assad will refuse to negotiate face-to-face with the opposition, and de Mistura's plan for concrete results becomes more difficult.
2. Notice that United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 contains a schedule. Section 2 says "with a target of early January 2016 for the initiation of talks" in Geneva. Section 4 calls for "free and fair elections, pursuant to the new constitution, to be held within 18 months". The deadline for elections, 18 months from the beginning of January 2016, was 1 July 2017. This deadline was missed because of delay by the opposition, as well as their intransigent demands to achieve in negotiations what they failed to win in the civil war.
3. I continue to believe that Resolution 2254, which is based on the flawed Geneva Communiqué of June 2012, is the wrong direction for the current problems in Syria. See my [review](#) of why the negotiations in Geneva during 2014 failed.
4. Notice that on 30 August 2017, de Mistura promised the U.N. Security Council that negotiations in Geneva would begin "Late October: Geneva talks. This time, we hope, serious ones, concrete ones. We are planning for two weeks in a row." Then the "late October" schedule was abandoned with *no* explanation.
5. Notice that on 27 September 2017, de Mistura told the U.N. Security Council that negotiations in Geneva would begin "no later than end October or very early in November." But in his 26 October briefing to the Security Council de Mistura's schedule had slipped one entire month. De Mistura did *not* explain why the scheduled had slipped, but it must be that the opposition is still not unified.
6. On 6 September 2017, de Mistura called on the opposition to recognize the reality "that they did not win the war". This is important, because for the past two years the opposition has been attempting to achieve in negotiations what it failed to win in seven years of civil war. But the opposition protested and de Mistura stopped mentioning that Assad had won the civil war.

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### **\_\_ Oct 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.

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### **de Mistura in November 2017**

On 22 November, de Mistura announced:

I intend to convene not just one round but actually two rounds this year in December in Geneva. But to do so I need a strong and creative Syrian [opposition] delegation. "Remarks at Opening Session of Riyadh 2 Meeting by Mr. Staffan de Mistura, UN Special Envoy for Syria," [U.N. Geneva](#), 22 Nov 2017.

On 27 November, de Mistura briefed the United Nations Security Council, one day before negotiations were scheduled to resume in Geneva:

Mr. President, Members of the Security Council,

1. I am briefing you from Geneva, as we are preparing for round 8 of the UN-convened intra-Syrian talks. Let me explain how we got here over the past month, and the approach to the talks at the moment.

2. Last month, you remember, I said: after Raqqa, after Deir-ez-Zor — and let us perhaps now also say after the Government of Syria defeated ISIS recently in its last stronghold of Abu Kemal — the operation to combat and defeat ISIS' territorial foothold in Syria would have completed its main tasks, and there would be a moment of truth for bringing about a real political process. I still believe that a moment of truth has arrived; although I want to register at the moment my serious concern at the tremendous escalation of violence in Eastern Ghouta in these last weeks and on-going restrictions on humanitarian access to that area. As ISIL is being defeated, neither side should turn their guns back towards de-escalation zones, and I therefore would like to urge, together with you, the Astana guarantors to address these challenges in order to avoid these problems for the de-escalation areas.

3. To prepare for real talks in Geneva, I called for real diplomacy. My messages were essentially the following:

1. the Government delegation should come ready to negotiate;
2. we need a united opposition delegation with common positions that comes ready to negotiate;
3. negotiations should take place in Geneva [repeats: in Geneva] without any, any preconditions;
4. they should negotiate on a workplan initially focussing on the 12 living essential principles and the constitutional and election baskets, towards the implementation of SCR 2254;
5. all other initiatives [repeats: all other initiatives] should support the UN mediation process that you, this Council, mandated the United Nations to conduct — and no one else.

4. We have seen signals on all these points, and we will now see what happens in Geneva. I do note with great interest that in DaNang, Sochi, and Riyadh, important meetings have taken place that might help us, I believe, to begin a genuine negotiation process in Geneva. International players are clearly looking for some common ground based on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2254, and are urging Syrians to begin to find some common ground too.

5. In DaNang, Russian President Putin and US President Trump affirmed that the political process, and I quote, “must include full implementation of UNSCR 2254”, end of quote. They also noted that this included, and I am quoting again, “constitutional reform and free and fair elections under UN supervision, held to the highest international standards of transparency, with all Syrians, including members of

the diaspora, eligible to participate” — end of quote. This statement of the two Presidents followed a taking note by them of what they termed, and I quote, “President Assad’s recent commitment to the Geneva process and constitutional reform and elections as called for under UNSCR 2254”, end of quote. As the mediator, I also noted that President Assad said in Sochi after meeting President Putin on 24 November, and I quote, “we do not want to look back. We will accept and talk with anyone [repeats: anyone] who is really interested in a political settlement”, end of quote.

6. Notwithstanding these potentially interesting and important signals, when my deputy, Ambassador Ramzy, held consultations in Damascus with the Government over the weekend, the Government did not yet confirm its participation in Geneva, but indicated that we would be hearing from them soon. Last night [26 Nov], we received a message that the Government would not travel to Geneva today. Naturally we hope and indeed expect that the Government will be on its way shortly, particularly in light of President Assad’s commitment to President Putin when they met in Sochi.

7. Turning to the opposition: last week, over three intensive days [22-24 Nov], and I witnessed one and a half of them, an expanded opposition conference was convened in Riyadh. Participants reflected the main components of the Syrian mosaic and the ideological diversity within the Syrian opposition and the Syrian society. Resolution 2254 mentions by name three groupings — those who met in Riyadh 1, the Cairo Platform and the Moscow Platform — and they were all there. Armed groups controlling territory inside of Syria, including those involved in Astana and the various de-escalation arrangements, were active participants in Riyadh. There was a strong participation — finally — by women. There was a strong presence of independents including activists, business people, and tribal figures. Several parties based inside Syria were actually represented through their own political umbrellas, including representatives based inside Syria.

8. As this Riyadh 2 initiative was clearly designed within the framework of advancing resolution 2254 and the Geneva process, which speaks clearly of three by name, and “others”, I was glad to attend it to urge the participants to move ahead. I also took note of other international attendees at the opening of the conference, including Russian Presidential Envoy Lavrientev. After I left to travel to Moscow for useful consultations, Foreign Minister Lavrov and I were both active in assisting the efforts of Saudi Foreign Minister Jubeir, whose determined efforts in order to obtain the outcome that we saw we really should be appreciating. The Syrian Negotiations Commission formed in Riyadh is now in the process of arriving in Geneva while we are talking — I expect this process will be completed by tomorrow morning coming from various locations.

9. I publicly noted that the participants in Riyadh unequivocally rejected terrorism and affirmed that the solution to the crisis is political, not military. I have noted that they formed a united opposition delegation reflecting the full diversity of the participants to the conference. And I have noted that the delegation was tasked to negotiate in Geneva without any, repeat any, preconditions, to discuss all issues on the agenda, and to have the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions as the sole reference for the negotiation.

Mr. President,

10. Assuming that both parties arrive in Geneva, we will be looking to move them into beginning serious discussions and hopefully negotiations. Let me make one thing clear: we will not accept any preconditions from either party.

11. And let us be clear what a precondition is: it is when one party says: “I will not begin to negotiate with the other side unless they do or say the following”. I hope both parties hear this message. I will also assess, as a mediator should be doing, the parties’ engagement by what they do in the room, and how positively they engage on a workplan and show a genuine readiness to discuss, negotiate, regardless of their stated public positions on any issue. We know that there are always differences. That is what negotiations are really, and each side has the right to express its own opinion, which might not be pleasant for the other one as long as they don’t put preconditions and refuse to talk to the other side. That is what negotiations are all about. Resolution 2254 is a guideline for this.

12. What can therefore that workplan more or less look like? We can do this by looking at the end goal of resolution 2254 and then working backwards.

13. Resolution 2254, if we all remember, culminates in an end-goal of free and fair elections held under UN supervision [repeats: under UN supervision], to the highest standards of accountability and transparency, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to vote — no exclusion, refugees included of course. They must also be preceded by the popular ratification of a new constitution, and the draft constitution should be produced according to an inclusive schedule and process that, as resolution 2254 says, is set via a process in Geneva. Clearly, the drafting and approval process must be all-inclusive and a national dialogue and/or a national conference would be important components of this overall process.

14. Serious engagement and negotiations on these matters should proceed on the basis of resolution 2254 and guided by the living 12 principles developed during the process which can paint a clear vision for the future of Syria that can be shared by all. I believe, with goodwill, *Inchallah*, it should be possible to narrow the differences on these principles.

15. If possible, we would also begin to explore issues pertaining to baskets 1 and 4 — namely governance and counter-terrorism, security governance and confidence-building measures.

16. I will be discussing all this with all who are coming to Geneva, and I will share with them thoughts and a workplan for the negotiation process. And as I do so, I will be reminding them that the time has come to demonstrate, not to us, not even to you, but to the Syrian people that they care about their survival, their lives and the lives of their loved ones — through immediate, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access and medical evacuations from besieged areas, and in willingly addressing the plight of detainees, abductees and missing people — and believing concretely in a negotiation

on a political process.

Mr. President,

17. Throughout the process various ideas have emerged for a wider gathering of Syrian stakeholders. Indeed, the Geneva process itself does require such a gathering of Syrians and I have been building the foundation for it by inviting Syrians from all walks of life, from inside and outside, to participate.

18. In this context, let me also stress that more than 200 civil society actors will be engaged here in Geneva now in the UN-led political process in Geneva over the next weeks as part of the intra-Syrian talks. In the coming days, the Women Advisory Board will be fully engaged, once again, and in the real negotiations. I will engage a group of Syrian legal and constitutional experts and hear their advice and expertise. I will be engaging with civil society organizations with human rights expertise including detainees, abductees and missing persons; aided by technology we will be able to get in touch with refugee community leaders, in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey; and with civil society actors working in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. All that from Geneva. I count on their commitment to the political process, sense of citizenship, and real contact with the real problems on the ground and their own insights and ideas in order to strengthen our on-going mediation efforts.

19. I note the initiative of France to bring together representatives of the five permanent members of this Council here in Geneva, for a preparatory meeting tomorrow at which I was invited to participate to elaborate on the agenda of this round. I am looking forward to any expression of support by the international community, including the Security Council, to the efforts of the United Nations to implement resolution 2254 — through a UN-led political process in Geneva.

20. As you are aware, the Russian Federation has continued to pursue plans for a large gathering related to Syria, in the relatively near future but with no date set as yet. I should report that the Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey met recently in Sochi. The Russian Federation has sought the United Nations support for this conference. I have been in continuous and open consultations with them. I have also continued to assess the views of Syrians, and the wider international community, including all members of the Security Council, bearing in mind the mandate given to the United Nations by you in this Council — by you. Therefore, it is, as far as I can see, premature for me at this stage to say anything regarding this initiative. And I will continue to view this proposal and all other initiatives through the same prism: does it contribute to effective UN-led intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva to implement resolution 2254? Yes or no?

Mr. President,

21. Syria has been at war for the last 6 years. Half of its population have fled their homes. Reconstruction will cost at least 250 billion US dollars. There have been myriad of obstacles to a settlement: a constellation of actors; a variety of shifting agendas, and a real danger, still there, of soft but concrete fragmentation of the Syria's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. And then we have had history's

largest and wealthiest terrorist group bringing in terrorists from over 100 countries; the use of force against civilians on a horrific scale. All this has been in front of our eyes for the past 6 years.

22. This crisis, one of the worst in the history of the United Nations, now has the potential to move towards a genuine political process. A clearer map of de-escalation, ceasefire and de-confliction arrangements has emerged, largely enabled by Astana and Amman. We see the emergence of international consensus, and we must begin to stitch the process into concrete results, enabling Syrians to determine their own future freely. The united support of the international community, centered on this Council, will be vital if negotiations are to move forward in a concrete way.

"Briefing to the UN Security Council by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 27 Nov 2017.

### **My comments:**

1. Paragraph 6. On 26 October 2017, de Mistura announced that the next negotiations in Geneva would begin on 28 November. Despite this advance notice, Assad's government will *not* travel to Geneva on 27 November, so they will miss the beginning of the negotiations. Usually it is the opposition that arrives day(s) late to negotiations in Geneva.
2. In paragraphs 3 and 14, de Mistura refers to "12 living essential principles". De Mistura issued those principles on 24 March 2016, after round 2 of negotiations in Geneva. Those principles are quoted in my essay for [March 2016](#).
3. In paragraphs 10-11, de Mistura insists there will be *no* preconditions. He does *not* say how he will deal with the opposition's demand that Assad resign before the transitional government of Syria begins.
4. Paragraph 22 repeats de Mistura's call in March 2016 for "concrete results". I think such concrete results are unlikely from negotiations in Geneva, because of the intransigence of the Syrian National Coalition and HNC, and also because Assad's government is pursuing a military victory.

At 18:47 GMT on 27 November, [Reuters](#) has a news article titled: "Little prospect of Syria peace progress seen in Geneva talks". Reuters reported: "A Syrian newspaper reported that the government delegation would delay its planned Tuesday [28 Nov] arrival in Geneva because of the opposition's insistence Assad step down."

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## **Negotiations in Geneva**

**28 Nov 2017: Day Nr. 54**

Back on 30 August 2017, de Mistura told the United Nations Security Council that the next negotiations in Geneva would be for two weeks. As of today, 28 November, de Mistura has



not publicly said how long the current round of negotiations will last.

On 28 November, de Mistura met with the opposition delegation. Assad's government will send a delegation to Geneva on Wednesday, 29 November, one day after the negotiations were scheduled to begin. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

### 29 Nov 2017: Day Nr. 55

Assad's negotiating team arrived in Geneva on 29 November. Agence France-Presse reported: "But a government delegation landed in the Swiss city on Wednesday [29 Nov], reportedly after securing key concessions from UN mediator Staffan de Mistura, including keeping the Assad issue off the table. .... De Mistura has said that he would push for direct talks once the opposition unified, but a source close to the government has said that Damascus would not agree to sit around a table with rebel negotiators this round." [Arab News](#).

[Reuters](#) reported an interview with Nasr Hariri, the new head of the HNC: "De Mistura originally planned a round of 4-5 days but was now planning to continue until Dec. 15, Hariri said, ...."

The [Associated Press](#) grimly reported: "There is little optimism, however, that the current round would achieve any significant breakthroughs."

On 29 November, De Mistura issued the following terse statement:

Special Envoy de Mistura recalls his previous requests that delegations participating in the intra-Syrian talks refrain from statements aimed at delegitimising other invitees. Having however noted unhelpful statements in recent days, he urges the cessation of such statements.

The Special Envoy reminds the Syrian delegations who are in Geneva of his appeal on them, in his briefing to the Security Council on 27 November, to engage seriously and without preconditions. As the eighth round of intra-Syrian talks has now started, he stresses that the time has come to focus on achieving real progress on the political process, in the interest of the Syrian people.

Staffan de Mistura, "Note to Correspondents: Statement on behalf of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), 29 Nov 2017.

De Mistura did *not* identify who was "delegitimising other invitees".

### 30 Nov 2017: Day Nr. 56

On 30 November, de Mistura held his first press conference during the eighth round of negotiations in Geneva:

This round of talks in Geneva is number 8, and we are planning to have it lasting up to the 15th of December.

As you remember the intention was to actually have them for two to three days and then it was likely that the Government delegation in particular would have gone to

Sochi, and that would have required for them to return afterwards, and to a second round of the same round, so to speak. But Sochi has been postponed as you know for some time — to January or February, the date is not being fixed — and therefore we felt that this is the occasion to actually take a little bit more advantage the prolonged opportunity.

The Government arrived slightly delayed, but did arrive, and the opposition has been here from the beginning. Now, all this takes place against quite a backdrop, it is not just a normal round of talks. Think about the intense diplomatic activity which has taken place regarding a common type of search for a political solution to the Syrian conflict. No one can deny that, as we said, after the territorial losses of Daesh in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, there has been now a moment of truth, we need to find a political solution, and that is shown itself through a lot of activities. Let me just mention them because they all have an influence on what we are doing and on what this round of talks — and the next ones — will be.

The Da Nang joint declaration of President Putin and President Trump, the trilateral summit of Iran, Russia, and Turkey Presidents, the meeting between President Assad and President Putin where there was a follow-up declaration which has an impact — we are in fact referring to it when we meet, especially the government delegation and the opposition —, the so-called R2, Riyadh II conference, plus our own Security Council briefing when I got an additional reinforced mandate in order to proceed according to some of the indications, that I will indicate; our own visits meetings in Moscow, New York, Paris, Riyadh, Ankara and contacts with the Iranian authorities and the EU partners, and the recent telephone conversation just the day when we started the intra-Syrian talks with Secretary Tillerson, and a visit to Damascus by the Deputy Special Envoy, Ambassador Ramzy.

So we have now two delegations in Geneva — one arrived a little bit late, but they are there and I would like to place on record and thank the Russian Federation for their having secured and helped in security the presence of the Syrian Government delegation, and Saudi Arabia for having facilitated, quite effectively, the establishment in Riyadh of a unified opposition delegation — it is the first time, you remember, we used to have three, four, and different groups.

Now we do have also as you know — and I want to place this on record — our own constant interest in engaging Syrian civil society, and we have been able to do so in a very active way — why we are doing so? Because that's the principle, delegations yes, are important — but what about the people of Syria? Do we hear their voice? And therefore, we have engaged more than 200 different partners of the civil society and I have been listening, as usual. And I want to emphasize that to my own and my very, very effective Women's Advisory Board. All that in the background to these meetings that we have been having.

So we are still at the beginning, if you want to look at it in the context of the 15th of December.

Today we had what I would define, probably, a first time — I am sorry perhaps you

will get used to this type of terminologies, but they do mean something — very close, I would say, very close proximity parallel meetings with the two parties. In fact, I have been shuttling with my colleagues between the two rooms which basically were five meters away, while we were actually raising and discussing, with both, issues which we consider very important for all.

On substance, well the agenda that we are pursuing is the one that I had been referring to — and I got a reinforced mandate from the Security Council. These are the 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles — I will elaborate, the name sounds very sophisticated but it is something very substantial. And that is what the Security Council has been asking us to focus on, and, I must say, all the meetings I referred to from Da Nang to the Sochi trilateral meeting, there was always the reference to some type of importance to the constitutional process and the elections, which we interpret according to 2254 as presidential, and parliamentary elections, under the UN supervision. That means that apart from the 12 principles, we have been, and we intend to discuss and raise with both sides, all four baskets, but in particular the two which we have been referring to and which we have been supported by all these meetings to address: constitutional process and UN-supervised elections.

We have also been talking about the rules of the game, and therefore reemphasizing: no preconditions. I know every side had been expressing, and probably will continue doing so although we are not in favor of that, their own opinions, but don't you have in your own countries different opinions? I want to believe so. And that opposition and government — and we have our French colleagues here who can remind us how this is very intense, or my own country, there is always discussion between the opposition and the government. So opinions is one thing, preconditions is a completely different thing. So we are asking — and I am insisting, and so far it has been respected — no preconditions about anything that we will be discussing. Of course nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and everybody knows that.

So where are we on these 12 points, why are they so important? Well these are essential, because they do refer to what could be, could be, a shared vision of the kind of Syria that the Syrians want to live in. They are inspired by the request of both the Geneva Communiqué and the 2254 resolution, which as I said, we need to come up with a shared vision.

Both parties have responded quite constructively, actually even in a way illuminating ideas and comments and amendments, and that is what we discussed today when we had those close proximity parallel discussions.

Today we did share with them our own thoughts and our own understanding on some commonalities that exist in fact between them about what could be a shared future vision of Syria. They are important, you know why? Because they might guide the drafting of a new constitution, and actually be an entry point for genuine reconciliation discussions.

We are hopefully going to continue along that road, and that's why what we have been thinking about is actually allowing any delegation during this weekend — and I think

the Government will do so — to actually return home, consult, refresh and come back next week around Tuesday, in order to retake again, the same round of discussion so that we go through the 12 points, the constitutional process and the elections aspect, and do so until the 15th of December.

Everyone have been acting so far, I must say, professionally and quite carefully addressing their own point of view, I hope this will continue. I can't tell you much more because, as I said, we are at the beginning — but the beginning with a strong backlog of international interest in wanting to see political process.

....

QUESTION: You mentioned the UN would for the first time propose for direct dialogue between the two parties, what are their response?

SdeM: I was just explaining it to our French colleague, French speaking colleague, that you see, it's true, that it's always very good to have direct dialogue, but for a mediator what matters is the substance, we have plenty of negotiations in the past in history, where in fact it took only the last two meetings of the whole agreement [to obtain] they actually sat with each other. But what is more important is they actually be able to interact between the two on the substantive things. I give you an example, I've been in Astana as you know has produced some good results on very specific area the so-called de-escalation areas — do you think that they were meeting together? No, they came in the same room and sat, you know the picture, and they looked at each other not very happily but they sat there. The real discussions were being done by very effective mediators, who are the three facilitators, or guarantors who were shuttling all the time. So let's be frank, the direct contact is good, but what is essential is being able to exchange opinions and shuttling like we do or proximity is good enough and if and when it [direct negotiations?] happens I will be very glad but it may just be a photo opportunity.

Staffan de Mistura, "Note to Correspondents: Transcript of Press Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#), 30 Nov 2017.

Note that *no* negotiations occurred in Geneva during August, September, October, and most of November, so that the opposition could unify and then direct negotiations would occur. But now de Mistura says "proximity is good enough" and direct negotiations are not needed.

Yesterday, de Mistura publicly admonished delegates *not* to "delegitimise" other delegates. But today, de Mistura praised the delegates for acting "professionally". De Mistura is not consistent.

### **1 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 57 Assad's delegation quits**

On 1 December 2017, after meeting with de Mistura in the morning, the head of Assad's delegation announced: "As long as the other side sticks to the language of Riyadh 2 ..., there will be no progress. For us (this) round is over, as a government delegation. [De Mistura] as

mediator he can announce his own opinion.” [Reuters](#). The specific objection to words in Riyadh2 is the demand that Assad resign before the transitional government in Syria begins. Assad's delegation will return to Damascus tomorrow for consultations with their government. Assad's delegation *may* return to Geneva on Tuesday, 5 December. See also [Associated Press](#); [The National](#)(in UAE).

On 1 December 2017, de Mistura released the following statement about his 12 points of commonalities.

In light of media reports of material purportedly on the table in the intra-Syrian talks, the Special Envoy has decided to clarify where things currently stand by releasing the attached 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles paper dated 30 November 2017. This paper was distributed by the Special Envoy to the delegations in parallel meetings yesterday. The Office of the Special Envoy would like to briefly elaborate on the purpose of this paper and its ongoing evolution.

Over several rounds of talks, the Special Envoy periodically identified commonalities emerging from his separate consultations with the government and the opposition. These included 12 points of commonalities regarding the end-state of Syria, which were last shared with the parties in a version offered for their consideration by the Special Envoy during round 4 of the talks.

Since that time, the Special Envoy has received valuable proposals regarding the content of the 12 points from the government and the opposition, and he and his team have consulted painstakingly and carefully on all material received. He has also received useful insights on principles during consultations with the Women's Advisory Board and Syrian civil society through the Civil Society Support Room.

In light of this, yesterday the Special Envoy shared with the two delegations a document entitled Special Envoy's 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles. As he explained to the delegations, these seek to embody end-state commonalities. They seek to offer an enduring perspective on the vision of a future that can be shared by all Syrians, and do not address the question of how to realize the vision, which will continue to be developed in parallel with the four baskets. They are consistent with and reflect many of the end-state principles contained in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and can serve to inform the parallel discussions of the four baskets which remain the agenda of the talks.

Yesterday, when the Special Envoy presented the document to both delegations, he underscored that these remain living, and thus subject to further discussion, development, modification and updating by the Special Envoy to strengthen commonalities in negotiations, also bearing in mind additional inputs that could develop more detailed language on the appreciation of Syria as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The Special Envoy has therefore requested the delegations to further reflect and offer their reactions on the living principles and to engage on baskets 2 (constitutional schedule and process) and 3 (elections) in talks next week.

"Note to Correspondents: Statement on behalf of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura," [U.N.](#) and [U.N. Geneva](#), 1 Dec 2017.

Despite the promise in the first paragraph of the above statement, the United Nations websites did *not* post a copy of de Mistura's 12 points.

In his speech to the United Nations Security Council on 27 November, and again in his press conference on 30 November, de Mistura praised the Riyadh meeting for creating a unified opposition. But de Mistura ignored that the Riyadh meeting also created a communiqué that demanded that Assad resign before the transitional government for Syria began. That demand (i.e., pre-condition) by the opposition caused Assad's delegation to arrive late and depart early, and may have ended the Geneva negotiations for the foreseeable future.

### **5 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 58 Assad's delegation absent again**

On 4 December, the opposition delegation in Geneva says the absence of Assad's delegation is an "embarrassment to Russia". [Asharq Al-Awsat](#); [Reuters](#).

At 13:00 GMT on Tuesday, 5 December, journalists began to report that Assad's delegation had *not* arrived in Geneva, and that Assad's government was unable to decide whether to return to Geneva. Assad's delegation attended only 3 of the first 5 days of round 8 of the Geneva negotiations. Meanwhile, de Mistura met with the opposition delegation in the afternoon of 5 December. [The National](#) in the UAE; [Ahrām](#)(AFP); [Gulf Times](#)(AFP); [Associated Press](#).

### **6 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 59 Assad's delegation absent again**

On Wednesday, 6 December 2017, at 11:35 GMT, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's delegation remained in Damascus, "with no sign of President Bashar al-Assad's delegation returning to the negotiations in Geneva after they walked out last week."

At 17:15 GMT on 6 December, [Reuters](#) reported: "The United States and France called on Russia on Wednesday [6 Dec] to deliver the delegation of President Bashar al-Assad to Syria peace talks in Geneva...." In a press conference, Tillerson said: "We have left it to the Russians to deliver them [the Syrian regime delegation] to the table, ...." [U.S. State Dept.](#)

The French foreign ministry criticized Assad's government for "obstructing" the Geneva negotiations. [Reuters](#). But the real blame ought to be on the opposition, who demanded in their Riyadh communiqué on 23 Nov that Assad must resign — a demand that the opposition failed to win in 7 years of civil war and a result that *should* be determined by the Syrian people in elections.

My guess is that de Mistura will do the same thing that he did in April 2016, when the HNC delegation walked out and failed to return — hold meetings with the one delegation that remained in Geneva, and hold many meetings with de Mistura's informal advisors in the "Civil Society Support Room" and the "Women's Advisory Board". De Mistura will pretend to continue negotiations, after the demand (i.e., pre-condition) of the opposition scuttled the

negotiations in Geneva.

**7 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 60**  
**Assad's delegation absent again**

Let me begin by noting two facts. First, this is the 60<sup>th</sup> day of so-called negotiations in Geneva since January 2016, but there have been *no* concrete results. Second, Assad's delegation attended only 3 of the first 7 days of round 8 of the Geneva negotiations. No knows when, or if, real negotiations will begin in Geneva.

To make the Geneva negotiations successful, de Mistura should ban from Geneva both the former and current members of the Syrian National Coalition and Free Syrian Army, that dominated and continue to dominate the HNC. Then de Mistura should create a totally new opposition delegation from the "Civil Society Support Room", the "Women's Advisory Board", and perhaps the Moscow group.

At 08:23 GMT on 7 December, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's delegation would return to Geneva on 10 December.

On 7 December, de Mistura held his second press conference during round 8 of the negotiations in Geneva:

No[w] let me now talk about the political process. As you know the government delegation has left for a recess, we had a recess during the weekend, the work has continued with the opposition delegation, unified opposition delegation, and we have been able to go quite a lot in discussions with them, both on the 12 points, on the four baskets, and with particular emphasis from our point of view, in particular on basket two and basket three, which I remind you, is the constitutional issues and the elections under UN supervision. All that was done with us and without any precondition. We discussed openly.

Now the government, the government has informed us that they would fly back to Geneva on Sunday the 10th of December. We have taken note of that and we are ready to continue, as we said from the beginning, to discuss with both sides until the 15th, when they depart, therefore until the 14th evening. Then we expect therefore those who will be present in Geneva, and we say it again, to seriously engage, in particular on the 12 points, on all baskets, but in particular on those two baskets which we announced in the Security Council — and every member of the Security Council says that it is important — i.e., constitutional issues and elections under UN supervision.

The other day, President Putin, I heard him saying, very much clearly that he insisted on the need of presidential, I repeat, and parliamentary elections, which under the 2254 means, under UN supervision.

Now, let me be frank and clear, there are many initiatives that are being planned and can be planned in the future, but we shall assess the behavior on both sides, government and opposition in Geneva, and based on that we will then decide how this, as we said at the Security Council, can be a building up or not, or a sabotage of



Geneva. If that is the case, we will draw our own conclusions. We want any type of new initiative which is going to take place or could take place, to be, as is being claimed, an opportunity of supporting Geneva, and building on Geneva and coming back to Geneva. That is the position of the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

So, bottom line, we are expecting the government to come back on Sunday [10 Dec], we are having the opposition still here, we will engage both of them, expecting no preconditions, and on the 12 points and on constitution and elections. And based on that we will be then assessing whether there is any serious intention, not only in Geneva — but what goes wrong in Geneva is very bad sign for any other initiative elsewhere.

So that is where we are at the moment. Thank you.

....

QUESTION: You said you are going to analyze next week if it is a building up process or if it is a sabotage, if it is a sabotage according to you and your colleagues and advisors, what is going to happen? What are you thinking? Are you going to halt talks? Cancel talks, give up absolutely?

SdeM: Thank you. I understand you are doing your job and I hope you will appreciate I am doing mine. I am not in a position of telling you now what would be our reaction if we come to the conclusion that either side here in Geneva is de facto, by simply being here but not participating to talks, de facto sabotaging the Geneva political process, the only one which has been actually mandated by the UN Security Council. So I will tell you more once we assess the situation. What I am telling you today is that if, God forbid — because it will be very bad news — we draw the conclusion that one of the two sides is actually, de facto — not simply by being here and coming to a meeting, but actually engaging — is de facto sabotaging the process and the progress of Geneva, that would have a very bad impact on any other political attempt to have processes elsewhere. And that's why it is very important to actually see how Geneva is moving.

"Joint Press Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and UN Senior Advisor Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#) and [U.N.](#), 7 Dec 2017.

My comment is that it is obvious that the opposition delegation sabotaged the Geneva negotiations with their demand (i.e., precondition) in the Riyadh communiqué that Assad must resign before the transitional government begins. The opposition surely knew that demand would be unacceptable to Assad.

The [Voice of America](#) reported that "U.N. Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura says he will assess progress in the Syrian peace talks next week and decide whether it is worth continuing the political process or whether it has run its course for now." That is a more explicit statement than what de Mistura actually said at his press conference.

**8 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 61  
Assad's delegation absent again**

On Friday, 8 December 2017, Assad's delegation had been absent from Geneva the entire week.

On Friday, neither Reuters nor the Associated Press reported on de Mistura's negotiations. The most recent Associated Press news article that mentions the Geneva negotiations is dated 5 December. Below, on 21 November, I wrote about the [News Fatigue](#) in connection with the meeting of opposition delegations in Riyadh, now the same fatigue is affecting coverage of the United Nations sponsored negotiations in Geneva. Despite multiple promises by de Mistura, there have been *no* serious negotiations in the current round of negotiations in Geneva.

### **10 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 62**

At 11:19 GMT on Sunday, 10 December 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that Assad's delegation returned to Geneva. But Reuters also reported: "Western diplomats voiced scepticism about [Assad delegation's] willingness to engage."

### **11 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 63**

News fatigue was in effect today, as journalists did *not* report on negotiations in Geneva.

### **12 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 64**

On the morning of Tuesday, 12 December, the [Associated Press](#) reports that the opposition is whining about Assad's delegation creating "new conditions, making it difficult to move forward." The only example of an allegedly "new condition" is that Assad's delegation refuses to negotiate face-to-face with the opposition, but that so-called condition was established on 29 November. My comment is that there are only three days remaining in the current round of negotiations, which were scheduled for nearly three weeks. The barbarians from Syria appear determined to waste every day arguing about alleged pre-conditions, when both sides have created pre-conditions.

On the night of 12 December, *Arab News* reported:

Bashar Assad should stop playing games and engage seriously with the UN-sponsored peace process, Yahya Al-Aridi, the Syrian opposition spokesman at the Geneva talks, told Arab News on Tuesday [12 Dec].

Al-Aridi dismissed reports that UN envoy Staffan de Mistura had told the opposition it no longer enjoyed international support and that failed Geneva negotiations would be replaced by a peace and reconciliation conference proposed by Russia.

"The role of the international broker is to facilitate the process and he has no right to decide that this side is with us or not with us," he said. "We have the strongest thing, which is the will of the Syrian people — which we consider as trust."

....

Al-Aridi said later that the delegation of the High Negotiations Committee had many criteria, mainly the demands of the Syrian people.

Syed Tausief Ausaf, "Assad urged to 'stop playing games and start serious talks'," [Arab News](#), 13 Dec 2017.

My comment is that the opposition's claim to have "the will [or demands] of the Syrian people" is pure propaganda. The opposition delegation was appointed in Riyadh, *not* elected by the Syrian people. It is intriguing that de Mistura allegedly told the opposition that they "no longer enjoyed international support". De Mistura is correct that failure of negotiations in Geneva to produce concrete results will cause the Russian conference in Sochi to replace the U.N.-sponsored negotiations in Geneva. Because the Russians are allied with Assad, the conference in Sochi will *not* be favorable to the Syrian opposition.

### 13 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 65

For a long time, Assad's delegation refused to meet face-to-face with the opposition delegations, because the opposition had not unified. Then in Riyadh on 23 Nov 2017 the opposition declared that it had unified. But Assad's delegation continued to refuse to meet face-to-face with the opposition, because the opposition's communiqué in Riyadh demanded that Assad resign before a transitional government could begin.

Now, on 13 December, the opposition is demanding face-to-face negotiations with Assad's delegation. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Asharq Al-Awsat](#).

There are only two days remaining in the almost three-week long eighth round of negotiations in Geneva. The barbarians from Syria seem determined to use the entire three-weeks in petty squabbling about procedure. Note that hundreds of thousands of people in Syria need food or medicine, and the Syria civil war continues to kill more than 2000 people/month, but the delegations are *not* solving those problems. Assad's delegation appears to be refusing to discuss de Mistura's substantive agenda of a new constitution and elections in Syria.

At night on 13 December, [Reuters](#) reported that de Mistura appeared on Swiss television and said he had asked Russian president Putin to convince Assad to negotiate in Geneva. But the Russians are planning their own peace conference in Sochi, while de Mistura believes that the United Nations Security Council has mandated the *only* peace conference be in Geneva under U.N. sponsorship. Meanwhile, Reuters quotes de Mistura: "The opposition told me clearly when they arrived here, and again yesterday [12 Dec] and this morning [13 Dec] too, that they are ready to meet the government right away to have a hard, difficult discussion. The government is not ready, it has said it is not ready to meet the opposition. That is regrettable but diplomacy has many means." The opposition's demand for face-to-face negotiations is not the only problem, as Reuters reported: "A senior Western diplomat said that the government delegation had failed to engage with de Mistura on a new constitution and elections...." On 14 December, the [Associated Press](#) reported de Mistura's appearance on Swiss television. The Associated Press said: "... de Mistura signalled frustration at the lack of progress. The previous rounds of talks also made little if any progress."

**14 Dec 2017: Day Nr. 66**

On Thursday, 14 December, the eighth round of so-called "negotiations" in Geneva ended. After 13 days of negotiations in round 8, there were *no* concrete results, and the promised face-to-face negotiations did *not* occur.

Reuters reported on the angry departure of Assad's delegation:

Syrian government negotiator Bashar al-Ja'afari accused its opposition, backed by Western countries and Saudi Arabia, of sabotaging a round of U.N.-led peace talks that ended in Geneva on Thursday [14 Dec] without any results.

....

[Ja'afari said:] "Those who drew up the Riyadh 2 statement were the ones who sabotaged this round. I mean by that the other side. I mean the Saudis and the Saudi handlers themselves who are the Western countries. They do not want the Geneva process to succeed."

Ja'afari said that the Syrian delegation at the Geneva talks had engaged seriously in the round, which he said had focused on counter-terrorism.

[In response to de Mistura's proposal to have Russia convince Assad to negotiate]

Ja'afari said that Russia was its ally but that de Mistura had made an "error" in the interview with Swiss television channel RTS. His mandate as facilitator of the talks would be reviewed in the light of his report to the U.N. Security Council on Tuesday [19 Dec], Ja'afari said. "Nobody can exert pressure on us," Ja'afari told reporters. Stephanie Nebehay & Tom Miles, "Defiant Syrian envoy blames West, Saudis and U.N. as peace talks end," [Reuters](#), 19:04 GMT, 14 Dec 2017.

Despite what Ja'afari said, the official agenda for this round of negotiations in Geneva was *not* to discuss "counter-terrorism". De Mistura has been very clear about the agenda: to discuss a new constitution for Syria and to discuss elections in Syria. This is an example of Assad's delegation failing to engage in negotiations.

[Al-Arabiya](#) reported: "Jaafari said in a press conference following his meeting with UN envoy Staffan De Mistura that there will be no negotiations as long as the opposition adheres to its position that President Bashar al-Assad be excluded from any transitional government." That means the opposition must delete from the Riyadh 2 communiqué the demand that Assad must resign before the transitional government begins. See also [Associated Press](#).

On the evening of 14 December, De Mistura had a press briefing, at which he said round 9 of negotiations in January 2018 would depend on whether someone could convince Assad to negotiate. I added paragraph numbers and boldfaced some important remarks.

SdeM: Thank you Alessandra. Let me make some few comments and then of course I will be available and open for questions.

[¶ 1] We have just completed the 8th round of the intra-Syrian talks. I will give you some ideas and where we are, more or less. You must understand that the deep assessment of this round needs to wait for me to discuss it with the Secretary-General in New York, where I am going this weekend, and then the Security Council, so you have to forgive me if I will be still be a little bit vague I would say what I think, but I will not give you too much of analysis because that will depend on the Secretary-General's discussion with me, on the issue that we have seen and heard and on my discussion with the Security Council.

[¶ 2] So I remind you that this round has taken place after quite a lot of international activities and diplomacy, we said it the other day, I will just repeat it because it is good to remember. It took place in Da Nang, in Riyadh, in Sochi, at very high level and there were also negotiations and discussions between us and others with the two delegations.

[¶ 3] So the goal we had — and we still have — was very clear, to bring about real negotiations, in other words that's what I said in the Security Council, on the full implementation of resolution 2254, because regardless of what people say or different delegation analysis everybody agrees that the only resolution we have is 2254 — and that we talk about full implementation. How to do it? In what form? How accelerated? Through what means? — is another issue. But 2254 [is what we have]. I said and we indicated in the agenda of the meeting a particular focus on the 12 principles, on constitutional processes and elections, while of course elaborating the thoughts on governance and counter-terrorism, which are basket 4 and basket 1. And then never forgetting, pushing for confidence building measures such as detainees, again, which is a terrible issue which is not moving forward.

[¶ 4] So, what is the assessment? Let's be frank — as you know I am a very positive thinker, by now we know each other — we did not achieve, we did not achieve these negotiations. In other words, negotiations, in reality, in the end, did not take place. So why? Let me give you the position of the two sides, then I will make some comments myself.

[¶ 5] The Government: you must have heard Ambassador Jaafari gave his own interpretation or version on why he did attend these meetings, and when he attended, I will give you what I heard from him in the meeting. The Government had been claiming that the opposition has put themselves a precondition due to the Riyadh II statement which took place in Riyadh — and insist, the Government, that such a Riyadh II statement should be withdrawn, otherwise they do not talk to them. And also questioned whether the opposition delegation represented a sufficiently wide spectrum of views. My explanation to try to convince the Government to engage with the opposition was: 1, we are in Geneva — not on the islands, we are not in Riyadh, we are in Geneva. And I will judge what is said in Geneva. Everyone can express their own opinion as long as it is not a precondition. The Government then reacted by saying that there was a very strong statement upon arrival of the opposition delegation which in a way reflected some of the points of the Riyadh II declaration. It is true and therefore **I did express my disappointment with the opposition** — and in all fairness, if you look, and you are the best judges, there were several other important, in my opinion,

well calibrated statements where the opposition did not refer any more to that context which was particularly annoying to the Government.

[¶ 6] In spite of that, the Government insisted on not wanting to meet the other side, the opposition and insisted that they did not wanted even to discuss through us with the other side, in spite of the fact that we had one meeting almost parallel as you know because they felt that I should be imposing on the opposition to withdraw the statement which was done by someone else, not all of them, there were others in Riyadh II. That obviously was not a logical or possible type of approach because to me sounded again a precondition.

[¶ 7] Now on the other side the opposition which [was] unified, and I think that this is an important point that I draw the attention of the Government on — the Government used to say in the previous rounds we will not meet the opposition, because “who are they? They are divided, we do not know who they are” — well this time, and I think that in Riyadh the Saudi authorities did a good job there frankly and we were there, Ambassador Lavrentiev, from the Russian Federation was there, I was there, we were able to watch how difficult it was to make in a new type of political environment the so-called Moscow platform, the Cairo platform and the Riyadh platform come together. And indeed they showed up here and you can judge yourself — apart from that beginning, which was something I complained about, they have been able to have a common line, a common position and even in the meetings, a unified position, a mature one in my opinion.

[¶ 8] Now, they said that they are not putting any preconditions — and even when it was raised, that issue of Riyadh II, it was their opinion, but they called in fact for an open, tough negotiation with different goals but no preconditions. And in fact the opposition said that the Government is putting a precondition. In other words, **we got into this game of conditions, preconditions, which is regrettable** and all this requires a real political will — not this type of ping pong, particularly from the Government side, in saying unless someone withdraws that [then engagement will not happen]. Why I am saying that? — because for us, in the UN, a precondition is when you say: I will not talk to that group or that person unless he or she will do this or that. That is in English, or in any language, a precondition. And that is what the Government actually did.

[¶ 9] **Now, I did not see therefore the Government really looking to find a way to have a dialogue and negotiate in this round — I have to say, regrettably. I did see the opposition trying to.**

[¶ 10] I really hope that diplomacy, not only ours, will help the government and the opposition to actually do what is expected and was expected.

[¶ 11] I have been explaining it quite frankly to the Ambassadors of the P5, the permanent members of the Security Council who are here in Geneva, but I will obviously then elaborate further and ask their advice and the advice of the Security Council when I meet the whole Security Council next week.

[¶ 12] So we did not have, in spite believe me of a lot of effort by my whole team, day and night, with all sorts of creative formulas, **we did not have real negotiations**. We did have, however, bilateral discussions, with both parties — we had 7 meetings with the Government and 11 meetings with the opposition. **The opposition in particular are engaged with us on all four baskets:** governance, constitutional process, elections and countering terrorism. They also gave me some concrete ideas on the so-called 12 essential principles. **The Government engaged with me only on terrorism**. We do understand the Government has been affected, like all of us, all over the world, by terrorist attacks and I certainly recognise that even very recently the Government had been affected in Damascus and elsewhere by terrorist attacks or attempts of terrorist attacks. But the truth is that there was not one single other subject that they addressed except that one, whereas **we had invited them here to come and discuss 12 points, constitutional process and elections** and then also the other baskets.

[¶ 13] Meanwhile on the humanitarian side, while we were having the meetings as you know, we had still this tragic situation in Eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in the country. And nothing has been moving here or elsewhere on detainees so that is very much sad to say at the end of a year.

[¶ 14] I am planning to go to Astana at the end of the year at the request of the Secretary-General, at the invitation of the Kazakh authorities. One of the subjects that should be there and are on the agenda and I hope will be on the agenda — and we will be insisting that it is on the agenda — is the issue of detainees, because it is affecting thousands and thousands of Syrians and the so called missing people or the kidnaped ones, and so on.

[¶ 15] I will probably not elaborate much more because as you know, I reserve that for next week when I will be talking to the Secretary-General and then the Security Council. But some fundamental points and then I am almost through and then I will take your questions: **there is clearly a desperate need for a real political process under UN in Geneva** to implement 2254, everybody is feeling that. Secondly that the intra-Syrian talks do need to produce some progress on constitutional and electoral matters, everybody had said so, everybody had felt so but in reality we were not able to move. And when we say so that means that it should be implemented through a calm and neutral environment, with a credible, all inclusive, non-sectarian governance arrangements, and arrangements to counter-terrorism, all implemented under 2254, and that means all the four baskets. That is still the party line. So I am probably going to reach the conclusion that as a mediator I may need to come up with some additional new ideas on how to actually have key parameters regarding moving forward, particularly on the issue of constitutional issues and on elections — but that will be after consulting the Secretary-General and the Security Council.

[¶ 16] We have been hearing also many other voices, so the two weeks have not been wasted. Apart from the opposition with whom we engaged, and with the Government with whom we engaged sadly only on one subject, i.e. terrorism, or counter terrorism, **we had the opportunity of hearing many Syrian voices, the civil society, the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, and even this time very much refugees** — because sometimes we forget, but they are five million and they have a voice and they will be



involved, both in the constitution and in the elections, both presidential and parliamentary.

[¶ 17] So all that took place as if they were part, and as far as I am concerned, part of this period of consultations which did not end up in negotiations. I would conclude by saying, if you did ask me, **a big missed opportunity**. A golden opportunity at the end of this year when in fact there is a clear indication by many sides, that the military operations are coming to a close, the Daesh territories reduced close to zero, but at the same time everybody knows, everybody agrees — believe me because I talk to them privately, and separately and publicly, as well — that without a clear political process we risk to not have learnt a lesson of Mosul, and we risk to not have what should be winning the peace, not only winning the war against Daesh. So the bottom line is, I was hoping, and my team worked very hard, but due to what I described to you and I tried to be as objective as I can, is **a missed opportunity, a golden opportunity missed**. As you know our motto is — did you try?, you failed, they failed with us, you try harder and you fail better — but **we are not going to give up on the Syrian people**, especially in this moment, when in fact they are expecting once the conflict is over, there should be some political process and not precondition, or stonewalling.

QUESTION: ....

....

QUESTION: Simple question, is there any point in coming back?

SdM : Well, you see that's exactly the type of question that every mediator should always ask himself all the time, and I will consult the Secretary-General and the Security Council, but what is the alternative, look at me, what is the alternative? When I refer to other initiatives, we know there are other ideas and some of them probably are going to be very good, or could be very good, we are not prejudging them, but the only alternative for a political process is the Geneva UN mandated one. Now will that require another recess of two months, one month, until everybody realizes that there is not a solution except that one, that there can be no reconstruction unless there is a political credible process, but that is something that we have gone through in the past. So my short answer is yes, when? I'm planning in January —remember our motto we never give up, and when things don't go well that doesn't mean that we should be simply giving a chance to nothing to happen.

.... ... if this stops the alternative is back to war, alternative is abandoning Syria, ....

....

QUESTION: Mr. de Mistura last week you told us, last Thursday [7 Dec] about Eastern Ghouta in this room, did you have any chance to talk with Mr. Jaafari regarding the evacuation of the wounded and sick Syrians in Eastern Ghouta, and what did he tell you?

SdM: I did raise it, and will continue to raise it as it has been done at the Humanitarian

Task Force. I didn't get a satisfactory answer.

"Transcript of Press Conference by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 14 Dec 2017. [Paragraph numbers and boldface added by Standler. Most of the text in brackets was inserted by the U.N. Office in Geneva.]

De Mistura's remarks at his press briefing were mentioned in many leading newspapers. See, e.g., [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [Washington Post](#)(AP); [New York Times](#); [Wall Street Journal](#). These mentions by the news media are in contrast to the lack of coverage by journalists on many days during round 8 of negotiations in Geneva.

My conclusion is that the Geneva negotiations are a complete and total failure, and both the opposition and Assad's delegation are to blame. While de Mistura gave his strongest criticism to Assad's delegation, the self-appointed opposition has usurped the right of the Syrian people to again elect Assad as their leader when the opposition demanded in their Riyadh2 communiqué that Assad resign.

Agence France-Presse reported: "The failure of Syria peace talks this week has cast doubt over UN efforts to mediate a solution to the country's devastating war, while regime backer Russia has emerged as a key dealmaker, analysts say." [Arab News](#).

### 19 Dec 2017: U.N. Security Council

On Tuesday, 19 December 2017, de Mistura briefed the U.N. Security Council on the failure of round 8 of negotiations in Geneva, and his new ideas for how to motivate the barbarians from Syria. Because de Mistura is verbose, I have boldfaced the parts that I find important.

Mr. President, Dear colleagues and friends at the Security Council,

[¶ 1] Let me say at the beginning how much my team and I are grateful for the support we received this year from the Security Council. Since this is my last briefing this year and the end of the Security Council membership for some of you, I would like to say: Thank you. Thank you because I felt you supported us and understood our challenges and I count on you for next year as well.

[¶ 2] The 8th round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva concluded last Thursday [14 December]. In my last briefing, I indicated why and how I was going to try to facilitate real negotiations, real discussions, not just pre-negotiations.

[¶ 3] *Why?* Because, first, we saw developments on the ground — de-escalation and major strides against ISIL/Daesh's territorial control — that gave a logical impetus to the political track. ISIL is gone, almost, territorially, not everywhere. Al Nusra is still there. But now it is time to talk about the political future. Second, because significant international diplomacy had taken place just before the talks — in Da Nang, just to mention an important meeting and an important declaration; in Riyadh, where Riyadh 2 was established — which was considered unthinkable almost a year ago, in other words three different opposition groups who had been in fact not really talking to each other have been unified in one group and have now one voice; and in Sochi, where there has been an important meeting between President Putin and President

Assad, and between Presidents Putin and Erdogan [and Rouhani]. And because both the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition Syrian Negotiations Commission had given some public signals that they were interested and committed themselves to a real discussion in Geneva.

[¶ 4] *How?* By a clear and realistic work-plan. Focused on the full implementation of 2254. That's all we have. That's all we were able to get together, you remember. 2254: the only real resolution that is guiding us on a political process and legitimizing such a political process. But with a particular focus on principles — the so-called 12 Principles, constitutional process and UN supervised elections — which we call baskets 2 and 3. While exploring of course the issues of governance and counter-terrorism — which we call baskets 1 and 4. And pushing for confidence-building measures, such as humanitarian access — and Mark [Lowcock] will talk about that — and detainees, abductees and missing persons. With the active support of outside players.

[¶ 5] So, how did it go? Mr. President, this agenda I just indicated — which I thought was ready to start moving forward due to what I mentioned — did not move forward. **The opportunity to begin real negotiation was not seized. A golden opportunity was missed.**

[¶ 6] For many reasons. Psychological: we are at the end of the year. Political: because we are at the end, we want to believe, of a major military operation. And from a human point of view, because many ordinary Syrians have been waiting and asking for this: they want the situation to change for them.

[¶ 7] Let me tell you why, from the perspective of each delegation. I will try to do it as objectively as possible, although I cannot refrain from showing [my disappointment] even in my body language. You know I am Swedish and Italian so I am supposed to keep my Swedish calm and refrain my Italian emotions, but I have also been a UN diplomat for 47 years, so I am trained to keep my emotions for myself — **but I cannot hide my disappointment.** So let me tell you why, quoting them and presenting the perspective of each delegation.

[¶ 8] The Opposition delegation, which held 11 meetings with me, came to Geneva almost directly from the so-called Riyadh 2 conference, about which I briefed you last time. The Opposition therefore was not able to prepare itself and in spite of that they were able to keep one line and speak with one voice. They publicly affirmed their positions in the Riyadh 2 statement and called for direct negotiations, indicating they were positions, not preconditions, with the Government. It also stated its readiness for indirect negotiations, through me and my team, if direct negotiations were not possible.

[¶ 9] The Opposition delegation received from us an updated version of the 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles — translated into English: these are the principles that we have been working on and preparing for over a year and discussing with everyone, including civil society, the Government and the Opposition, which could be the basis for what would be principles for a future constitution. The Opposition gave concrete input in response to our presentation of our updated version of the 12 Living Intra-

Syrian Essential Principles. It engaged on all four baskets in in-depth discussions with the UN — frankly for the first time quite in depth discussions — showing competence, sometimes welcoming, sometimes disagreeing with, ideas that the UN developed or proposed; and other times sharing with the UN its own ideas.

[¶ 10] **The Government delegation**, whom I met seven times — they were not in Geneva for the same length of time as the Opposition — **considered the Riyadh 2 statement as containing a precondition in its call for President Assad to depart at the start of any transition period. In all fairness, you should know that both myself and the Saudi authorities in Riyadh — and I think there was also some active participation from the Russian Special Envoy in addition to the engagement of the Special Envoys from your countries — we did advise the Opposition not to emphasize this aspect, because it would have been potentially considered a precondition. They told us that it was important for them to do so because it has been a party line since the beginning and that it was not a precondition but a position, an opinion.** The Government also regarded language in the Riyadh 2 statement on the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran as unacceptable. It further questioned whether the Opposition delegation, although now unified and including the Moscow and Cairo platforms together with the old or renewed Riyadh platform, was sufficiently representative. **It also stated — actually using a video on YouTube — that until full Syrian sovereignty was restored and terrorism defeated in all parts of the Syrian territory, it was not possible to entertain real movement on a constitutional review process or elections. That to me was a new condition that I had never heard before and it made me worried for any other initiative, in addition to Geneva, because if we have to wait all together until the whole country is in a different geographic and political environment, with no foreign or terrorist presence at all, that may mean that any type of intention to genuinely address constitutional review or election may now be put aside for a long period, if this position of the Government is confirmed — and it was confirmed to us.**

[¶ 11] **Calling for the Riyadh 2 statement to be withdrawn, the Government declined to meet the Opposition directly or to negotiate indirectly with them through me, until and unless the statement is withdrawn. The Government further declined to explore any item, any item, of the agenda with the UN other than counter-terrorism — basket 4, which is important since we are all affected by it, but is not the only one. It received an updated version from us of the 12 Living Intra-Syrian Essential Principles, but did not comment or engage on them any further.**

[¶ 12] As the mediator, I naturally tried to help both sides think creatively and overcome whatever barriers they perceived for negotiation.

[¶ 13] I, for instance, counselled the Government that the Opposition had set out its negotiation position in Riyadh, that any opposition in the world can, and sometimes does, call for a change of government, as a maximum goal, and that a negotiating position was not the same as a precondition. I said they should also test the other side in negotiations and confront them, and talk to them. The Government found this unconvincing, arguing that the mentality of the Opposition revealed by the Riyadh 2 statement showed that the Opposition was pursuing unachievable demands.

[¶ 14] Meanwhile, I counselled the Opposition to de-personalize and broaden their thinking on governance, and not constantly to refer to that type of personalization of the political solution, and to publicly clarify that it had no preconditions. The Opposition pointed out that the Government was setting a precondition to talk to them. Nevertheless, the Opposition responded to my appeal about its public messaging by making clear that it was calling for implementation of Security Council resolutions and “a tough negotiation with different goals” but this did not persuade the Government to engage them — or me — other than on terrorism. The Opposition regarded this as a sign that the Government was avoiding the negotiating table. In other words, they were ready to negotiate.

[¶ 15] **I should add that for the whole time we were in Geneva, no progress was made on the most urgent humanitarian issues,** as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock will brief you. I was hoping that this would at least take place, it was a perfect moment to give some good news. I must congratulate all of you, whatever your position has been, for getting an important resolution moving forward. That gives me at this moment of the year a feeling that the Council can move forward when people are in need.

[¶ 16] There was also no progress on the critical issue of detainees, abductees and missing persons — something raised via the Astana process but not yet delivered neither in Astana or Geneva. So, in view of the fact that we do have now a new Astana opportunity, I really urge Iran, the Russian Federation and Turkey, in their capacity as guarantor states, to address these issues during their next meeting in Astana, which will be held at the end of this week, and not miss that opportunity.

Mr. President,

[¶ 17] Whatever the frustrations — and there are many, and they are on all sides, I recognize it — let us recall that only a UN-brokered process will be seen by the Syrians as impartial, and will attract the regional and international legitimacy required. That is why you in this Council mandated the United Nations to facilitate the political process. I appreciate the support extended by permanent members of this Council when they assembled in Geneva at the opening and closing of the round of talks.

[¶ 18] Let us also remind ourselves that, despite **the failure to negotiate in Round 8,** the frontloading of essential living principles for a future constitution and identification of details of processes under the constitutional and electoral baskets — while working to build a safe, calm, neutral environment under the governance and security baskets (1 and 4), which are important to the constitutional and elections ones — remains the most feasible approach towards the implementation of resolution 2254.

[¶ 19] The principles captured in the Living 12 Essential Principles published in Round 8 seek to embody end-state commonalities and offer an enduring perspective on the vision of a future that can be shared by all Syrians. They are consistent with and reflect many of the end-state principles contained in Security Council resolution 2254 and can serve to inform the parallel discussions of the four baskets which do remain

the agenda of the talks. The Principles therefore constitute important assurances about the ultimate purpose of any political settlement process under resolution 2254.

[¶ 20] Let me now be pragmatic. Since we have been talking of a constitutional process and elections, and we were not able in the intra-Syrian talks to actually engage both sides on it, well, let me engage you on it. I believe the time has come for the UN to provide specific elaborations on the constitutional and electoral baskets (2 and 3) and how they relate to governance and counter-terrorism, security governance and confidence-building measures (1 and 4) and develop agreed and clear modalities for the full implementation of UNSCR 2254, and stimulate wider consultations as well.

[¶ 21] Let me share what is our thinking at this stage.

Mr. President,

[¶ 22] On basket 3, elections: SCR 2254 expresses this Council's support for free and fair elections pursuant to a new constitution, administered under supervision of the United Nations and held to the highest international standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, eligible to participate.

[¶ 23] The UN has provided electoral assistance to a majority of the UN's member states, including about a third of them in the last two years alone — so we do have experience — and often in post-conflict situations and across the full spectrum of electoral assistance. There is clearly a need to fully respect Syrian sovereignty — no question there — over its national electoral process — while at the same time facilitating the UN supervision that this Council has stated it supports.

[¶ 24] Bearing in mind 2254 and insights obtained from the parties — we have been able to engage a little bit each of the parties as well as civil society and with the average Syrian people — in order to hold free and fair elections to the highest international standards, **there will need to be a clear timeline and sequencing** agreed as per 2254 for UN supervised elections — presidential and parliamentary. Provision would need to be made to ensure equal opportunities for all to participate in public life — not to be scared to be involved in it. Principles would need to be agreed for an electoral legal framework, that meets the highest international standards and ensures independent electoral management. Parameters would be required on voter eligibility so that all Syrians irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or gender, including members of the diaspora, can vote, with special procedures to ensure the participation of refugees, internally displaced persons and other Syrians impacted by the conflict. Specific provision would have to be made to promote women's participation. And UN supervision could include roles in support of the electoral legal framework, electoral institutions and operations (including diaspora voting) and reporting to the Security Council on the implementation of electoral processes as related to the highest international standards of inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. That's on elections. If you want the UN to be involved, that's what the UN comes with: ready to respect sovereignty, ready to be working hard, but this is what UN-supervised elections mean.

Mr. President,

[¶ 25] On basket 2 — constitution: 2254 calls for UN-facilitated process to set the schedule and process for drafting a new constitution before, before, UN supervised elections are held.

[¶ 26] The UN therefore has sought at every turn of our meetings to try to get a little bit the feelings of the various parties on this matter. And based on these let me offer 11 observations to set some parameters and help produce further discussion if we want a constitution process as per 2254, and therefore with the UN blessing:

1. It would appear both parties accept that Syria requires a review of its constitutional order culminating in the popular approval of a new constitution and it is for the people of Syria alone, we all agree, they all agree, to determine the future constitution of Syria. Not to be written by any of us, any countries or any of us, we can help but it should be theirs.
2. Any constitutional review must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led and conducted in accordance with 2254 which, as I have indicated, provides that the setting of a schedule and process for the drafting of such a new constitution must take place within the context of UN-convened and facilitated intra-Syrian talks. Schedule and process for the drafting of such a constitution must take place within the context of UN-convened and facilitated intra-Syrian talks.
3. Such schedule and process should attempt to identify and contain guiding principles, a **sequenced timetable**, and identify all relevant institutions that need to be established — including their mandates, composition and the manner of establishment.
4. To that end we believe that such Constitutional review process could be guided by the principles contained in Security Council Resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communique and be informed by the 12 living Intra-Syrian essential principles which do offer a perspective of a vision of a future Syria that can be shared by all. As I have been indicating earlier, these principles give important assurances to the people of Syria as to the purpose of any constitutional review which must meet the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria.
5. Such principles, while not supra-constitutional principles unless otherwise agreed by the Syrian people, could be developed and embodied by a constitutional drafting body. However, to be credible, such constitutional drafting body and any drafting process would also likely need to address how power is to be shared, how power should be de-centralised and exercised in Syria on a national, provincial and local level.
6. The two institutions that have so far emerged from discussions for the purposes of drafting and revising a new constitution and instituting a national dialogue process are a Constitutional Commission and a National Conference. The



Constitutional Commission could prepare and refer an initial draft of a new constitution to a National Conference in Syria, which could oversee a national dialogue and review, revise and then refer any draft constitution for popular approval — in accordance with 2254.

7. Both institutions should have their mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, agreed in UN-facilitated intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. The United Nations would ensure that any composition agreed would be consistent with SCR 2254 and based upon any inclusive and objective selection criteria determined and agreed in Geneva.
8. At the very least, both institutions would have to consist of representatives from the government, opposition in the intra-Syrian talks, as well as additional components of Syrian society, including religious, political, intellectual, economic and union figures, Syrians from the diaspora, legal experts, with provision made for including clearly civil society, independents, and indeed women.
9. Such constitutional review would have to be inclusive, containing a national dialogue that is well-structured, conducted transparently and is broadly-based; that ensures opportunities for dissemination of drafts, debate, revision; and that has full contact and consultation with civil society, political parties, universities, academia and the public on the draft constitution.
10. The United Nations stands ready if authorized by you to provide good offices support to any Constitutional Commission as described and National Conference as described agreed by the parties in the intra-Syrian talks, as well as the provision of international expertise.
11. However, for a meaningful and inclusive constitution-making process to take place in Syria, a secure, calm, neutral environment would need to be established to enable Syrians from all segments of society to safely and freely participate. This in turn requires the sides in Geneva to identify relevant and appropriate counter-terrorism, security governance and confidence-building measures as well as credible all-inclusive, non-sectarian governance arrangements that need to be agreed and put in place via negotiations. A tasked-based approach to governance also help identify milestones and performance indicators. The process of establishing a favourable environment would be greatly enhanced, we don't need to repeat it, by tangible progress on unhindered humanitarian access and on confidence-building measures — in particular, action on detainees, abductees and missing people — and a nation-wide sustainable ceasefire.

Mr. President,

[¶ 27] Forgive me for being long but this is an important moment for actually setting some clear parameters in front of us when we talk about important next steps.

[¶ 28] These propositions are advanced in good faith by the UN in order to promote fresh thinking in all quarters, in particular here, in relation to constitution and elections and their relation also to governance and counter-terrorism. They come from intense engagement with the parties and Syrians across the board, far beyond the people we have been meeting in official meetings. What I have presented is designed to show how resolution 2254, your resolution, could be implemented credibly and in full in a way that is genuinely responsive to the needs of the Syrians and the realities and the realities of 2018. We intend to present some of the ideas contained in here as well as the approaches in a non-paper or a mediator's statement early next year.

Mr. President,

[¶ 29] I am not at present — I am seeing the Secretary-General this afternoon — in a position to update the Security Council on further developments regarding proposals to hold an early congress of national dialogue in a location outside Syria. The Secretary-General will continue to view, that is the instruction I have so far, to view this and all other initiatives by a simple test: do they support the mandated political process under the UN and the full implementation of SCR 2254?

[¶ 30] Bottom line, if any entity relevant to constitutional review was to be established outside Syria, that is the line I have from the Secretary-General, and there was a desire for it to work under the aegis of the United Nations, it would either have to emerge directly from the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva or the UN would need to retain the prerogative to review such body, in consultation with yourselves. I would be guided by 2254 in this regard and obviously the Secretary-General's guidance.

Mr. President,

[¶ 31] Let me conclude by reminding you of something else, something I've always been stressing, but at the end of the year we should do it again. **These past three weeks while the negotiations did not proceed, Syrians made their voices heard and their views known to us.**

[¶ 32] The Syrian Women's Advisory Board provided valuable insights and ideas on the 12 Principles and baskets 2 and 3. We hosted 130 civil society representatives. This included experts on constitutional and legal matters, human rights, grass-roots dialogue and social cohesion. I had discussions through VTC with Syrian refugees, because sometimes we forget there are 5 million, and they are there, and they want to be part of the future, but they want to be also reassured that if they decide to come, there is a future, in Jordan, Lebanon as well as civil society representatives in hard-to-reach areas across Syria, and of those who have presence also in Turkey.

[¶ 33] They had inputs and thoughts on every issue on the agenda. And my team and I have learned a lot from them. But most of all, they called, without any doubt, for a political solution, for dignity, for the protection of civilians, for maintaining Syrian's territorial integrity, and for unconditional access to healthcare, support and education (which they reminded us is a pillar of counter-terrorism). They demanded the release of detainees and abductees, and not to be punished for those who actually left and became

a refugee when they return because they are afraid of that, for information on the missing and for the UN and the international community to create conditions for the voluntary return of refugees.

[¶ 34] And they desperately wanted to see the UN Geneva process to move forward.

[¶ 35] I think nobody in this Chamber finds those requests, pleas unreasonable. But trust, confidence, and political will — these are the hardest commodities to find when I have my intra-Syrian talks. I hope that by elaborating ideas the parties and all Syrians can see that resolution 2254 can actually be implemented even in the context of the realpolitik of 2018 in the interests of all Syrians.

[¶ 36] The question is how much we all will do to help achieve this vision. I can assure Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and myself will spare no effort. We look forward to an active, hopefully proactive, early 2018 in that regard.

[¶ 37] Thank you, Mr President, and thank you for your patience. It was longer than average but we are at the end of the year.

Staffan de Mistura, "Briefing to the Security Council by United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura," [U.N. Geneva](#), 19 Dec 2017. [Paragraph numbers and boldface added by Standler. Bracketed text added by U.N. Office in Geneva.]

There was weak coverage of the 19 December U.N. Security Council meeting by journalists. [U.N.](#); [Reuters](#). The Associated Press did *not* report on this meeting. The transcript of de Mistura's briefing to the Security Council was *not* posted on the U.N. Secretary General's webpage, unlike many other briefings by de Mistura.

In two places, de Mistura mentions the need for a "timeline" or "timetable". There is a schedule in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, which called for a new constitution, followed by elections not later than 1 July 2017. The Syrian delegations totally ignored that schedule in 2254, and never began drafting a new constitution. In my opinion, it is time to recognize reality that the Syrians are incapable of drafting a new constitution, so foreign meddlers will need to draft a new constitution and impose it on Syrians. Better policy would be to forget the obsolete requirement of a new constitution in the 2012 Geneva Communiqué (which was enshrined in Resolution 2254). After the U.N.-supervised election, if the new Syrian government desires changes in the constitution, then they can amend the current constitution or write a new constitution.

De Mistura provided new information to the U.N. Security Council on 19 December, which makes Assad's delegation appear more responsible for the failure of negotiations in Geneva. A nice solution would be to require Assad's delegation to negotiate in good faith on all substantive issues in de Mistura's agenda, as a condition for Assad appearing on the ballot in the U.N.-supervised election in Syria. But de Mistura can *not* impose that condition, and the Russians are unlikely to support such a condition.

In light of de Mistura's revelations about Syria, we can now list the ways in which Assad's government refused to negotiate in Geneva:

1. Assad's delegation failed to appear for 5 days of the scheduled negotiations (28 Nov and 5-8 Dec).
2. Assad's delegation refused to discuss de Mistura's substantive agenda of a new constitution and elections in Syria. Instead, Assad's delegation was only willing to discuss co-called "counter-terrorism".
3. Assad's delegation stated for the first time that negotiations needed to wait until *after* "full Syrian sovereignty was restored and terrorism defeated in all parts of the Syrian territory". This could mean a delay of more than one year.

As long as Assad continues the last two policies, *negotiations are not possible*.

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### **HNC squabbles and meeting in Riyadh**

Since 17 August 2017, de Mistura has been depending on Saudi Arabia to convene the Syrian opposition and create a unified opposition that is willing to compromise with Assad's government. Because of the intransigence of the HNC (which is largely composed of the Syrian National Coalition), that is an almost impossible task.

Since de Mistura arranged for the Saudis to persuade the Syrian opposition, two things have happened to divert the attention of the Saudi Arabian government from diplomacy regarding Syria:

1. On 4 November 2017, 49 people were arrested in Saudi Arabia on suspicion of corruption, including 11 princes. The government will attempt to recover US\$ 100 billion in missing money. By 9 November, the total number of arrested people exceeded 200. [New York Times](#); [Associated Press](#); [The Guardian](#)(AP).
2. On 4 November 2017, Hezbollah launched a rocket from Yemen into Saudi Arabia. The Saudis responded by removing the prime minister of Lebanon (where Hezbollah is based), intensifying its blockade of Yemen, and criticizing Iran (which supplied the rocket to Hezbollah).

On 13 November, Saudi Arabia announced the conference of Syrian opposition groups would meet in Riyadh during 22-24 November. [Saudi Press Agency](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is that it is inadequate to have a three-day meeting that ends a mere four days before the next negotiations in Geneva are scheduled to begin. The negotiations should be scheduled for more than three days, to allow time to reach agreement on difficult issues. And the negotiations should begin much earlier — e.g., September or October 2017 — so that when the meeting fails to reach a consensus, more meetings in Riyadh can be scheduled, without further postponing the negotiations in Geneva that are scheduled to begin on 28 November.

On 20 November 2017, [TASS](#) reported that Alexey Borodavkin — the Russian Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva — urged the Syrian opposition to change their position to "renunciation of the demand for Assad's immediate resignation".

On 20 November 2017 — only 2 days before the conference in Riyadh begins and 8 days before the next round of negotiations in Geneva begin — Riyad Hijab resigned as head of the HNC. Hijab had been head of the HNC since the HNC was created in December 2015. Hijab did *not* explain why he suddenly quit and left the HNC leaderless at a critical time. [Al-Jazeera](#); [Al-Arabiya](#); [Reuters](#).

On 21 November, the Syrian National Coalition issued a press release that explains their view of what will happen at the conference in Riyadh. Because of its importance, I quote the entire press release:

The Syrian Coalition condemns statements made by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov concerning participants in the Syrian opposition conference which will begin the Saudi capital Riyadh on Wednesday, November 22. The Coalition categorically rejects these statements as it underscores that the conference is entirely an internal Syrian issue. The subject of attending the conference, which is being generously hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, should be a matter of concern for Syrians only.

The Coalition emphasizes that the conference is receiving widespread Arab and international attention and that representatives from around 30 countries will attend the opening of the conference. Russia's claims about it having a key role in the conference is a blatant attempt to undermine the unity of the opposition and disrupt the conference as well as amount to gross interference in Syria's internal affairs.

"Syrian Coalition Condemns Russia's Interference in the Syrian Opposition Conference in Riyadh," [SNC](#), 21 Nov 2017.

On 22 November, [Al-Arabiya](#) reported that after Riyad Hijab quit on the evening of 20 Nov, the following members of the HNC also resigned: "Mohammed Sabra, the opposition delegation's chief negotiator; Khaled Khoja; Salem al-Musallat; Suheir Atassi; and Riyad Naasan Agha." A total of 10 people resigned from the HNC.

### **News Fatigue and disintegration of Syrian opposition**

On 21 November, I was surprised to find that the English-language news media in the Gulf nations (e.g., Saudi Press Agency, Al-Arabia, Arab News) quickly abandoned reporting on the resignation of Hijab and the now leaderless HNC. News media in Europe and the USA mostly ignored these developments on both 20 and 21 November.

My essay for [August 2016](#) contains a section titled "Why foreign nations indifferent to Syrian civil war", where I mentioned the decline in coverage of Syrian peace negotiations by journalists. I also said "Before people deserve help, they need to stop making their problems worse. The continuing failures of both Assad and leaders of the opposition may justify the indifference currently shown by politicians in Western Europe and the USA, as well as by journalists."

The civil war in Syria continued in 2017, approximately 2500 people died each month, chemical weapons continue to be used, other atrocities (e.g., attacks on hospitals) continue to occur, and Syrians prevent the United Nations from delivering food and medicine to most of the people in Syria who need humanitarian aid. Diplomats hold meetings and promises are made, but the civil war continues. I suggest that journalists tire of reporting on futile meetings and empty promises.

Since the fall of Aleppo in December 2016, it is generally recognized that the so-called moderate opposition in Syria (e.g., Free Syrian Army) has been militarily defeated. That means the Syrian National Coalition (which was weakly affiliated with the Free Syrian Army in 2013-2014) is now only a group of Syrian expatriates who are seeking a role in a future Syrian government. The HNC is largely comprised of members of the Syrian National Coalition and Free Syrian Army. The HNC has frustrated negotiations in Geneva since January 2016.

Also, in December 2016 the U.S. Government (i.e., Secretary of State John Kerry) suddenly withdrew from involvement in political negotiations about the Syrian civil war. Kerry's decision essentially left the fate of Syria in the hands of Russia, Iran, and Turkey. Those three nations created the negotiations in Astana that imposed on Syria the decisions of those three foreign meddlers. Then in November 2017, Russia announced it was sponsoring a "Syrian People's Congress" (see [below](#)) to accomplish what the negotiations in Geneva had failed to produce. Moreover, Russia's use of its veto in the United Nations Security Council has protected Assad from investigation and prosecution for war crimes, frustrating the international community's attempts to enforce international law in Syria. (see [above](#).)

The negotiations in Geneva (supervised by de Mistura) ended in July 2017, when de Mistura began to wait for the Syrian opposition to "unify" and drop their demand that Assad resign. *If* the Syrian opposition can unify, drop their demand that Assad resign, and choose a new opposition leader during 22-27 November, then the Geneva negotiations scheduled to begin on 28 November *might* produce some concrete results.

One of the long-standing problems with the Syrian civil war was the fragmentation and disorganization of moderate rebels, and the disorganization of the Syrian political opposition to Assad. This lack of organization also adversely affected the negotiations in Geneva. Not only were the moderate rebels defeated on the battlefield, but also the political opposition (HNC) failed to accomplish any concrete results in the Geneva negotiations, making the Syrian opposition a total failure.

### **22 Nov: meeting in Riyadh**

On 22 November at 07:40 GMT, [Middle East Eye](#) explained: "Around 140 opposition members from a wide range of platforms will gather for three days of talks at the invitation of the Saudi foreign ministry." The Saudi Government clearly intends to reconstitute the opposition delegation to the Geneva negotiations. The *Middle East Eye* explained: "The overhaul, experts and oppositionists said, will pave the way for a new negotiating delegation that could water down the opposition's traditional demands, including Assad's immediate

ouster." The Saudi process began by failing to invite some of the more intransigent opposition leaders: "Speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, an HNC figure said most of those who had resigned were hardliners who had not been invited to Riyadh."

On the evening of 22 November, [Al-Jazeera](#) reported that some of the opposition groups had prepared a draft resolution that "said that a solution to the war in Syria can only be achieved with the departure of Assad at the start of the transitional period — a position held by the Syrian opposition since the start of the war, now in its seventh year." See also: [Arab News](#), which said: "Syrian opposition groups will stick to their demand President Bashar Assad leave power at the start of any political transition". My comment is that the Saudi government may have underestimated the intransigence of the Syrian opposition.

The *Kuwait Times* republished an Agence France-Presse article, which clearly explains what happened in Riyadh:

Syrian opposition figures met in Saudi Arabia yesterday [22 Nov] in a bid to form an overhauled delegation to peace talks that analysts say may be more willing to compromise on key demands. The Riyadh meeting was co-chaired by the UN's Syria envoy, Staffan de Mistura, and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir, who said the aim was to reach a "fair solution" to the conflict. De Mistura said the goal was to give momentum to next week's talks in Geneva by forging a unified opposition delegation, as long demanded by the Syrian government. He said he would travel to Moscow today for talks with Russian officials. "I'm always optimistic... especially in this moment," he said.

The 140 or so delegates from a wide range of opposition platforms are under heavy pressure to row back on some of their more radical demands after a series of recent battlefield victories that have given President Bashar Al-Assad's regime the upper hand. Absent are several former leading figures who were seen as unwilling to compromise. Among them is Riad Hijab, who stepped down as leader of the Saudi-backed opposition High Negotiations Committee (HNC) ahead of the meeting complaining that there were "attempts to lower the ceiling of the revolution and prolong the regime".

Multiple rounds of talks hosted by the UN have failed to bring an end to the war in Syria, which has killed more than 330,000 people since 2011 and forced millions from their homes. Factions opposed to Assad have been plagued by divisions throughout the maelstrom. Participants in the Riyadh meeting include members of the Istanbul-based National Coalition as well as of rival Cairo- and Moscow-based groups seen as more favorable to the regime, and independent figures.

Qadri Jamil, who heads the Moscow-based group, yesterday announced he would not be attending the talks, citing what he said was the Syrian opposition's inability to agree on "the bases and principles" of their stance at the Saudi summit. The National Coalition meanwhile said Jamil had pulled out after "disagreement over an article on Bashar Al-Assad stepping down and the start of a transitional phase" in Syria.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he expected that the withdrawal of Hijab and other hardliners in recent days would "help the Syria-based and foreign-based



opposition unite on a constructive basis". Observers said it could clear the way for a new negotiating team that would water down some of the opposition's longstanding demands, notably Assad's immediate ouster. His fate has been one of the chief obstacles to progress in peace talks, with the opposition demanding he step down at the start of any transition.

"The Saudi pitch to the Syrian opposition has been that denial will only make the situation worse, and that they have to rethink their strategy," said Hassan Hassan, a fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy in Washington. "The problem... is that the political opposition does not see it that way, and most activists are still struck in the 2012 thinking, that Assad has to be toppled."

Ahead of the meeting, dozens of prominent civilian and armed opposition figures appealed to participants not to compromise on the "ouster of Bashar Al-Assad and his gang". "No one should back down or quietly circumvent" it, they said in an online statement. HNC member Yehya Al-Aridi acknowledged some participants, notably the Moscow platform, were more flexible on the president's future. But they "do not represent the choices of the revolution or the Syrian people," Aridi told AFP. And Hisham Marwah, another National Coalition member, said his group's "positions toward Assad have not changed". "Whoever is betting on the Riyadh conference to legitimize the presence of Assad is delusional," Marwah said.

Agence France-Presse, "Syria opposition pressured to compromise in Riyadh," [Kuwait Times](#), 22:00 Kuwait time, 22 Nov 2017.

TASS also reported that the Moscow group did *not* attend the meeting in Riyadh: "The Moscow group did not travel to Riyadh to take part in the Syrian opposition conference, however, it is not ruling out possibly of joining its decisions if other participants abandon their radical approach, Chairman of the Moscow group Qadri Jamil told TASS on Wednesday [22 Nov]." TASS also reported on the composition of the opposition delegations to Riyadh: "About 140 opposition members are taking part in the event. Of these, 22 are delegates from the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, 21 from the armed groups, 14 from the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC, a leading internal opposition group) and 10 from the Cairo group. About 70 participants have independent delegates' status."

On 22 November, the Associated Press reported on the situation in Riyadh, before the meeting occurred and without quoting anyone who attended the meeting in Riyadh:

Syria's notoriously fragmented opposition gathering Wednesday [22 Nov] in the Saudi capital is trying to close ranks and come up with a unified vision as international efforts appeared headed toward a resolution that would preserve the rule of President Bashar Assad.

The opposition remains rife with disagreements and is weakened by its allies' distraction with other conflicts. President Bashar Assad, in contrast, is the most secure in his post since the war began, boosted by significant military victories backed by his allies Russia and Iran that have turned the tide of the conflict.

Sarah El Deeb & Philip Issa, "Syria's opposition, divided and varied, to get a new face," [Associated Press](#), 22 Nov 2017.



Neither *The New York Times* nor Reuters reported on the meeting in Riyadh on 22 November.

### 23 Nov: meeting in Riyadh

Well, the three-day meeting in Riyadh ended on the second day. The opposition issued a communiqué that declared: “[the transition] will not happen without the departure of Bashar Assad and his cronies and the repression machine at the start of the transition period.” After asserting that condition, the opposition's communiqué also called for "direct unconditional negotiations" with Assad's government in Geneva. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). [Al-Arabiya](#) posted a copy of the Reuters article.

Late at night on 23 November, [Arab News](#) reported: "Syrian opposition leaders gathering in Riyadh have decided to form a new, 50-member High Negotiation Committee (HNC)." The new HNC includes the Cairo group. *Arab News* does not say whether the Moscow group is included in the new HNC. But Reuters quotes HNC spokeswoman Basma Qadmani as saying the new HNC includes both the Cairo and Moscow groups.

On Friday afternoon, 24 November, the Saudi Press Agency issued the following press release from the meeting of the Syrian opposition:

Thanking the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense, the Saudi government and people for generously hosting the 2nd conference for Syrian revolution forces and opposition in Riyadh over the past two days, the gathering, which attracted representatives of a spectrum of a wide-range Syrian national forces aiming to build a new democratic and civilized Syria, confirmed sticking to the unity of the Syrian territories, integrity, sovereignty of the State on all its territories, without cutting a centimeter of its land or giving it up to whoever, expressed commitment that Syria is a multinational and multicultural home for all ethnics, nationalities and cultures which constitute its entity and represent the extract of the history of Syria, considered the Kurdish issue an integral part of the Syrian national concern and underscored the importance of rejecting all segregationally and extraordinary policies practiced against them and called for reinstating the nationality to the denaturalized.

This came in the final communique of the 2nd expanded conference for Syrian revolution forces and opposition held in Riyadh from 22-23 November 2017 in the participation of representatives of opposition, revolution, and military forces as well as independents, dignitaries from the civil society and local and social councils of all the components of the Syrian people.

The conference aimed at unifying the ranks of revolution forces and opposition to conduct a joint vision for a political solution based on Geneva I (2012) and UN security council resolutions No. 2118 and 2254 and other relevant resolutions in a way that lays the foundation for a transitional stage supposed to conduce to a civil multilateral democratic political system that would achieve justice for all citizens and unite all Syrians in a nation of liberty, freedoms and dignity against forces of autocracy, aggression, extremism and terrorism and of prevailing security and

prosperity.

The communique said the political process has been reviewed, and was seen as not achieving its prescribed goals due to the violations committed by the governing regime against international law, its non-abidance by the UN resolutions regarding the protection of Syrian civilians, lifting of besiege imposed on them, guarantee of delivery of humanitarian assistance and relief supplies to all regions and people in need, release of all political detainees, disclosure of the fate of the missed, all considered bases for confidence building before launching useful and significant negotiations.

The statement added that the conferees discussed all items on the agenda, exchanged viewpoints in an atmosphere of mutual respect and deep awareness of the historical responsibility towards the Syrian people and reached congruence on all vital issues facing their country.

The participants stated that Syria's new rule should depend on the principle of administrative decentralization, equal citizenship regardless of race, sect or gender and on the principles of human rights, transparency, accountability, and power of law.

The gathering pledged to preserve the Syrian state institutions, rehabilitate them and restructure its security and military institutions and guarantee the rights of personnel joining them.

They confirmed that the legitimate state institutions, to be elected by the Syrian people through free and fair elections, are the one in charge of determining who is to possess and use weapons.

They reject terrorism and extremism in all their forms and manifestations, announced fight against them, strongly rejected regional and international interference, clearly citing the Iranian interference which aims at destabilizing the security and stability of the region, making demographic changes in it, spreading terrorism, including state terror, and foreign militias, and rejected the presence of any foreign fighter on the Syrian territories and demanded the expulsion of all foreign forces out of Syria.

The conferees confirmed that the solution to the Syrian crisis is political according to UN-sponsored resolutions that would provide international guarantees including deterrence measures and executive mechanism of those resolutions in a way that guarantees the commitment of all parties to execute them and that the political transitional process in Syria is the joint responsibility of Syrians and the international community as well.

They underscored the importance of conducting a new Syrian constitution by Syrians without the interference of any and the choosing of their leaders through democratic free elections in which Syrians from inside and outside take part under the umbrella of the UN and the participation of no less than 30 percent of Syrian females and that whoever proved to have committed war crimes against the Syrian people would not take part in any way and at any stage in the political process.

They said direct unconditioned negotiations means that all issues could find their way to the table of negotiations and no party would submit conditioned issues. However, demands to implement the instructions mentioned in previous international resolutions pertaining to the crisis in Syria should not be considered as preconditions. Also, no bar should be imposed on negotiating any item, including the form of rule, its system, liabilities, powers, responsibility and status of the presidency and government etc.

The conferees stressed that they are committed to the statement issued by Geneva I to establish a transitional ruling panel that would create an impartial environment through which the transitional process could move. Being keen to implement the transitional process in what guarantees the safety of all parties in a secure, stable and quiet atmosphere, would not take place without the departure of Bashar Al-Assad and his aides before the beginning of the transitional phase, the communique announced.

The participants demanded the UN to take the necessary measures to activate the political process through calling for a direct unconditioned negotiations between the unified revolution forces and opposition delegation and that of the Syrian regime representatives to put the agenda based on Geneva I declaration issued on 30 June 2012 and UN relevant resolutions No. 2118, 2254 and 262/67 as sole negotiation references under the patronage and guarantee of the United Nations.

The participants warned that unless the serious endeavors to reach a fair political solution to the Syrian crisis were combined with a package of implementation of former UN-sponsored resolutions, citing the release of detainees, lifting of siege and delivery of relief and humanitarian assistance, the fragile situation would explode in a more aggravated one that might lead to the return and spread of terrorism in the region.

They considered Riyadh declaration of today as the sole reference for the Negotiations Supreme Panel. They announce acceptance and support for the UN role and the world community in supervising a ceasefire and peace-keeping as well as the patronage of the political process.

They approved the minutes of the meeting, endorsed the organizational structure and regulations of the negotiating panel and named their representatives to its current round who would select the negotiating team.

They acknowledged the Kingdom's continuous support for the Syrian people to achieve their hopes and aspirations in freedom and dignity.

"Syrian revolution forces and opposition expanded conference issues final communique,"

[Saudi Press Agency](#)(part 1 of 4),

[SPA](#), [SPA](#), [SPA](#), 10:54 to 14:45 Saudi time, 24 Nov 2017.

I repeatedly searched Google but I was unable to find an English-language version of the Riyadh communiqué.

**My comment:** it is easy to foresee that the Syrian opposition has scuttled the Geneva negotiations, by demanding that Assad resign. In fact, during the first four days of the Geneva negotiations that began on 28 November 2017, Assad's delegation refused to

negotiate allegedly because of the opposition's demand that Assad resign. The opposition also showed that they are delusional — they can *not* recognize the reality that Assad won the Syrian civil war. A group that is delusional can *not* be taken seriously in negotiations about the future of Syria.

My essay for [February 2016](#) suggested 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](#) expanded on that suggestion. Finally, after 22 months of futile negotiations in Geneva, there was an opportunity in Riyadh in November 2017 to reconstitute the HNC so that it would negotiate with Assad's government. But, sadly, the Riyadh meeting failed to produce an opposition delegation that would negotiate with Assad's government.

### **24 Nov: meeting in Riyadh**

On the night of Friday, 24 November 2017, [Arab News](#) reported: "Syria's main opposition group selected Nasr Hariri to head the negotiating team at a new round of UN-backed peace talks with the Damascus regime in Geneva next week, a spokesman said on Friday [24 Nov]." *Arab News* says "The negotiation body comprises 36 members, representing all sections of the opposition." [Al-Arabiya](#) described the composition of the 36 members of the negotiating delegation: "The opposition coalition won eight seats while the military factions were represented by seven, in addition to eight seats which went to independent opposition figures. The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCB) also won five seats, while the Cairo and Moscow delegates to share eight seats equally." See also: [Reuters](#).

In my opinion, it was a mistake to include 8 members of the Syrian National Coalition and 7 members of the disorganized and defeated "military factions" in the new negotiating team. Those groups were members of the opposition negotiating team in Geneva that failed in 2014 and failed again during 2016-2017.

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### **Russia seizes initiative: Syrian People's Congress**

On 31 October 2017, [Reuters](#) reported that Russia would host a "Syrian People's Congress" beginning 18 November to discuss writing a new constitution for Syria.

My comment is that De Mistura has been *intending* since January 2016 to have Syrians write a new constitution, but his efforts have stalled because of problems with the HNC (i.e., the opposition delegation). Given the failure of the U.N.-sponsored negotiations in Geneva to produce any concrete results (e.g., a new constitution for Syria), Russia has moved into the vacuum and will attempt to write a new constitution. Russia may succeed, because Russia is smart enough *not* to use the dysfunctional HNC as the sole opposition delegation.

On 31 Oct 2017, Russia announced that it had invited 33 different Syrian groups to the "Syrian People's Congress" in Sochi, Russia, to begin on 18 November. [Reuters](#). Assad's government immediately agreed to attend. [Reuters](#).

One day after the Russian announcement, both the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) and the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) rejected the Russian proposal. Their reason was essentially that Russia supports the continuation of the Assad regime in Syria, while the SNC and HNC demand that Assad relinquish control of Syria. [Reuters](#). The SNC issued a press release that said: "As part of its attempts to circumvent the Geneva Communique of 2012 and the UN Security Council resolutions and the rest of international resolutions, Russia announced it was convening a conference of Syrians in Sochi under the slogan of supporting the Geneva political process. .... The Syrian Coalition and the Free Syrian Army's General Staff confirm they will not participate in the Sochi Conference as they reiterate their support for the political transition process in Geneva aimed at achieving the aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom, dignity, and justice."

Two days after the Russian announcement of the "Syrian People's Congress", the French Foreign Ministry declared that the Geneva negotiations should be the *only* forum for discussing the political future of Syria. [Reuters](#). My comment is that the French may be correct, but the Geneva negotiations have accomplished nothing during the past 22 months, so it is time for a new approach. Moreover, the Russians will likely ignore the French objection.

On 11 November, Russia postponed the "Syrian People's Congress" — now called the "Syrian Congress on National Dialogue". [Reuters](#).

On 27 November, journalists reported that Russia had postponed the Congress until sometime in February 2018. I am unable to find a credible source in Russia to cite.

On 22 December 2017, Russia announced during the Astana meeting that the Syrian Congress of National Dialogue will be held in Sochi during 29-30 Jan 2018. [Reuters](#). My comment is that a mere two-day meeting is too little time to decide many substantive issues on a new constitution for Syria. More likely, the Sochi meetings will be an opportunity for Russia, Iran, and Turkey to impose a constitution on Syria.

On 24 December, [Al-Arabiya](#) reported that Russia's Foreign Ministry will *not* send invitations to Sochi to opposition members who demand the resignation of Assad: "As per new boundaries set by the ministry [on 23 Dec], the Syrian opposition must set aside the notion of removing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from office in order to participate at the congress. The ministry also said that they will not allow Sochi to become an arena pro-Assad leaving."

On 25 December, [Reuters](#) reported that approximately 40 Syrian rebel groups rejected participation in Sochi. The rebels also blamed Russia for committing war crimes in Syria. See also article on 26 Dec by the [Associated Press](#).

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

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## Continuing Civil War in Syria

### Introduction

Full-text of agreements on a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria is posted at [rbs0.com](http://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.

My essay for [Aug/Sep 2017](#) mentions creation of a new safe zone in Homs and some improvements in delivery of humanitarian aid.



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### Continuing War in Syria

On 5 October 2017, the Red Cross said 10 hospitals in Syria had been damaged by war during the past 10 days. It was the worst attacks on medical facilities in Syria since Aleppo in December 2016. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). As I remarked in 2016, both the insurgents and Assad's army are barbarians.

On 13 October, approximately 100 ISIL fighters in Raqqa surrendered to U.S-supported Kurdish and Arab forces. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 14 October 2017, U.S-supported Kurdish and Arab fighters began the final assault on Raqqa. The Kurds and Arabs allowed approximately 200 ISIL fighters and their families to flee from Raqqa before the final assault. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 17 October, the Kurdish and Arab fighters liberated Raqqa from ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 18 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported that former ISIL fighters in Syria are fleeing to Idlib province to join the Nusra Front, which is linked to Al-Qaeda.

On 24 October, the [Washington Times](#) mentioned a report by The Soufan Group that at least 5600 ISIL fighters in Syria had returned to their home nation. The largest number of Islamic fighters went to Russia. That news suggests that we may see an increase in Islamic terrorist attacks in Russia and Europe.

On 29 October, the [Associated Press](#) reported that ISIL fighters in Syria had "melted into the desert", from where they would launch "scattered hit-and-run attacks and suicide bombings."

On 3 November, the Syrian government announced it had captured *all* of the city of Deir Ezzor. ISIL had held that city for three years. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [The Telegraph](#).

On 9 November, the Syrian government declared victory over ISIL, when Assad's army liberated the town of Albu Kamal (also spelled "Boukamal") from ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). ISIL is still present in Syria, in fighters scattered in the desert, in fighters near Damascus, etc. [Associated Press](#).

But on 10 November, ISIL counterattacked Albu Kamal and recaptured half of that town. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).

On 11 November, ISIL seized all of Albu Kamal. [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).

On 19 November, the Syrian army again liberated Albu Kamal. [Reuters](#).

On 29 December 2017, an agreement between insurgents and Assad's government sent



insurgents from Beit Jin — 40 km southwest of Damascus — to either Idlib province or Daraa. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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### **Oct/Nov/Dec 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.

**On 9 November 2017, Jan Egeland gave a press briefing** for the first time since 28 September:

We just finished the meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force, a very bleak report was delivered from us, on the UN side, I feel as if we are now returning to some of the bleakest days of this conflict again, at least the fears are that we are now returning with civilians in cross fire in too many provinces at the same time.

We have had a period of de-escalation in many areas, it helped a lot in terms of less displacement, less killing, less civilians maimed and killed. We are now having reports of attacks against civilians, displacement of civilians from Idlib and Aleppo in the northwest, through Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor in the north and the east, and intensively in the central regions, east of Damascus, in Hama and elsewhere.

Nowhere is it as bad as in eastern Ghouta, which is the area just next to the capital Damascus city, it is in rural Damascus, east of the capital. This epicenter of suffering has 400,000 civilians, men, women, and children, in a dozen besieged towns, and villages.

Since September, it has been completely sealed off until September when there was some access with the commercial and other traffic. Now the only life-line would be our convoys. This last week we were, again, unsuccessful in spite of all possible efforts to get convoys into these areas with food and medical supplies. The week before we had three convoys overall, including a large one into these areas that got the first supplies in for many months. The week before that, again, we were completely unsuccessful. Of course we cannot continue like that: if we get only in a fraction of what is needed, it will be a complete catastrophe.

The assessment that was done by our colleagues, they were only there for a few hours the week before this, a week ago, showed that there are now a growing number of acutely malnourished children. If you are acutely malnourished, you are very close to dying. That is why we need also the medical evacuation. Since May we have tried to have large medical evacuations from eastern Ghouta where the medical services have been so hard hit also by the war, and by the lack of supplies.

It is only a little bit more than a dozen patients that have been evacuated through the

good efforts, heroic efforts, of the Syrian Red Crescent, so there is an accumulated number now of around 400 men, women, and children, I would estimate maybe three quarters of them are women and children that need to be evacuated now.

We have confirmation of seven patients dead because they were not evacuated, some of these are children. A list of 29 cases was given some time ago, of 29 cases that are the most critical cases, these will die if they are not evacuated, they include 18 children, and among them young Hala, Khadiga, Mounir and Bassem. They all have a name, they all have a story, they all have the urgent need to be evacuated now.

We are still not getting permissions to do this evacuation even though everything is ready. We've had minute and detailed planning with the medical groups still functioning inside these areas, with the colleagues in the Syrian Red Crescent, it is all coordinated with the World Health Organization, with the rest of the UN System, we know where to take the cases, we know what treatment they need. So why men in their 50s and 60s like me stop women and children from getting the medical service that will save their lives, is beyond my imagination. It can change tomorrow, if we get the green light we can do it.

Of course it is not by evacuating people you solve the problem. You solve the problem with an end to the fighting and the shelling and it is now cross-fire, there is air raids and shelling from government controlled areas into these areas, but there is also a lot of mortars coming out. I was in contact with colleagues in Damascus city last night, reporting of mortars going on their way.

The violence has to stop and we have to have general access then we can feed and provide to the 400,000 people.

It is not just eastern Ghouta, there are also other areas and let me mention one, the Berm, which is in the south east of Syria, is a desolate area at the border with Jordan. Some 50,000-55,000 civilians are there. The last time there was a partial distribution to these people was in June. We now have, thanks to excellent cooperation with, among others, our two co-chairs, the Russian Federation and the United States, a detailed plan of how to go from within Syria, from Damascus to the Berm and then a further plan to be able to deliver inside this area, that is opposition controlled still. It is urgent that it happens because the reports of suffering within the Berm is tremendous.

There is hope in us making progress, not only on the Berm and on eastern Ghouta, with the fact that the Russian Federation did initiate a trilateral problem solving mechanism, with the UN, the government of Syria and the Russian Federation meeting in Damascus. It had the first meetings, still hasn't produced the concrete results that were needed, but it is our strong feeling that the Russian Federation wants us to get the access and wants to help us, so we are hopeful that this trilateral mechanism will yield results and that they can yield results starting now.

My final point. Winter is coming, winter in Syria is as hard as it is in Europe, the difference between in Europe and in Syria is that people are now sitting after a 7-year war, longer than the second World War, they have little, if no, reserves, they have no

heat in the house, they live in a ruin, it will be a horrific winter.

In eastern Ghouta the price of a food basket is ten times that of the average in the country, so people cannot afford food and that will be their situation as the harsh winter is coming.

....

QUESTION: What you have said goes against the sense of normality that the Syrian government tries to inspire outside, so why this is happening? What are the reasons behind hostilities are regaining (inaudible) and if you could tell us how many people since this new wave of violence is now outside of the reach of the UN, of humanitarian aid?

Egeland: The number of people in, sort of, besieged areas is between 400,000 and 500,000 now, so it is about half the number that was there when we started, it was closer to a million earlier. The people living in hard to reach areas are 2.9 million now, compared to around 4.5 million earlier. One of the reasons that this number has decreased is that the Islamic State is controlling less territory, but also other areas are calm now or calmer now than before, including Aleppo city that we can reach. We can reach for the first time Deir ez-Zor city by land, before we could only reach it with high altitude air drops that were spectacularly successful in feeding people but spectacularly expensive as well.

I do not know if I am saying things that are very different from others, what I really try is to reflect the exact, and full and utter truth. We have now gone through the list of air raids, shelling, mortars, going from opposition side, and it is endless the number of places that people have been hit, the number of civilians that have been wounded, the internally displaced people who hoped to find to refuge and are now again in cross-fire.

This can change fast, but at the moment it is very bad and the worst, the epicenter is eastern Ghouta and there are 400,000 people there.

....

QUESTION: You just mentioned the designated terrorist groups the victories against the Islamic State and the recent victories, what impact did that have on the overall humanitarian situation, especially in Albu Kamal today?

Egeland: Well, we are getting access to civilians, I mean because one has retaken areas held by Islamic State we humanitarians can operate, we can reach civilians, and people also can return when it is possible. But the cost has been tremendous, really. Again I repeat the question, was it really necessary to destroy the city to liberate it? Was it really necessary to displace everybody to free them? Maybe, but I think the question has to be asked, the cost has been tremendous both in Raqqa and now still in Deir ez-Zor area. But the positive side is now people can return and we can operate there. We were not allowed to operate by the ruthless Islamic State that held these territories.

"Note to Correspondents: Transcript of Press Stakeout By Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Jan Egeland," [U.N.](#), 9 Nov 2017.

**On 7 December 2017, Jan Egeland gave the following press briefing**, the first briefing since 9 November:

**de Mistura:** Thank you very much. First of all let me pass the floor very quickly to Jan because we just had today a humanitarian taskforce [meeting] and it did address a very serious issue that while we are trying to serious meaningful talks in Geneva, the humanitarian situation is concerning, very concerning in some areas, and in particular one, and there has been, from what we have been getting, from the last time when Jan made a very powerful, in my opinion, a very strong appeal about progress, particularly on the medical side, on one particular besieged area called eastern Ghouta, there has been zero, zero outcome so far, and that is very concerning.

So I will give the floor to you [Jan], after that I am going to elaborate a little bit on also what is up on the political discussions, so that is the reason why, I think I [owe] it to you today some update.

**Egeland:** Thank you very much Staffan, indeed I gave my shortest and most somber report, I think, in the nearly two years we had the humanitarian taskforce to the member states, because there was nothing much to say except that we are ready, we can deliver, we can evacuate [, but] we are waiting for political, military, security obstacles to be lifted, and they are not lifted. We need help from the parties on the ground, by the government on the ground, by all of those nations who have influence and they are not helping us as they should.

We are, of course, making progress elsewhere, outside of the besieged areas, there is now movement to Deir ez-Zor, there was an initial assessment security mission there. In Raqqa, which is peppered by explosives, by everybody, there are a lot of plans to try to help people home but it is too dangerous for the time being, there are complex explosives all over, by IS, by those attacking and those bombing.

The epicenter of suffering is, however, eastern Ghouta. 400,000 people are there, and let me just clearly reiterate what is happening. Six months ago a very detailed evacuation plan was delivered to the government for needy cases of evacuation, on medical grounds from eastern Ghouta. Since then, names have been added regularly and it is now, we now have a revised list of 494 names. There are among them 282 cases that is need for specialized surgery, specialized treatment, specialized investigations that cannot get inside. There are 73 severe cancer cases, 25 kidney failure cases and 97 heart disease cases very concerning, five acutely malnourished children that need to be evacuated, six acute mental health cases etc.

The reason it is now 494. It is also that in the revised list ten patients had died, and just got the names of two more cases, so in total, 12 had died on this waiting list and they wait for a half an hour drive to hospitals in Damascus and elsewhere, that stand ready to help and save lives.

Three children have been lifted out as particularly needy and that's by the desperate

remaining doctors inside, who say that can we please have these children now lifted out tomorrow. It is Muhannad, is 45 days old and has kidney failure. It is Enji, she is 7 years old and she has hemophilia, severe hemophilia. Nour, is two years old and she has a rare cancer called retinoblastoma, very rare and very dangerous. They cause no harm in their lives, can the men who sit on that list please sign it off so that our ambulances can take them out of this hellish place, which is eastern Ghouta, and we can save their lives?

Altogether, 231 of the cases are female, 137 are children, 61 are over 65 years old. So these are civilians, in the midst of this horrific war.

We had hoped to do six convoys last week, everything ready, the trucks, the supplies, the courageous relief workers. All six stalled, three of them to eastern Ghouta that has severe and acute malnutrition reported. And why we are not rolling? Because of lack of facilitation letters from the government. There is also insecurity but I note that some commercial trucks are rolling in and out of Ghouta.

Now, in Foua and Kefraya, besieged by armed opposition groups, and Yarmouk besieged by many groups, including forces loyal to the government, the reason why we are not rolling is that the parties are quarrelling, as they always do, on simultaneous exchange of convoys. There are also rumors that the reason we are not rolling into Ghouta and we are not having [medical] evacuation from Ghouta is that detainees have to be released simultaneously. I would like to say that civilians, children, no one can be a bargaining chip in some kind of tug of war, where many things are negotiated at the same time. These have a right to be evacuated and we have an obligation to evacuate them.

Just a final issue to say that there are now 30,000-35,000 people in a desperate situation in a desert stretch in Syria, at the border with Jordan, it is called Rukban. We have a detailed plan to go there with a convoy, it is still stuck. We need the green light from the government and still we have to work with the Russians and the Americans who are both helping us with the details on a complex security arrangement to go in cross-line and into this area.

So, I'd say, I had failed, I feel we have not been able to fix it, it is very very heart breaking to get photos every day from children who are increasingly malnourished and who are increasingly dying and not being able to help them. Thank you.

**de Mistura:** Jan Egeland did not fail because we are not giving up and he is not giving up — but what we are signaling is that, while we are trying to have some political process and progress, and while we are seeing in the world announcements about the fact that the war is almost over, and that the Daesh has been defeated or can be defeated or is in the process of being defeated, there is no reason, no reason whatsoever to have this medieval type of approach regarding civilians, patients, children, women, particularly if the conflict is getting close to the end, one reason more to consider this unacceptable.

And therefore, I decided to be with Jan when he did say what he said because we can

have a lot of political process but if this is happening while people are dying we feel that this is not good enough, and we need to draw attention to this.

"Joint Press Stakeout by UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and UN Senior Advisor Jan Egeland," [U.N. Geneva](#), 7 Dec 2017.

On 19 December 2017, the United Nations Security Council renewed deliveries of humanitarian aid to Syria until 10 Jan 2019. [U.N.](#)

On Thursday, 21 December 2017, Egeland gave his final press conference of the year 2017, in which he admitted that the humanitarian aid situation in Syria was becoming worse. I have boldfaced what I consider Egeland's most important remarks.

This was indeed a stocktaking meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group. We were from the UN's side putting very bluntly to the Member States, those who have influence on the ground, the facts. And the facts are not good. **I remember the last stocktaking in December 2016, we felt that now, it cannot get worse, it has to get better, 2017 will be better. I thought it would be better — and I was wrong. In many respects, 2017 got even worse. We are now in the seventh war year, and it is not getting better.**

The number one indicator of how we are faring is the number of times civilians have been displaced. The number of times they have to leave their homes, their closest, their dearest and flee for their lives. Well, in 2017, 2.6 million times a child, a woman or a man had to flee inside Syria. In 2016, it was 2 million times.

So 7,700 times per day a child, a woman or a man fled because of violence in Syria, that's a small town fleeing every single day for an entire year.

It wasn't equally bad through 2017. We had a good period from, I would say, end of May until August when it was more quiet, and we can thank the de-escalation zones agreement of the Astana partners for their influence on calming down this horrific conflict.

But since August, it's been very bad all over, and in October and November between 700,000 and 800,000 times a person had to flee in Syria. It is the two worst months for the two last years: October, and last month, November.

Of course no other place did so many people flee for their lives in the last two months as in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, where a cruel occupation of the so-called Islamic State ended in a very bloody retaking of territory.

If we look at returns, there is progress, so more people were able to return to their areas in part because it became quiet in some of the major cities. According to UNHCR, 720,000 people could return and did return home in the first nine months of the year, until the end of September, that's many more than in the entire 2016 when 560,000 people returned. And many have seen the return increase as a sign that things have become better in 2017. Well, when three to four times more people flee as those who return, I don't think it is a good balance sheet for 2017.

**We failed too many people in 2017.** For 2018, families are debating whether to try to return or not - as refugees and as internally displaced. A survey shows about half of the Syrians displaced have not made up their minds whether they will try to return or not.

Just over a quarter will return, 27 percent, and then many actually want to integrate where they are. So the family jury is out, really: should we risk it and go back or not, and at the moment most are seeing things as being too unsafe and there had been too little to return to in Syria as of late.

We have to do better in 2018, both in security and in providing facilities to return back to.

What about the main purpose of the Humanitarian Task Force, and how did we succeed there, which is to provide support to the hard-to-reach and besieged areas? There are much fewer living in hard-to-reach areas at the end of December this year, compared to last year. Five and a half million people in hard-to-reach areas including all of the Islamic State held territories at that time, compared to 3 million people now. More than twice as many, 975,000 people, lived in besieged areas in December of last year, compared to the 420,000 in besieged areas today.

**However, and in spite of there being fewer people to try to reach in besieged areas, we had lower success rate in 2017 than we had in 2016. In many months we reached only 10 or maximum 20 percent of the people in besieged areas. In December we haven't reached a single soul.** All our attempts have gone in vain, we haven't gotten permission from the Government or from the parties concerned to go to a single besieged area, so far in December. So we are ending with the worst month, it seems, since we started our work in February last year.

That is in contrast to the overall humanitarian response, which is very impressive in Syria, there are a lot of very courageous humanitarian workers providing for a lot of people.

7.6 million people on average get some form of assistance every single month, 7.6 million people of the 13.1 million people in some need, well over half, get support every month.

About two thirds of this is delivered within Syria and from and to Government controlled areas, 37 percent. Over one third goes cross-border to opposition controlled areas, and that is why it was an enormous relief for us, who are humanitarian workers, that the Security Council did the right thing and extended the authorization for cross-border work for another 12 months, and they did that this week.

2.8 million people get assistance every single month on average through the cross-border relief given by non-governmental organizations and UN agencies.

Nowhere is more at stake than next door to Damascus, the capital. In eastern Ghouta,

very close to Damascus, there are nearly 400,000 people and they are besieged. We have tried now every single week for many months to get medical evacuations out, and food and other supplies in. We have over the last couple of months only reached 28,000 of the nearly 400,000 people with food and other supplies. So when in the beginning of November our colleagues found that one third of children under five were stunted because of malnutrition, and 12 percent were suffering from acute general malnutrition, it was the most shocking finding of malnutrition overall since the war started, and it is next door to Damascus, where there are enormous warehouses full of what they need in eastern Ghouta.

Since then few, very few, hardly anyone has gotten real relief, it is worse now. And we have seen in October and November that food still available on the market is only available to the most affluent. The price now is eight times what it was in August and September, so a single mother with five children cannot afford to buy anything, she is reliant on supplies that we are unable to give because we do not get permission from the Government to go.

494 people were on the priority list for medical evacuations. That number is going down, not because we are evacuating people but because they are dying. I informed the task force today that on the 14th of December, while we were meeting and we were having a press conference, a nine months old child from a place called al-Marsh, in eastern Ghouta, died. The child had a tough start, congenital cleft palate, it is a condition that is bad in your mouth, but that was not the reason that the poor child died. The child died because of severe acute malnutrition and because not being evacuated in time to reach the doctor that could have saved the life of the nine-months-old.

Let me end actually by this desperation around the medical work. The health crisis is a crisis within the crisis. Again, let's remind ourselves: for many years, Syria has been the number one country in the world for attacks on health workers and health facilities - has been, still is.

It is also a place where medical equipment, surgical materials and medicines had been removed or reduced in quantity from all UN inter-agency convoys during 2017, as it was before. It doesn't mean that all medical equipment is taken away, but 50 tons were taken off and 123 tons of the WHO, World Health Organization, supplies went through. So more than the third is taken off and that is often the things that are most life-saving for the wounded, for those who need acute trauma treatment.

This has to end. How can we take Christmas holidays in safety, in peace, in affluence while the most innocent in this bitter conflict are suffering the most, are dying? Not because there was not relief, not because there were not people willing to go there even in great danger, but because they were part of a power play between mostly well-fed men with power and with guns. This has to change, this was my message to the countries in this group who can influence the parties on the ground, and it is not only eastern Ghouta, there are smaller groups of civilians in Foah and Kafraya besieged by armed opposition groups, as there are in Yarmouk, the old Palestinian refugee camp, and the reason we are not going there is this obscene tit-for-tat: I am not letting you get to the civilians I besiege unless my friends in another place get relief which means that



no one gets relief.

"Note to Correspondents: Transcript of stakeout by Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy, Jan Egeland," [U.N.](#), 21 Dec 2017. [Boldface added by Standler.]

Since the end of October 2017, de Mistura and Egeland have been publicly complaining about approximately 500 severely malnourished or sick people in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus. On 24 December, Turkey offered to provide treatment for 500 people in Ghouta. [Associated Press](#). On 26 December, Assad's government allowed 4 people to be evacuated in ambulances to hospitals in Damascus. Agreement was reached to evacuate a total of 29 people in exchange for Jaish al-Islam releasing 29 captured Syrian soldiers. [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). My comment is 29 is 6% of the 500 who need to be evacuated. That means Assad is 94% barbarian.

On 29 December, all 29 sick people had been evacuated from Ghouta. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

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## U.N. Reports

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

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

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## Prosecution for War Crimes ?

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

My essay for [May 2016](#) revised my discussion in March and added some new material.

My essay for [October 2016](#) contains my comments on possible prosecution for war crimes.

In his monthly report on Syria issued on 20 July 2016, Ban Ki-moon noted:

The plight of those in Aleppo and elsewhere across the country underscores that civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic are as much at risk as they have ever been owing to the continued blatant disregard for humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. Ongoing sieges are depriving civilians of the most basic items necessary for their survival, such as water and food, and strikes are launched on heavily populated areas

from both air and ground, without regard for civilian presence. Parties to the conflict must immediately abide by international humanitarian law and individuals who fail to do so should be brought to account. Civilians must not and cannot ever be a target and all efforts should be made to protect civilian lives, including at the expense of gaining a military advantage.

"Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/631 at ¶62 (20 July 2016).

But Ban did *not* call for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. *Who* is going to bring the parties "to account" for many past, and continuing, war crimes?

In his monthly report on Syria issued on 16 August 2016, Ban Ki-moon noted:

In blatant disregard for the special protected status of health-care facilities under international humanitarian law and Security Council resolution 2286 (2016), adopted on 3 May, medical facilities continued to be damaged or destroyed as a result of fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations and health partners received credible reports, which are in the process of being verified by the United Nations and partner organizations, of 44 attacks against health facilities in July alone.

"Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/714 at ¶42 (16 Aug 2016).

The conduct of hostilities [in Aleppo] continues to be characterized by a prevailing disrespect for the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law. All parties to the conflict are failing to uphold their obligation to protect civilians. The fight for territory and resources is being undertaken through indiscriminate attacks on residential areas,

....

S/2016/714 at ¶51 (16 Aug 2016).

In his 16 August 2016 report, Ban did *not* call for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court. Ban did *not* call for any punishment for the violators of international law. Ban simply wanted the fighting to stop.

Again, in his 16 September 2016 report, Ban neither called for referral of Syria to the International Criminal Court, nor called for punishment for violators of international law. He did *not* mention war crimes.

... what is most needed is for the conflict to end. As world leaders come together for the seventy-first session of the General Assembly in late September, there should be no greater goal than to put the collective power of the world's leaders together to end the world's greatest humanitarian tragedy. I call upon all Member States, on those who are engaged in the conflict, on those who are engaged in the International Syria Support Group, on any who have influence, to act. The world is watching.

Ban Ki-moon, "Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015)," S/2016/796 at ¶41 (16 Sep 2016).

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

**QUESTION:** If I could ask you, Secretary-General, you have mentioned violations of international law in Yemen. In the past, you have mentioned possible war crimes in

Syria. And yet on both subjects, both wars, the Security Council has no agreement at all. They can't even come up with a statement on Yemen. They can't even agree the words of a statement. What is your message to the Security Council about their duty?

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

....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[¶36] The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to deteriorate at an

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

....

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

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

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

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

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

The Secretary-General reminds all parties to the conflict that targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure is a war crime. He calls on all sides to immediately cease any such attacks. Those responsible for these and other atrocities in Syria, 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." The U.N. Secretary General said the same thing in his monthly reports for July through December 2017:

- S/2017/623 at ¶41 (July),
- S/2017/733 at ¶42 (Aug),
- S/2017/794 at ¶44 (Sep),
- S/2017/902 at ¶44 (Oct),
- S/2017/982 at ¶48 (Nov), and
- S/2017/1057 at ¶42 (Dec).

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.

### **U.N. General Assembly Resolution 71/248**

On 21 December 2016, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 71/248 that directs the Secretary General to create a team to investigate war crimes in Syria. (See my essay for [December 2016](#).)

This important resolution was *not* publicly posted at the U.N. website until 20 Jan 2017, 30 days after it was passed.

Resolution 71/248 contains two deadlines.

1. §5 of 71/248 says: "Requests the Secretary-General, in this regard, to develop, within 20 working days of the adoption of the present resolution, the terms of reference of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and also requests that the Secretary-General undertake, without delay, the steps, measures and arrangements necessary for the speedy establishment and full functioning of the Mechanism, ...."
2. §8 of 71/248 says: "Requests the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the present resolution within 45 days of its adoption,...." (i.e., 4 Feb 2017)

On 26 January 2017, the U.N. Secretary General met both deadlines in Resolution 71/248. The Secretary General promised to appoint a head of the Mechanism by the end of February 2017. [U.N.](#) Not only did Guterres fail to meet his end of February deadline, but also there was *no* head appointed by the end of June 2017.

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

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

In his 23 June 2017 monthly report, S/2017/541 at ¶44, the United Nations Secretary General said: "I continue to reiterate my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be

referred to the International Criminal Court. I also call on all Member States to support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011." The Mechanism was established in General Assembly Resolution 71/248 on 21 Dec 2016.

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## Debacle in Iraq

### Death Toll in Iraq

I posted an HTML webpage that contains a [table](#) of monthly death tolls announced by United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) during 2013-2015.

I am no longer listing the Iraqi death toll on my HTML webpage, because the statistics from the Iraqi government are seriously incomplete and *not* credible. But, for what it is worth, the United Nations reported the following numbers of Iraqi civilians killed in "terrorism, violence, [or] armed conflict":

- 114 dead during October 2017. [UNAMI](#).
- 117 dead during November 2017. [UNAMI](#).
- 69 dead during December 2017 (not including police and not including Anbar province). [UNAMI](#).

On 3 December 2016, UNAMI announced it would stop reporting casualty numbers for the Iraqi army, because the Iraqi army wanted to keep those numbers secret to prevent loss of morale. [UNAMI](#); [Associated Press](#). That change in reporting means that future UNAMI casualty numbers will be smaller than past numbers, making it difficult to compare monthly numbers before and after the month of November 2016.

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### ISIL attacks in Iraq and other news from Iraq

On 25 September 2017, an overwhelming majority (92.7%) of Kurds in Iraq voted for independence from Iraq.

The Kurds seized control of Kirkuk in 2014, to prevent ISIL from capturing Kirkuk at a time when the Iraqi army was incompetent. On 15 October 2017, the Iraqi army began attacking Kurdish militia in Kirkuk. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

My fear is that the battle in Kirkuk could be the beginning of an Iraqi civil war against the Kurds. [Gulf News](#) in UAE published an editorial titled: "The last thing Iraq needs is another war".

The corrupt and dysfunctional Iraqi government has a history of discriminating against the



Kurds, as part of Iraq's ethnic and sectarian disputes. I see no good reason to maintain the unity of Iraq, given that the nation of Iraq was artificially created by the French and British governments in 1916 (the Sykes-Picot agreement).

On 17 October 2017, the Kurds retreated from Kirkuk. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#)(17Oct); [Reuters](#)(18Oct).

On 28 October 2017, Masoud Barzani — leader of the Iraqi Kurds since 2005 — announced he would resign, effective 1 November 2017. [Rudaw](#); [Reuters](#). Like U.K. prime minister Cameron, who disastrously called for a popular vote on exiting the European Union, Barzani had called for the popular vote on Kurdish independence from Iraq.

On 5 November, two ISIL suicide bombers in Kirkuk killed at least five people in an attack on a Shiite mosque. [Reuters](#).

On 17 November, the Iraqi army liberated Rawah, a small town near the border with Syria. Journalists described Rawah as the last town in Iraq under ISIL control. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Washington Post](#).

On the night of 27 November, an ISIL gunman and a suicide bomber in a shopping district in southeast Baghdad killed at least 17 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

On 6 December 2017, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military has 5200 troops in Iraq, but the number is decreasing now that all of the towns in Iraq have been liberated from ISIL.

On 9 December 2017, Iraqi prime minister Abadi declared "final victory" over ISIL in Iraq. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). What he did *not* say was that Tikrit, Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul are in ruins and Iraq has *no* money to rebuild those cities. Also, the remnants of ISIL can still do terrorists attacks, such as car bombs, in Iraq. The economy of Iraq is still heavily dependent on sales of oil, so when oil prices are low, the Iraqi government is short of money.

On 28 December 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported on the lack of money to rebuild Mosul. "Baghdad estimates [US]\$100 billion is needed nationwide to rebuild. .... Corruption and bitter sectarian divisions make things even harder."

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## Islamic Public Relations Problem

### Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## My Proposal

There are genuine cultural differences between mainstream Islam and Christianity. For example, Saudi Arabia does *not* issue driver's licenses to women. Women in Afghanistan

wear a burqa. The effort here should *not* be to impose orthodoxy and make mainstream Islam more like Christianity. Instead, the effort here should be for Muslim clerics and other Muslim opinion leaders to cite their holy book and other theological documents to show that it is forbidden for Muslims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- In June 2006, a U.S. airstrike killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in

Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL).

- In May 2011, the U.S. Military killed Osama bin Laden.
- In September 2011, a U.S. drone strike killed Anwar al-Awlaki, an Islamic cleric and Al-Qaeda terrorist in Yemen.
- On 9 June 2015, a U.S. drone strike killed Nasir al-Wuhayshi (aka al-Wahishi), head of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen). He was also the apparent successor to current Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.
- On 13 June 2015, U.S. fighter jets may have killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Libya. He is/was a leader in Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.
- On 16 June 2015, an airstrike in Syria smote "a senior ISIL leader", Tariq bin Tahar al-'Awni al-Harzi. [Reuters](#); [AP](#).
- On 11 July 2015, Abu Khalil al-Sudani, an Al-Qaeda leader in Afghanistan, was killed by a U.S. airstrike. The [Pentagon](#) boasted of the accomplishment. See also, [NY Times](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 18 August 2015, a U.S. drone strike near Mosul killed the Nr. 2 leader of ISIL, Fadhil Ahmad al-Hayali, also known as "Hajji Mutazz", "Abu Muslim al-Turkmani", or "Abu Mutaz Qurashi". [White House](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [Rudaw](#). On 13 October, [Reuters](#) reports ISIL has confirmed his death.
- On 15 October 2015, a U.S. Coalition airstrike in Syria killed Abdul Mohsen Adballah Ibrahim al Charekh — also known as Sanafi al-Nasr — who was the leader of the Al-Qaeda affiliated Khorasan Group. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 12 November 2015, a U.S. drone airstrike in Syria apparently killed Mohamed Emwazi — a U.K. citizen also known as "Jihadi John" — who had executed at least 6 hostages (e.g., Steven Sotloff, James Foley, Abdul-Rahman Kassig, David Haines, Alan Henning, Kenji Goto) beginning in August 2014. [Pentagon](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 13 November and 2 December 2015, U.S. airstrikes killed al-Qaida leaders in Libya and Somalia. [Pentagon](#).
- In "late November" 2015, a U.S. airstrike in Iraq killed Abu Salah, the financial minister of ISIL. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 29 December 2015, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes had killed 10 senior ISIL leaders during 7-27 December. Some of the dead leaders were involved in the terrorist attack in Paris on 13 Nov. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#) on 29 Dec; [Reuters](#) on 30 Dec.
- On 25 March 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that the U.S. Military had killed Haji

Imam, "who was an ISIL senior leader, serving as a finance minister and who is also responsible for some external affairs and plots." Imam is also known as Abdul-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) spells the dead man's name as "Haji Iman — an alias for Abd ar-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli".

- On 4 May 2016, Australia announced that a Cambodian immigrant who had joined ISIL had been killed by a U.S. airstrike in Mosul on 29 April. His name was Neil Prakash, also known as Abu Khaled al-Cambodi. Neil had been featured in ISIL recruiting videos. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#); [ABC](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#).
- On 9 May 2016, the [Pentagon](#) announced that an airstrike on 6 May had killed "Abu Wahib, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's military emir for Iraq's Anbar province". [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
- On 21 May 2016, the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, was killed by an airstrike from a U.S. drone in Pakistan. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#); [NY Times](#). [Reuters](#) reported: "The death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour ... could further fracture the Taliban — an outcome that experts cautioned might make the insurgents even less likely to participate in long-stalled peace efforts." And [Reuters](#) reported the Pakistani government is wailing about the U.S. violation of Pakistani sovereignty. [Obama](#) was pleased that Mansour — also spelled Mansur — was killed by the U.S. military. Four days after Mansour was killed, the Taliban elected a new leader. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 4 August 2016, an Egyptian military airstrike killed the leader of ISIL in Egypt, Abu Doaa al-Ansari. [Ahram](#); [Associated Press](#); [Ahram](#)(18 Aug confirmation); [Al-Arabiya](#)(19 Aug).
- On 30 August 2016, a U.S. airstrike near Al Bab, Syria, splatted Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani. He is said to be the head of external operations of ISIL (i.e., in charge of attacks in Europe, etc.), a tactician, and their chief spokesman. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#)(31Aug); [Associated Press](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP); [Pentagon](#)(12Sep).
- On 8 September 2016, Abu Hajer al Homsy, also known as Abu Omar Saraqeb, the top military commander of Nusra Front (now called "Jabhat Fateh al-Sham") was killed by an airstrike in the village of Kafr Naha, Syria. [Reuters](#); [Middle East Eye](#). On 9 Sep, [FRANCE24](#)(AFP) and [Al-Arabiya](#) reports that the Pentagon denied a U.S.-airstrike killed him.
- On 7 September 2016, a U.S. airstrike splatted Wa'il Adil Hasan Salman al-Fayad, a senior leader of ISIL and the ISIL minister of information, who prepared terrorist videos. [Pentagon](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#); [Reuters](#)(10 Oct).
- On 3 October 2016, a U.S. airstrike in Idlib province of Syria killed Sheikh Abu al Faraj al-Masri (real name = Sheikh Ahmad Salamah Mabrouk), an Egyptian terrorist who in the 1980s fought in Afghanistan with Ayman al-Zawahri (the current Al-Qaeda leader). [Reuters](#) says the dead Sheikh was a "prominent member" of Nusra Front in Syria. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).

- On 26 November 2016, a U.S. drone airstrike in Raqqa killed Boubaker el Hakim, an ISIL member who allegedly was involved in planning the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper offices in Paris on 7 Jan 2015. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
- On 4 December 2016, a U.S. drone splatted three ISIL members in Raqqa. The three were allegedly plotting attacks in foreign nations, and two of them had allegedly been involved in the Islamic attacks in Paris on 13 Nov 2015. [Pentagon](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#)(AFP).
- On 26 December 2016, a U.S. airstrike splatted "Abu Jandal al-Kuwaiti, an ISIL gang leader in Raqqah ... near Tabqa Dam, Syria. .... ... his death will degrade ISIL's ability to defend Raqqah and launch external operations against the West." [CENTCOM](#).
- On 12 January 2017, a U.S. airstrike splatted Abd al-Jalil al-Muslimi, a Tunisian citizen who was a member of Al-Qaeda in Syria. [Pentagon](#).
- On 17 January 2017, a U.S. airstrike splatted Mohammad Habib Boussadoun al-Tunisi, a Tunisian citizen who was a member of Al-Qaeda in Syria. [Pentagon](#).
- On 26 February 2017, something really important happened when a CIA drone launched a Hellfire missile that hit an automobile carrying the Nr. 2 international leader of Al-Qaeda. Abu al-Khayr al-Masri was blown to bits near the city of Idlib in Syria. *The New York Times* says "his real name was Abdullah Muhammad Rajab Abd al-Rahman" and "Since [March 2015], Mr. Masri had operated in Syria as Al Qaeda's deputy leader, providing orders and advice to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, the Qaeda affiliate in Syria formerly known as the Nusra Front,...." [Associated Press](#)(27 Feb); [NY Times](#)(1 Mar); [Reuters](#)(2 Mar); [Associated Press](#)(2 Mar).
- On 7 May 2017, journalists reported that the leader of ISIL in Afghanistan, Abdul Hasib, had been killed by U.S. and Afghani ground troops on 27 April. [Reuters](#); [NY Times](#).
- On 26 May 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.

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## ISIL is *not* defeated

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

1. On 10 June 2014, ISIL captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), but, as of April 2017, the Iraqis have been unable to liberate Mosul.
2. My essay for [Jan 2015](#) chronicled the spread of ISIL to Egypt, Libya, and Afghanistan.
3. On 23-24 Feb 2015, ISIL abducted more than 220 Assyrian Christians in Syria. As of 30 Aug 2015, only approximately 46 have been released by ISIL.
4. On 17 May 2015, ISIL captured Ramadi in Iraq. After seven months of procrastination and delay, on 27-28 Dec 2015, the Iraqi army captured the government center in downtown Ramadi, as explained in detail in my essays.
5. On 20 May 2015, ISIL captured Palmyra in Syria. [Reuters](#); [BBC](#).
6. On 22 May 2015, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in a Shiite mosque in Saudi Arabia, killing 21 people. [Washington Post](#); [Arab News](#)(AFP).
7. My essay for [June 2015](#) cited that an ISIL suicide bomber killed 27 people at at Shiite mosque in Kuwait on 26 June.
8. On 26 June 2015, an ISIL terrorist killed 38 people on a beach in Tunisia. [Associated Press](#).
9. On 1 July 2015, ISIL attacked Egyptian army posts in the Sinai, killing at least 64 Egyptian soldiers. [Associated Press](#).
10. On 11 July 2015, an ISIL car bomb damaged the Italian consulate in Cairo, killing 1 pedestrian. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Casualties were few because the bomb exploded at 06:30 local time, when few people were on the street. The attack shows that ISIL can strike anywhere.
11. On 16 July 2015, ISIL in the Sinai Province of Egypt launched a missile that caused a fire on an Egyptian Navy ship. [Ahram](#) in Egypt; [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
12. On 17 July 2015, the last day of the Ramadan month, an ISIL suicide truck bomb at a market in the Diyala province of Iraq killed at least 115 people.
13. On 6 August 2015, ISIL captured the town of Qaryatain in Syria. [Associated Press](#); [SOHR](#). Also on 6 August, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated at a mosque used by Saudi Arabian police, killing at least 15 people. [Associated Press](#); [Arab News](#).
14. On 12 August 2015, ISIL in Egypt beheaded a hostage from Croatia, who was an oil and gas surveyor and who was kidnapped by ISIL on 22 July. It was the first time ISIL in Egypt had killed a foreigner. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
15. On 7 September 2015, ISIL captured the final Syrian oilfield. ISIL now controls *all* of the oilfields in Syria. [SOHR](#); [Reuters](#); [Al-Arabiya](#).

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

[CNN](#).

27. At night on 28 June 2016, three ISIL suicide bombers attacked an airport in Istanbul, Turkey. At least 42 people were killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#).
28. At 20:45 on 1 July 2016, seven ISIL terrorists attacked a bakery/restaurant in Dhaka, Bangladesh, taking hostages. The terrorists killed 20 hostages and 2 policemen. The terrorists had the hostages recite verses from the Koran, to identify who was a Muslim. The non-Muslim hostages were tortured and killed. [Reuters](#); [Associated Press](#). While the Bangladeshi government attempted to deny that the terrorists were affiliated with ISIL, the terrorists belonged to a gang that had pledged allegiance to ISIL. [NY Times](#) ("... a local extremist group that has pledged loyalty to the Islamic State butchered diners in a restaurant."); [Reuters](#) ("... Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen claims it represents Islamic State."). Further, ISIL claimed credit for the attack in Dhaka. [The Telegraph](#); [Reuters](#). Moreover, the attackers uploaded photographs of their attack to the ISIL headquarters in Syria. The children of upper-class parents had joined the terrorist gang, which the [NY Times](#) says is evidence of the radicalization of the population. More about the elite attackers is at [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#).
29. On 3 July 2016, an ISIL truck bomb detonated at a shopping center in Baghdad, killing at least 292 people. See my essay for [July 2016](#).
30. On 4 July 2016, an ISIL suicide bomber detonated in the parking lot outside the mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, where the prophet Mohammed is buried. The blast killed four Saudi Arabian soldiers who were guarding the mosque. This attack is important because it occurred at one of the holiest sites of the Islamic religion. [Al-Arabiya](#); [Saudi Press Agency](#); [The Guardian](#).
31. On 14 July 2016, an ISIL terrorist drove a truck through a crowd of people in Nice, France, killing 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](#). On 23 Oct 2017, the Philippine government declared they had broken the five-month siege of Marawi by ISIL. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
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 in my [essay](#).)
  51. On 14 October 2017, the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab group exploded a truck bomb outside a hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia. Initial reports were that at least 20 people were killed. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The following day, the death toll increased to approximately 230, the worst Islamic terrorist attack in Somalia history. [New York Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). Two days after the bombing, the Somalis abandoned counting the dead, as the deaths exceeded 300. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). On 20 Oct, the [Associated Press](#) reports a total of 358 dead. But on 1 December 2017, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the final count was 512 dead.
  52. On 20 October 2017, an ISIL suicide bomber exploded inside a Shiite mosque in Kabul Afghanistan. Another suicide bomber exploded at a Sunni mosque in Ghor province, in western Afghanistan. A total of at least 63 people were killed in the two attacks during Friday prayers. [Associated Press](#). The following day, [Reuters](#) reported a total of at least 72 dead.
  53. During Friday prayers on 24 November 2017, ISIL attacked a Sufi mosque in the northern peninsula of Egypt, killing at least 235 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The following day, the death toll increased to 305. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#). The [New York Times](#) explains that Egypt's three-year war against ISIL has been a failure.
  54. On 28 December 2017, an attack by ISIL destroyed a Shiite cultural center in Kabul, Afghanistan, killing at least 41 people. [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).
  55. On 31 December 2017, a suicide bomber walked into a cemetery in Jalalabad, Afghanistan and detonated, killing at least 17 mourners. [New York Times](#); [Washington Post](#); [Reuters](#).

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**

On 7 January 2018, the Pentagon reported the cost of the U.S. war against ISIL:

As of June 30, 2017, the total cost of operations related to ISIL 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](#), retrieved 7 Jan 2018.

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.](#)

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## **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.

### **History**

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.
- My essay for [Aug-Sep 2017](#) described an Islamic terrorist in Paris on 9 August 2017; Islamic terrorists in Barcelona, Spain on 17 August; an Islamic terrorist in Brussels on 25 August; and an Islamic terrorist on the London Subway on 15 September.

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

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## Recent Islamic Terrorists

### 15 September 2017: Islamic terrorist in London Subway

As chronicled in my previous essay, Ahmed Hassan was arrested on the morning of 16 September for putting a bomb aboard a subway train in a London suburb. Because police released few details to journalists during September, I am continuing coverage here.

On 13 October, Ahmed appeared via video link in court, where he was ordered to stand trial,

beginning 5 March 2018. Ahmed is scheduled to appear in court again on 19 Jan 2018, to enter a plea and manage the case. [The Independent](#); [Reuters](#).

On 29 October, the most recent news on this case from the Metropolitan Police in London is dated 26 September and was cited in my previous essay.

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### **30 Sep 2017: Islamic terrorist in Edmonton, Canada**

On Saturday at 20:15 MDT (local time), 30 Sep 2017, an Islamic terrorist crashed his car into a policeman in Edmonton, Canada, sending the policeman flying 4½ meters in the air. The terrorist then got out of his car and stabbed the injured policeman multiple times. An ISIL flag was found in the car owned by the terrorist.

The terrorist fled on foot, then rented a U-Haul moving van. The speeding van injured four pedestrians, before the van flipped on its side in downtown Edmonton at 23:40 MDT. The terrorist was immediately arrested by police. [Edmonton Journal](#); [Edmonton Journal](#)(live blog); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

At 14:11 MDT on 1 Oct, the [Canadian Broadcasting Corp](#) identified the Islamic terrorist as 30 year old Abdulahi Hasan Sharif. The *Edmonton Journal* reported the terrorist is a refugee from Somalia.

On 3 October, Sharif made his first appearance in court on five counts of attempted murder and other charges. He is scheduled to appear again in court on 14 November. [Edmonton Journal](#).

Using a vehicle to deliberately hit pedestrians has been a common method of Islamic terrorism since July 2016, when an Islamic terrorist drove a truck on a beach at Nice, France.

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### **1 Oct 2017: Islamic terrorist in Marseille, France**

An Islamic terrorist yelled “Allahu akbar” as he fatally stabbed two women at the train station in Marseille, France on 1 October. Soldiers killed the terrorist. [Associated Press](#). [Reuters](#) reported: “Two police sources said the attacker had been carrying a butcher’s knife, was around 30 years old and of North African appearance. One source said he was known to police for common law crimes, while another said digital analysis of fingerprints had come up with several aliases.”

On 2 October, [The Telegraph](#) in England reported that the terrorist had been arrested on 30 September for shoplifting at a department store in Lyon, France. He was carrying a Tunisian passport when he was arrested, but he had *no* French identity papers. He is known to have used 7 different aliases, but his true identity is still unknown.

On 9 October 2017, the [Associated Press](#) and [Reuters](#) reported that police believe the stabber was radicalized by his younger brother, who was arrested in Italy on 7 October. The stabber's name is Ahmed Hannachi and he is from Tunisia.

On 2 November 2017, the younger brother of the stabber was extradited to France.  
[Associated Press](#).

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### 31 Oct 2017: Islamic terrorist in New York City

At 15:04 EDT on 31 Oct 2017, a rented truck from Home Depot began traveling in the bicycle lane in lower Manhattan district of New York City. The rented truck finally collided with a school bus, which collision disabled the rented truck. According to an eyewitness, the driver of the rented truck yelled “Allahu Akbar” after exiting the truck. The driver appeared to have a pistol in each hand, but his "weapons" were actually a paintball gun and a pellet gun. The driver was shot by a policeman and then taken into custody.

The suspect is Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov, a 29-year old man from Tampa, Florida — and who currently lives in Paterson, New Jersey. Saipov immigrated to the USA from Uzbekistan in the year 2010.

Police found a handwritten note inside the rented truck — the note pledged allegiance to ISIL, which confessed that Saipov was an Islamic terrorist.

The FBI's Terrorism Task Force quickly took charge of the forensic investigation, because the attack was presumedly an act of terrorism.

Note that the method of this crime is consistent with a series of Islamic terrorist attacks that used trucks to kill or maim pedestrians:

- 86 dead in Nice France on 14 July 2016
- 12 dead in Berlin Germany on 19 December 2016
- 4 dead on Westminster Bridge in London on 22 March 2017
- 5 dead in downtown Stockholm Sweden on 7 April 2017
- London Bridge on 3 June 2017
- 14 dead in Barcelona, Spain on 17 August 2017
- Edmonton, Canada on 30 September 2017

With this history, it is easy to foresee that Islamic terrorists will continue to rent — or steal — trucks, then drive into a crowd of pedestrians.

On the night of 2 November 2017, ISIL claimed Saipov as a "soldier of the caliphate".  
[WNBC](#); [Associated Press](#); [Reuters](#).

The multiple highly inappropriate pre-trial remarks by Donald Trump — which remarks *may* have prejudiced Saipov's legal right to a fair trial — are chronicled in my essay at [www.rbs0.com/trump.pdf](http://www.rbs0.com/trump.pdf), in the section on Trump's rude and obnoxious remarks.

*Why* did Saipov commit this terrorist act? The best "explanation" that I have seen is that Saipov wanted to be a commercial truck driver. Saipov founded two companies in Ohio to

transport goods by truck. While he was living in Florida, the insurance company for his truck did not renew their policy because of Saipov's many traffic citations and misdemeanors. Then his truck engine "blew up". Those two events ended Saipov's career as a truck driver. He then moved to New Jersey and became a driver for the Uber ride-sharing service. But Saipov was apparently angry about his failure as a truck driver.

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- "Live Blog — New York terror attack: Eight dead as truck runs down cyclists in suspected terror attack," [The Telegraph](#), began 20:42 GMT (16:42 EDT), 31 Oct 2017.
- "At Least 7 dead and 15 injured in possible act of terror on NYC bike path," [WABC](#), 17:01 EDT, 31 Oct 2017. (According to an eyewitness reported, "the suspect yelled 'Ali Akbar' after getting out of the vehicle.")
- "Terrorism Suspected After Truck Driver Kills Eight in Lower Manhattan," [NBC News](#), 17:07 EDT, 31 Oct 2017. ("The suspect got out of the truck and shouted 'Allahu Akbar' and fired a BB or pellet gun, four senior law enforcement sources briefed on the matter said.")
- "'This Was An Act Of Terror': 8 Dead, More Than A Dozen Injured When Truck Strikes Pedestrians In Lower Manhattan," [WCBS](#), 17:22 EDT, 31 Oct 2017. ("The incident began at 3:04 p.m. when the truck entered the bike path a few blocks north of Chambers Street along the West Side Highway in Lower Manhattan, police said.")
- "At Least 8 Killed as Truck Careens Down Bike Path in Manhattan," [New York Times](#), 31 Oct 2017. ("Two law enforcement officials said that after the attacker got out of the truck, he was heard yelling, 'Allahu Akbar,' Arabic for 'God is great.'")
- "Suspect Claimed He Committed NYC Truck Attack for ISIS: Sources," [WNBC](#), 19:20 EDT, 31 Oct 2017. (Saipov "left a note in the truck claiming he committed the attack for ISIS, according to law enforcement sources.")
- "Suspect identified, note declaring allegiance to ISIS found after truck attack leaves 8 dead," [Washington Post](#), 20:57 EDT, 31 Oct 2017. ("Inside the rental truck, investigators found a handwritten note in which Saipov had declared his allegiance to the Islamic State, according to officials.")
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- "Sayfullo Saipov's Path from Immigrant Trucker to Accused Terrorist," [NBC News](#), 11:05 EDT, 1 Nov 2017. ("Questioned in a New York hospital, where he is recovering from a bullet wound to his abdomen, Saipov showed no remorse, and actually seemed proud of what he'd allegedly done, ...." "Authorities say Saipov's online history indicates that he consumed ISIS propaganda, ....")
- "Driver Had Been Planning Attack in Manhattan for Weeks, Police Say," [New York Times](#), 1 Nov 2017. ("Mr. Saipov moved to New Jersey in March [2017] to be closer to his wife's family." A preacher at a mosque in Tampa "said Mr. Saipov was devoted to outward observances of Islam, like his beard, but not necessarily the substance." But the preacher never heard Saipov advocate violence.)
- "Finding a Rootless Life in U.S., Sayfullo Saipov Turned to Radicalism," [New York Times](#), 1 Nov 2017.
- "Terrorism charges filed against NYC attack suspect Sayfullo Saipov," [CBS News](#), 18:54 EDT, 1 Nov 2017. (On the evening of 1 Nov, Saipov was charged in federal court: "a charge of providing material support to a terrorist organization and a charge of violence and destruction of a motor vehicle with willful disregard for human life." "Additionally, Saipov asked to fly the ISIS flag in his hospital room, according to the criminal complaint. He told investigators he felt good about what he had done.")
- "Prosecutors Describe Plan for Maximum Carnage as Driver Is Charged," [New York Times](#), 1 Nov 2017. (Saipov "asked law enforcement officials to put up ISIS flags [in his hospital room] and 'stated that he felt good about what he had done.'")
- "The Latest: ...," [Associated Press](#), 2 Nov 2017.
- "Acquaintances say bike path suspect was argumentative, angry," [Associated Press](#), 2 Nov 2017.

- "ISIS claims suspected New York truck attacker as its 'soldier' as Trump vows military response," [Washington Post](#), 3 Nov 2017.
- "Sister of NYC Truck Attack Suspect Says Family Shocked, Never Noticed Extremism," [NBC News](#), 19:39 EDT, 4 Nov 2017. ("Suspected attacker Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov 'never had any extreme ideas before,' his sister, Umida Saipova, who lives in Tashkent in Uzbekistan, said in a text message to NBC News.")

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### 11 Dec 2017: Islamic terrorist in New York City

At 07:20 EST on Monday, 11 December 2017, Akayed Ullah detonated a pipe bomb in an underground passage way between Times Square and the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Only a small part of his bomb detonated. He was arrested by police and taken to a hospital with burns on his hands and abdomen, and some lacerations. Ullah was initially in serious condition in the hospital. Three commuters received minor injuries from the explosion.

Ullah is a 27-year-old immigrant from Bangladesh, who arrived in the USA in February 2011. Ullah is a lawful permanent resident of the USA. Ullah immediately told police his attack was inspired by ISIL, but he was *not* in direct contact with ISIL. He spotted a Christmas holiday poster in the passage way and decided to detonate there.

The White House was quick to react to this terrorist attack. Trump issued the following statement on 11 December 2017:

Today's attempted mass murder attack in New York City — the second terror attack in New York in the last two months — once again highlights the urgent need for Congress to enact legislative reforms to protect the American people.

First and foremost, as I have been saying since I first announced my candidacy for President, America must fix its lax immigration system, which allows far too many dangerous, inadequately vetted people to access our country. Today's terror suspect entered our country through extended-family chain migration, which is incompatible with national security. My Executive action to restrict the entry of certain nationals from eight countries, which the Supreme Court recently allowed to take effect, is just one step forward in securing our immigration system. Congress must end chain migration. Congress must also act on my Administration's other proposals to enhance domestic security, including increasing the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers, enhancing the arrest and detention authorities for immigration officers, and ending fraud and abuse in our immigration system. The terrible harm that this flawed system inflicts on America's security and economy has long been clear. I am determined to improve our immigration system to put our country and our people first.

Second, those convicted of engaging in acts of terror deserve the strongest penalty allowed by law, including the death penalty in appropriate cases. America should always stand firm against terrorism and extremism, ensuring that our great institutions can address all evil acts of terror.



"Statement from President Donald J. Trump Regarding Today's Attack in New York City," [White House](#), 11 Dec 2017.

Trump boasts of "my Executive action to restrict the entry of certain nationals from eight countries", but that is irrelevant to the 11 Dec bombing, because Bangladesh — from where Ullah emigrated — has *never* been amongst the countries that receive extreme vetting under Trump's executive orders. Trump's remarks on ending "chain migration" are relevant to preventing some terrorists from entering the USA. Note that Trump seems to have first called for ending chain migration on 8 Oct 2017 in a [letter](#) to Congress and in a [press release](#).

Trump's spokesperson said in her daily press briefing on 11 December:

Good afternoon. This morning, while New Yorkers were making their way to work, a terrorist set off a pipe bomb strapped to his body in one of Manhattan's busiest commuter hubs. Thankfully, there were no life-threatening injuries.

....

This attack underscores the need for Congress to work with the President on immigration reforms that enhance our national security and public safety. We must protect our borders, we must ensure the individuals entering our country are not coming to do harm to our people, and we must move to a merit-based system of immigration.

....

But we must also destroy the evil ideology that is behind ISIS and attacks like today's. This ideology has no borders but it must be eradicated. The President has successfully rallied the world behind this cause and we will not stop until it is accomplished.

....

QUESTION: Thank you, Sarah. Today, the suspected terrorist in New York City, he was described as a Bangladeshi immigrant. Bangladesh is not on the President's travel ban list. Does today's attack change the way that President Trump is evaluating travel restrictions?

MS. SANDERS: Look, we can — we do know, and the Department of Homeland Security has confirmed, that the suspect was admitted to the United States after presenting a passport displaying an F43 Family Immigrant Visa in 2011. And so we know that the President's policy calls for an end to chain migration, which is what this individual came to the United States through.

And if his policy had been in place, then that attacker would not have been allowed to come in the country. That's why the President has pushed for not one part of immigration policy, but a responsible and total immigration reform. And that's why we have to look at all sectors and do what we can to make sure we're doing everything within our power to protect the American people.



QUESTION: Thanks, Sarah. At the top of your remarks about ISIS, about the attack today in New York City, you talked about the need to destroy the ideology, intimating would-be attackers and the actual attackers. What policy changes are required to do that? How do you defeat an ideology that's been attempted since 9/11 with, really, no great success? What are you doing differently? What can you do differently in order to do that?

MS. SANDERS: I think one of the best ways that we have moved forward is in a process where we're allowing the members of the Department of Defense to aggressively move forward in defeating ISIS and, in hopes, annihilating a lot of that evil ideology through part of that process. We're going to continue pushing and continue looking for the best ways possible to make sure that we protect Americans. "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Sarah Sanders, 12/11/2017, #39," [White House](#), 14:20 EST, 11 Dec 2017.

Sanders is correct to call for the "eradication" of the ideology of Islamic terrorism, except that she can *not* say the words "Muslim" or "Islamic". Sanders is *wrong* to assert that the Department of Defense is "annihilating a lot of that evil ideology" by militarily defeating ISIL. Ideology is an idea that can *not* be killed with bombs or bullets. The USA has failed to do anything significant to eradicate the ideology of Islamic terrorism. Sanders is spewing empty slogans.

The Islamic terror attack in New York City was major news story in the USA on 11 December, but this news story faded on 12 December, and disappeared on 13 December. The short attention span may be one reason why the U.S. Government has not solved the problem of Islamic terrorism.

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- "For Bombing Suspect, a Life Split Between Bangladesh and Brooklyn," [New York Times](#), 12 Dec 2017.
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**22 Dec 2017**

### **Islamic terrorist in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**

On 22 December 2017, Ahmed Aminamin El-Mofty, a 51 year old immigrant from Egypt, shot at policemen at three locations in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania:

1. At 16:10 EST, at Third and State Streets, near the state Capitol building, El-Mofty shot several times at a Capitol Police car but missed the policeman inside.
2. At 16:40, at Fifth and Market Streets, El-Mofty wounded a State Policeman.
3. At 17:00, at 17th and Mulberry Streets, El-Mofty used two pistols to shoot at police. Police shot and killed El-Mofty.

At 19:12 EST on 23 December, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that El-Mofty had legally come to the USA as part of "chain migration". Trump wants to end chain migration. In the [tweet](#) from Homeland Security, the spokesman called El-Mofty's shooting spree a "terror attack".

There was little coverage of this terror attack by journalists, perhaps because it came three days before Christmas, when people do *not* want to read about Islamic terrorism. Also the attack occurred during the Friday afternoon rush hour, when people were leaving work and traveling home, so few journalists were "on duty".

### **Bibliography for Attack in Harrisbug**

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  - "Prosecutor: 'No doubt' gunman was targeting police officers," [Associated Press](#), 23 Dec 2017.
  - "The Latest: Feds: Gunman came to US via family-based visa," [Associated Press](#), 20:45, 23 Dec 2017.
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  - "Prosecutor says terror links not found in immigrant shooting," [Associated Press](#), 28 Dec 2017. ("The prosecutor described El-Mofty as possessing 'a boatload of ammunition' — hundreds of rounds. El-Mofty also had two propane cylinders, one in a fanny pack around his waist and one recovered from the ground near his car.")
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## Conclusions

During September 2013, I began chronicling the history of chemical weapons in Syria and the futile peace negotiations. I now see four distinct intervals:

1. [Before 10 June 2014](#), when removal of Assad was the simplistic solution to the Syrian civil war.
2. [The capture of Mosul, Iraq by ISIL on 10 June 2014](#) — as well as the declaration of ISIL's caliphate on 29 June 2014 — changed the Western view of the insurgency in Syria. Suddenly, the USA and Western Europe focused on defeating ISIL.
3. In March 2016 a "cessation of hostilities" had greatly reduced deaths in Syria, but the opposition delegation to peace negotiations in Geneva was making numerous demands that scuttled the negotiations. Nonetheless, there was finally a [glimmer of hope](#) for an end to the Syrian civil war. But the glimmer was extinguished on 18 April 2016 when

the main opposition delegation walked out of the negotiations in Geneva.

4. [On 23 Feb 2017](#) — after a ten month suspension owing to the refusal of the opposition to negotiate — negotiations resumed in Geneva. But there was *no* realistic hope of progress.

## **1. Western View of Insurgency in Syria Before 10 June 2014**

In February 2012, Hillary Clinton created the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations to attend meetings and denounce Assad. This group disappeared after November 2014, having accomplished nothing except wasting travel expense money.

Before 10 June 2014, the conventional wisdom in the "Friends of the Syrian People" nations — including the USA — was that Assad was Evil, and the removal of Assad was the Nr. 1 goal in Syria. The Syrian National Coalition has a consistent and intransigent demand that Assad resign. The intransigence of the Syrian National Coalition has been encouraged by Obama and Hillary Clinton, with the frequent U.S. declarations that Assad has lost his legitimacy as leader of the Syrian government.

Obama's foreign policy on Syria is essentially an obsession with the removal of Assad. (See my [document](#) that collects quotations from Obama and two U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and John Kerry.) When Assad did not resign in 2011 or 2012 or 2013, Obama's foreign policy was increasingly divorced from reality.

The following series of events exposed the futility of the plans of the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations and the Syrian National Coalition at the negotiations in Geneva during Jan/Feb 2014:

1. The reality is that Assad is firmly in control of the Syrian government, Assad is winning the civil war in heavily populated western Syria, and the insurgents are unable to force Assad to resign.
2. Assad did *not* resign, and the Geneva peace negotiations ended in failure on 15 Feb 2014. The Coalition's intransigent demand that Assad resign, and Assad's insistence on remaining in power, are *impossible* for compromise.
3. Not only are there no plans to resume Syrian peace negotiations in the foreseeable future, but also the United Nations negotiator (Brahimi) resigned in frustration on 13 May 2014.
4. Assad was re-elected for another seven-year term on 3 June 2014.
5. It is now obvious that neither side in the Geneva negotiations during Jan/Feb 2014 genuinely wanted to negotiate. The U.S. Government essentially forced the Coalition to attend the Geneva negotiations, and Russia forced Assad's government to attend.

A more detailed analysis of the failure of the Geneva negotiations is found in my separate [review](#). I suggest that the "Friends of the Syrian People" group of nations — and the Syrian National Coalition — were so obsessed with deposing Assad that they did not recognize that their demand that Assad resign would cause the Geneva negotiations to fail. Not only was much diplomatic effort and expense wasted on Geneva, but also the frustration caused the skilled U.N. negotiator, Lakhdar Brahimi, to resign on 13 May 2014.

In January 2014, ISIL invaded Iraq. The Iraqi government begged for help from Obama, but Obama ignored the Iraqi requests, as ISIL quickly captured about 1/3 of Iraq. During an interview published on 27 Jan 2014, Obama made a now famous remark about ISIL being "junior varsity" terrorists. See my essays for [July 2014](#) and [August 2015](#). Clearly, Obama seriously underestimated ISIL in early 2014.

## **2. Western View of Insurgency in Syria** ***After 10 June 2014***

After the capture of Mosul by ISIL on 10 June 2014, it was obvious that the big enemy in Iraq was ISIL. Because ISIL actively operated in *both* Syria and Iraq, the problems in the two nations were suddenly recognized to be intertwined. The U.S. Government's view was that terrorists in Syria had spilled into Iraq. The Truth is that ISIL was created in Iraq in 2004 under the name "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" and entered Syria in May 2013, when these terrorists took the name "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL).

An important point to recognize is that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (the predecessor of ISIL) was essentially defeated when the USA pulled its combat troops out of Iraq in Dec 2011. The weak and ineffective government of Maliki in Iraq allowed ISIL to capture much of western and northern Iraq from January 2014 through June 2014. There is an obvious lesson here. If the weak and ineffective Syrian National Coalition were to control Syria, ISIL would exploit that weakness. The result would be that ISIL would quickly seize control of Syria. In other words, we *need* a strong, decisive, experienced leader (e.g., Assad) in control of Syria, to limit the expansion of terrorists like ISIL, because ISIL is worse than Assad.

My conclusions for [August 2014](#) through [June 2015](#) contained a list of citations to some commentators who recognized that we should be cooperating with Assad in the fight against ISIL and other terrorist organizations. In the interest of brevity, I have deleted those citations from current and future essays.

On 23 Sep 2014 there was a change in U.S. strategy in Syria from (1) defeating Assad to (2) defeating ISIL. This change occurred when the U.S.-led airstrikes in Syria began. However, the USA, Europe, and Arab nations were unable to cooperate with Assad in the fight against Islamic terrorism.

ISIL has had effective fighters in Syria since mid-2013. The Syrian Kurds are the only ground forces in Syria who have defeated ISIL. Obama has been reluctant to cooperate with Syrian Kurds, because the Turkish government considers the Kurds to be terrorists. Instead, Obama planned to train-and-equip the so-called "moderate rebels" in Syria, an effort that *planned* to train 15,000 rebels by January 2018. Meanwhile, effective troops on the ground

were needed in Syria in January 2014 to prevent ISIL from capturing cities and infrastructure, and were needed in Syria beginning in September 2014 to complement the U.S. airstrikes. By 26 Sep 2015, fewer than 130 rebels have completed their training, and both batches of U.S.-trained rebels have performed poorly in Syria. On 9 October 2015, the U.S. finally ended the training of moderate rebels to fight against ISIL in Syria. Obama's train-and-equip program was an ignominious failure. This lack of competent ground forces in Syria is a glaring defect in Obama's strategy.

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

### 3. Glimmer of Hope for End to Syrian Civil War

On 29 January 2016, peace negotiations began in Geneva.

However, peace negotiations in Geneva were scuttled by an obstructionist opposition delegation. From its creation on 11 December 2015, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) — the main opposition delegation — insisted on pre-conditions (i.e., demands) *before* the HNC would begin negotiations:

1. end to the airstrikes by Assad and Russia,
2. end sieges by Assad's army,
3. delivery of humanitarian aid to rebel-controlled towns,
4. Assad releases all political prisoners, and
5. Assad resign.

At different times, the HNC made slightly different demands, but the above-mentioned five demands were commonly made. The HNC attempted to obtain through demands what they could not militarily win during five years of civil war. Obviously, one should *not* go into negotiations with Assad with a demand that Assad resign — the role of Assad in the future of Syria is for *all* the people of Syria to decide in an election.

Because the HNC arrived late, de Mistura first met with the HNC on 31 Jan 2016, two days after the negotiations formally began. The HNC refused to negotiate with the delegation from Assad's government, because none of the HNC's demands had been satisfied. De Mistura suspended the negotiations on 3 Feb 2016. The negotiations were supposed to resume no later than 25 Feb 2016. The negotiations actually resumed on 14 March 2016.

After a heroic effort by diplomats from Russia and the USA, and by de Mistura, on 27 February 2016, a "cessation of hostilities" began in Syria. This diplomatic effort quickly reduced the death rate by about 90%, a remarkable accomplishment. But the HNC was ungrateful for this accomplishment, and instead whined about minor violations of the ceasefire — some of which were caused by insurgents who continued fighting. The HNC also shifted emphasis to their other demands, such as humanitarian aid and release of prisoners.

Note that the [statements](#) by the ISSG and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2249, 2254, and 2268 continue to insist on implementing the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012. The [review](#) that I wrote in June 2014 explains why the Geneva Communiqué is flawed. The

United Nations (e.g., Ban and de Mistura) are now trying to solve the problem that existed in the years 2011 and 2012: convert Assad's dictatorship to a democratic government. But, since June 2014, the current big problem is ISIL's creation of a caliphate in Syria, Iraq, and eventually other nations. Another current problem is Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda) creating an emirate in Syria. Other current problems are numerous jihadist organizations who want to create a radical Islamic government to replace Assad's secular government. Looking at all of these current problems, I conclude that Assad is better than any of the alternatives amongst the insurgents. That makes the Geneva Communiqué of June 2012 an obsolete and wrong plan.

In mid-March 2016, I saw a glimmer of hope in the Geneva negotiations. But on 15 April 2016, I again concluded that the negotiations were "futile", because of the refusal of the parties to meet face-to-face, and the HNC's intransigent demand that Assad relinquish power. Then on 18 April 2016, the HNC walked out of negotiations and vowed *not* to return until all four of their demands were met by Assad. Then, on 28 June 2016, many opposition groups who were also participating in the Geneva negotiations threatened to quit the negotiations, unless their four demands were met. Sadly, there was *no* reasonable hope of satisfying any one of the demands of the HNC and other opposition groups, so the peace negotiations in Geneva were dead.

The new agreements between Russia and the USA on 9 September 2016 for a nationwide ceasefire and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid everywhere in Syria gave another glimmer of hope. But there were hundreds of violations of the new ceasefire during the first week, and the ceasefire collapsed on 18 Sep. On the night of 21 Sep, Assad and Russia began a ferocious new assault on Aleppo that extinguished the ceasefire. A major goal of the 9 Sep agreements was delivery of humanitarian aid to Aleppo, but there were *no* deliveries to Aleppo during September 2016, as another indicator of the failure of the new agreements. During 20-30 Sep, international diplomats frantically attempted to resuscitate the dead ceasefire, but failed.

On 18 October 2016 Russia unilaterally suspended airstrikes on Aleppo, and Russia/Syria had a unilateral ceasefire in Aleppo on 20-21-22 October 2016, to allow Nusra to depart from Aleppo, and to evacuate wounded from eastern Aleppo. This wonderful opportunity was another glimmer of hope, but was quickly rejected by insurgents in eastern Aleppo. Nusra refused to depart from Aleppo, which frustrated Russia's main reason for offering the ceasefire. The insurgents refused to allow wounded to leave eastern Aleppo, and the insurgents refused to allow civilians to leave eastern Aleppo. And finally, the insurgents repeatedly violated the three-day ceasefire. History shows the insurgents *again* prevented peace in Syria.

Finally, on 13 Dec 2016, the insurgents in Aleppo agreed to depart. After many violations of the agreement in Aleppo, the evacuation was completed on the night of 22 December 2016.

### **Blame for Failure in Geneva in 2016**

In my essay for December 2015, I wrote:

I predict that in February 2016 people will realize the operative principle is the German



saying "von nichts, kommt nichts" (out of nothing, nothing comes).

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

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

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

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

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

1. Since the HNC was created in December 2015, the HNC has consistently demanded its pre-conditions be satisfied *before* they would negotiate. In March 2016, Assad proposed a so-called "national unity government", but the HNC refused to consider the proposal. The HNC walked out of negotiations on 18 April 2016. It is clear that the HNC *never* wanted to negotiate.
2. On 18 April 2016, the jihadist group Ahrar al-Sham began a military offensive in Latakia province. In June 2016, Jaysh al-Islam, another jihadist group, conducted a military offensive in Damascus province. My previous essays chronicle other violations of the cessation of hostilities by rebels and jihadist groups.
3. Assad is now clearly pursuing a military solution, as he declared in his 7 June 2016 speech, and again on 12 Sep 2016. On the night of 21 Sep 2016, Assad — with the assistance of Russian warplanes — began a ferocious assault on the city of Aleppo.
4. The foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, USA) continue to pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military victory. Convincing these foreign meddlers to stop supporting the Syrian civil war currently appears impossible. My essay for [May 2016](#) cites repeated calls during 2013 and 2014 by the United Nations Secretary General for nations to stop the flow of weapons to Syria, but those calls were ignored by *all* of foreign meddlers.
5. The USA and Russia, as co-chairs of the ISSG Ceasefire Task Force, failed to recommend frequent violators of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement for



punishment. In particular, on 11 May 2016, the USA blocked Russia's attempt at the United Nations to declare Ahrar al-Sham and Jaish al-Islam as terrorist organizations, which would exclude them the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. And Russian airstrikes are supporting Assad's military campaign against rebels and jihadists. Neither Assad nor Russia are being punished for violating the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

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

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

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

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

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

The Syrian opposition to Assad is in deep trouble:

- The rebels — and to a lesser extent the jihadists — are being clobbered by Assad's army, Russian airstrikes, and attacks by Iran and Hezbollah. After the insurgents were defeated in Aleppo in December 2016, foreign meddlers appear to have reduced their

support of insurgents.

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

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

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

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

As I explained in my essay for [February 2017](#), Resolution 2254 has the *wrong* agenda. What Syria really needs is:

- A. *all* insurgents stop fighting,
- B. punishment of violators of the ceasefire,
- C. unimpeded deliveries of humanitarian aid to all who need food or medicine, and
- D. reconstruction of Syrian cities and towns, roads, electricity infrastructure, water infrastructure, and hospitals.

3. The delegates are too uncivilized to meet in the same room, face-to-face. Further, the opposition intransigently demands that Assad resign — a result that the opposition has failed to achieve in six years of civil war.
4. From what they have said and from how the 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 23 months of negotiations in Geneva since January 2016. That is an appalling track record by the Syrians. Amongst other things, it shows the opposition leaders are unfit to lead Syria.

As I said in my essay in February 2017, for the negotiations in Geneva to be successful, we need an opposition delegation who will surrender to Assad's government and who will compromise with Assad. But such a surrender is supported by neither the rebels nor the jihadists, who continue their futile fight against Assad.

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## Conclusion for Syria

Beginning in 2013, Obama and Kerry, along with the United Nations Secretary General, have repeatedly uttered the slogan that there is "*no* military solution" in Syria. But what the foreign meddlers (e.g., Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, USA, etc.) have actually done is pour weapons and ammunition into Syria, in support of a military solution. The situation dramatically worsened on 30 Sep 2015, with the beginning of massive Russian airstrikes on the Free Syrian Army and Nusra Front in western Syria. There is an incredible amount of hypocrisy by the foreign meddlers in *talking* about a political solution according to the Geneva Communiqué of 2012, while actively engaging in continuing — and escalating — warfare.

Since October 2013, I have been advocating in my essays that Europe and the USA actively support Assad in his fight against terrorists. But it is increasingly clear that neither Europe nor the USA will support Assad. And, beginning in December 2014, it is becoming clear that Assad's resources are stretched too thin for him to win militarily against a formidable array of terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front, Islamic Front). We have been here before. When the USA deposed Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, the result in Iraq was anarchy, followed by civil war. And when NATO airstrikes helped depose Gaddafi in Libya in 2011, the result was again anarchy and civil war. And so, when Assad leaves power, the Syrian government will collapse, anarchy will prevail, and each terrorist organization — already present in Syria since 2012-2013 — will rule a small part of former Syria and continue fighting with each other. In retrospect, some nations should be ruled by a strong tyrant (e.g., Hussein, Gaddafi, Assad), because a transition to democracy quickly degenerates into fragmentation, anarchy,

and civil war.

Back in June 2014, Lakhdar Brahimi — the second U.N. negotiator for Syria — predicted Syria will become "a failed state, with warlords all over the place." (See my [eighth essay](#) on Syria, at section titled: "Brahimi Interview".)

It should be an immense scandal that Obama's idealistic obsession with "supporting democracy" (i.e., opposing Assad) in Syria led to:

- the deaths of *more* than 346,500 people in Syria,
- the destruction of the Syrian economy and infrastructure — costing Syria approximately US\$ 200 billion [Reuters](#).
- the destruction of a secular Syria government,
- the rise of Islamic terrorists (e.g., ISIL, Nusra Front) in Syria, and
- more than five million refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, (see [Reuters](#)); plus a flood of one million migrants to Europe in August-December 2015.

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

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## Conclusion for Iraq

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

There are several huge problems in Iraq:

1. The Iraqi government is corrupt. (See my essays for [June 2015](#) and [January 2016](#))
2. The Iraqi government is dysfunctional. During July-October 2014, the Iraqi Parliament *slowly* formed a new government — during an existential crisis. My essays for July 2014 through February 2015 summarized the infrequent meetings, and low attendance in the Iraqi Parliament. (See the summary for July through October 2014 in my [webpage](#).)
3. The Iraqi army was unable to stop the ISIL invasion during the first six months of 2014. In June 2014, the Iraqi army was exposed as at least partly cowardly, corrupt, and incompetent by its rout in Mosul and Tikrit, which abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles to be captured by ISIL. Astoundingly, in May 2015 the Iraqi army *again* fled and abandoned U.S.-supplied weapons and vehicles during a rout in Ramadi. This shows that the Iraqi government learned nothing from the rout in Mosul, 11 months before the similar rout in Ramadi.

4. The criminal justice system in Iraq is apparently incompetent and dysfunctional. The Iraqi government is unable or unwilling to prosecute:
  - A. corrupt politicians or corrupt government officials,
  - B. army officers who hired ghost soldiers,
  - C. desertion at Mosul on 10 June 2014,
  - D. fleeing from Ramadi on 17 May 2015, and
  - E. terrorists who kill innocent civilians in frequent bombings in or near Baghdad.(See my essay for [September 2016](#).)
  
5. Beginning in August 2014, my essays each month have chronicled suicide bombings, car bombs, kidnappings, and other horrible crimes in Iraq. Such attacks have become an almost routine part of life in Iraq since Saddam Hussein was deposed in 2003. These continuing attacks are an indication that civilization has collapsed in Iraq.

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

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### **Need for Muslim Clerics to Continually Condemn Islamic Terrorism**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## U.S. War on Terror

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

ISIL has been defeated in its two capital cities — Mosul Iraq and Raqqa Syria. Some people



in the U.S. Government apparently expected ISIL to disappear after ISIL is defeated on the battlefield. But ISIL will remain alive as a brand of Islamic terrorism, which will inspire attacks worldwide. My essays chronicle years of suicide bombings and car bombings in Baghdad, as well as ISIL taking credit for inspiring terrorist attacks in Russia and Europe.

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This document is at <http://www.rbs0.com/syria49.pdf>  
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The annotated [list](#) of my essays on Syria and my links to historical documents on the Syrian civil war.

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